

# The Exploration of Social Anxiety, School Relationships, and Building a Sense of Community in the Classroom: Molding A Classroom Community.

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THE EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL ANXIETY, SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS, AND BUILDING A SENSE OF  
COMMUNITY IN THE CLASSROOM: MOLDING A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY.

by

NICOLE HINTON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Elementary Education  
in the College of Community Innovation and Education  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Shane Trenta

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to add a sense of community to a primary level classroom and allow students an opportunity to share their progress with peers. Having a sense of community in the classroom will help the teacher and the students build relationships and reduce the amount of stress and anxiety that students feel, which could impact student learning. This thesis explores programs that have been created to help students build social and life skills that contribute in a community. This thesis also focuses on how the students can make thesis changes within themselves rather than as a community. This thesis will teach students how to analyze themselves and then utilize that information to be a part of a community and build relationships with others. To complete this thesis, various programs and books have been reviewed and evaluated. Since there is a lack of focus on building a sense of community in the research, five sessions have been created to focus on building positive relationships and building a sense of community within a school setting.

## DEDICATION

I am dedicating this thesis to my husband, family, and professors. My husband encouraged me through the process of this thesis and has always pushed me to do my best. He believes in me and wants me to succeed in everything that I do. My family has also been very supportive and encouraging. They talked to me about my interest and support my decisions in my career. Lastly, my professors have given me insight and advice that made this thesis successful. I am grateful to everyone for helping me through this process.

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## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
List of Charts .....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Professional Rationale .....	2
Statement of Purpose .....	3
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH.....	4
Why Build A Sense of Community? .....	5
The Importance of Positive Peer Relationships.....	5
The Importance of Teacher/Student Relationships.....	8
The Impacts of Social Anxiety on Academic Achievement.....	10
Studies That Have Been Done.....	12
Building a Sense of Community.....	17
Molding A Community .....	19
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	23
Design of Study .....	23
Limitations .....	25

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FINDINGS.....	26
Characteristics of a Community .....	26
Integration of Literacy and Art.....	26
The Search for Programs .....	27
The Data: A Review of Previous Programs.....	28
Student Engagement Chart:.....	46
Evaluation of Programs Chart:.....	48
The Sessions for Molding A Community.....	49
Evaluation of Molding A Community Rubric:.....	49
Molding a Community Sessions.....	51
<i>Session 1: Let’s Make a Classroom Community Project</i> .....	51
<i>Session Two: What Makes a Community</i> .....	53
Cut-Outs for Session Two .....	55
<i>Session Three: We Have A Problem, Let’s Solve It</i> .....	56
<i>Session Four: Differences Among Us</i> .....	57
<i>Session Five: Classroom Community Project Gallery Walk</i> .....	61
Figure 1: Comment Cards.....	63
Figure 2: Thank You Cards .....	63
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION .....	64



Recommendations for Future Research.....	65
REFERENCES .....	67

## List of Charts

Student Engagement Chart: ..... 46

Evaluation of Programs Chart: ..... 48

Evaluation of Molding A Community Rubric: ..... 49

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

We all have different experiences with having relationships with people and creating a social life. For some, meeting new people and making connections with them is something that comes easy. For others, this can be very difficult and even a little scary. I have always been a shy and introvert person. I enjoy the company of people and want to have relationships, but I am always a little guarded to let people know a lot about me. For me, building relationships is something that takes work.

I can remember being in elementary school and having people think I was a little strange. People didn't necessarily not like me, but they had a hard time getting close to me. I realize now that I am older that this was because I made it difficult for people to feel like they could make a connection with me. After a while of trying to figure out why I could not become close with my peers, I began to feel self-conscious and disconnected from others and my academics. I am someone who enjoys learning and made decent grades, but I began to believe that I learned slower than my peers and was afraid to speak out in class or in a social setting. This feeling continued throughout my early college days and I even dropped out at one point. I later decided to go back to college to become an elementary school teacher. During this time, I met a lot of wonderful people who I build solid relationships with and helped me build my confidence back up. These experiences have inspired me to write this thesis and focus on the importance of building relationships and a sense of community in the classroom.

## Professional Rationale

I have learned over the years that people are all different and it is okay to be different. I have also learned that, as an educator, I can make a large impact on helping students overcome social fears that may affect their academics. Being a teacher is much more than teaching students about math, science, reading, and social studies. Students spend much of their time in the classroom and the teacher can act as a role model and help students learn about life skills that will be with them even after they leave your class.

I had a teacher when I was in third grade who made a large impact on my life. She went out of her way to make relationships with her students and I can remember feeling like she genuinely cared about me and my success. I truly cannot remember any of my other elementary school teachers or any activities that I did in their classes. I can, however, remember my third-grade teacher, Mrs. Hart, and the activities that we did in her class. Mrs. Hart made lesson plans that were engaging and allowed the students to work together. Doing these activities made an impact on my learning that I can still remember today.

One of the most important things a teacher can do is build relationships with their students and help their students to build relationships with their peers. This thesis discusses why these relationships are important and how to achieve building them. This thesis also discusses the negative consequences that could occur if the relationships are not built. Lastly, this thesis discusses a program called *Molding A Community* that was created to act as a

guideline and programs that teachers could use to achieve building a sense of community in the classroom.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to add a sense of community to a primary level classroom and allow students an opportunity to share their progress with peers. Having a sense of community in the classroom will help the teacher and the students build relationships and reduce the amount of stress and anxiety that students feel, which could impact student learning. This thesis explores programs that have been created to help students build social and life skills that contribute in a community. This thesis also focuses on how the students can make these changes within themselves rather than as a community. This thesis will teach students how to analyze themselves and then utilize that information to be a part of a community and build relationships with others. *Chapter three* provides insight on how this thesis was created. *Chapter four* discusses data that was found to complete this thesis. *Chapter five* discusses various takeaways from this thesis and provides recommendations on how it could be better for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

This thesis discusses the importance of building relationships and a sense of community. There are many benefits for the teacher and students when there is a sense of community in the classroom. By creating positive peer relationships, students can feel more connected to school and are more academically motivated. Students will be more engaged in learning, especially when they can have peer collaboration. When students feel that their peers are emotionally supportive, they have a positive identification with school and are more academically engaged (Miller, 2017). The topics discussed in this thesis are all relevant to the impacts of social anxiety and building a sense of community and academic achievement. More and more, students are suffering from social anxiety each year which puts their education at risk. The purpose of this thesis is to help students learn the importance of relationships and how relationships help our well-being not only in academic success but with our current and future mental state and success. By building sense of community in the classroom and teaching our students to have a positive perspective on themselves and others, we can change the level of their academic success and future educational and emotional choices. The following subtitles are factors that explain the importance of building relationships and how student achievement can be negatively impacted if students do not feel like they are a part of a community at school.

## Why Build A Sense of Community?

Social anxiety is a common problem for people of all ages. The effects of social anxiety have a strong impact on various factors such as mental health and academic achievement. Torres-Harding (2016) states that having the ability to communicate is a skill that is crucial for academic success as well as occupational success. When communication is absent, we are unable to receive benefits from the world around us and excel in social settings, such as the classroom. Since communication is a key factor for social anxiety and academic success, students and teachers need to build a sense of community to decrease social anxiety and increase academic success. This thesis explores social anxiety, school relationships, and building a sense of community in the classroom and school environment by implementing an intervention that classroom teachers can use.

## The Importance of Positive Peer Relationships

The impact of positive peer relationships on academic achievement is underestimated. It is easy to forget about the amount of stress students face inside and outside of school daily. More and more students are being bullied and awareness of this problem continues to increase. There are many factors to consider when thinking about bullying and what that word truly means. Mundy (2017) states that up to 1 in 3 students worldwide experience regular victimization. "Bullying is defined as repeated negative actions toward another child intended to cause harm; there is typically an imbalance of power between the victim and the bully" (Mundy, 2017, p. 830). Bullying is not just physical actions such as hitting or kicking, it also

comes in the form of social and verbal abuse. Name calling, teasing, and starting rumors is an example of students using their words to harm another student. According to Mundy (2017), social abuse is when a student becomes labeled with an undesired image or being socially excluded by peers. Mundy (2017) found that bullying has serious negative consequences on victims such as increased mental health problems which could lead to self-harm and suicide. Bullying does not only affect mental health, but also determines a student's success in secondary school and career paths. Students who are bullied are often less engaged in school academics and have a higher rate of being absent. Students deserve to feel safe and accepted when they come to school. Intervening with bullying can positively impact a student for the rest of their life. Students will struggle to achieve academic achievement if they feel that their mistakes and differences are being judged by their peers. As a result, students might respond to bullying by not applying themselves in academics or not showing up to school at all. This needs to be addressed in elementary school to avoid these issues carrying on through high school.

Students will enjoy coming to school and applying themselves academically if they feel that the school has a positive vibe. If the school has a negative environment, students are less likely to succeed academically. Lynch (2013) states that a negative perception of school climate, defined as perceptions of unfairness, hostility, and victimization, has low academic engagement by students and showed lower reading scores. If students have a positive perception of their school environment, the result is that they have higher academic engagement in school academics and reading scores. Putting a stop to a negative school culture before it has a chance to begin is important for achieving a positive sense of school community. If there is a positive



sense of school community, students are more likely to have academic achievement (Lynch, 2013).

To help create a positive sense of school community, students need to learn how to work together instead of how to work against each other. Cooc and Kim (2017) found that grouping students based on their academic achievement is beneficial. If done correctly, grouping a student who has high achievement with a student who has low achievement can be beneficial for both students. Research by Christakis and Fowler (2011) shows that academic outcomes are affected by peers influence in an “epidemic” or “contagion” theory. The theory states that students emulate their peers. Harris (2010) extended on this theory by stating that if high academic achievers are grouped with low academic achiever, the low achiever will adopt the habits of the high achievers that they are paired with. The behaviors that tend to be acquired are desired behaviors such as studying and completing their homework. Based on the epidemic or contagion theory, peers model expertise behaviors as well as learning skills that positively impact academic achievement (Cooc and Kim, 2017). Higher achieving students can model how to have high academic achievement for lower achieving students. This will raise the self-efficacy in both high and low achieving students and help bring students together to create a sense of community, rather than a sense of disconnect. As it is now, students tend to spend time with students who are on their same academic level and share common interest. If teachers can bring students together in the classroom, students will be able to see that they have things in common with people that they would not normally expect to. Students will not feel the need to divide into groups based on their differences.

Peer relationships have an enormous impact on academic achievement. Knifsend (2018) states that if students have negative feelings towards school starting in elementary school, they will struggle to overcome these negative feelings as they progress through grades. Students that have negative feelings towards school and the people that they encounter at school will continue to have low academic achievement, this could lead to dropping out and not going to college. Building a sense of community in the elementary school can help prevent these issues. Having positive peer relationships will raise student's self-efficacy and increase academic achievement. Knifsend (2018) states that students can have academic achievement on their own, but they are more likely to succeed and be engaged if they can share academic experiences with peers. Students will learn how to work together and accept everyone for what they are. School should not be a place where students feel trapped. Coming to school can feel like a chore if there is not a positive sense of community. Students are expected to deal with bad peer relationships while learning how to read, write, do mathematic equations, and pass tests. If there is a sense of community and positive peer relationships, students can look forward to learning alongside their peers and discuss their learning. It is hard to help students understand at a young age that they will need to have good people skills to succeed in life. Teaching students how to work as a team and look towards people with a positive perspective is a lifelong tool that they will need.

### The Importance of Teacher/Student Relationships

The relationship between a teacher and a student has a large impact on the academic achievement of students. Immediately building this relationship at the beginning of a new year can change the dynamics of the entire year Lucian (2017). Having students greet the teacher before entering the classroom gets them engaged before they even step foot in the classroom. It also notifies the student that you are interested in building a relationship with them and care about their wellbeing and academic success. According to Lucian (2017), research shows that students improve academically and socially from having a positive teacher to student relationship. If a teacher provides a supportive, warm, and close environment for the students, they will have higher academic achievement. It is difficult for students to learn from a teacher if they believe that the teacher does not like them or believe in them. There might be a lot of people that doubt a student's capability to succeed. Teachers need to make sure that their students know that they believe in them. Setting high expectations and guiding them to meet those high expectations informs the student that the teacher knows that they can learn the material and will help them succeed. Lucian (2017) states that having high expectations improve a student's confidence in themselves and will encourage the students to fully engage in academics.

How a teacher views a student often determines how a student views themselves. The self-determination theory states that people have three psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness Kurdi (2017). Kurdi (2017) found that teachers can fulfill these needs with their structure, autonomy support, and involvement. Teaching strategies, classroom management, and comprehension monitoring fulfill these needs. Creating structure involves

supervising activities, providing feedback, and setting clear expectations. Teachers can show autonomy support by encouraging students' feelings, thoughts, and actions in the classroom. Teachers take the time to inform students about why the rules are important and allow students to give feedback. Students have autonomy support when they feel that their opinions and feelings are valued by the teacher. Finally, teachers are involved by valuing their relationships with their students and putting effort into creating that relationship Kurdi (2017). When students feel that their teacher genuinely cares about their wellbeing and education, they are much more likely to engage in school academics and have success Kurdi (2017). Following teaching strategies is a natural way of building a positive teacher and student relationship. Teachers who supervise activities ensure that the students are understanding the content. If the students are not understanding the content, the teacher knows that they should intervene and help the students. Giving the students feedback lets them know that you are paying attention and will continue to guide them to success. Holding students accountable to rules and expectations shows them that you know that they can accomplish the expectations and that you will not let them fail. If teachers do their job well and with passion, they will meet the needs of their students and easily build strong relationships with them. By following research-based teaching strategies in their instruction and classroom management, teachers will build positive relationships with their students without struggle.

### The Impacts of Social Anxiety on Academic Achievement

According to Allen (2018), social anxiety affects a lot of students, this anxiety greatly impacts their academic achievement. It is hard to concentrate on schoolwork when a student is focused on the cause of their anxiety. Anxiety comes in many forms and has many causes. Teachers need to stop and think about the stress factors in students' lives and how the stress causes anxiety in students. Anxiety can start at a very young age and if not handled immediately and correctly, can stay with a student throughout their life. Anxiety is very common in children and often goes unnoticed. Allen (2018) states that anxiety starts at a very young age and if left unattended to, will progress and lead to mental health problems such as depression. It also leads to low academic achievement, difficulty making friends, bullying, and a fear of public speaking (Allen, 2018). Teachers should intervene with their student's anxiety, if possible, before it becomes a problem. Teachers should have a plan of action on how to decrease student anxiety and create a sense of community in the classroom and at school. Students are more likely to have academic achievement if they feel safe and welcomed in their school environment.

Intervening with student anxiety can be a difficult task. If not done correctly, intervention can make social anxiety worse. Allen (2018) found that overprotective behaviors reinforce anxiety. When adults take over for a child, they are eliminating the opportunity for the child to develop coping, social, and academic skills and the child internalizes the problem. The same information is true in teacher-student relationships. Allen (2018) states that allowing students to avoid fearful situations reinforces the anxiety by confirming that the situation is unsafe. Teachers also reinforce anxiety for students with criticism, rejection, and discipline by

creating a hostile environment. This will cause the student to have low self-worth and confidence. Teachers need to be aware of how their actions affect a student and their social anxiety. By yelling at students and embarrassing them in the class, the teacher is reinforcing the idea that school is not a good place and the student will continue to disengage. It can be hard as a teacher to intentionally put students in a position that will make them uncomfortable, but it is important to remember that the teacher is improving the student's ability to overcome their fears and make accomplishments. By giving students plenty of exposure to situations that they are uncomfortable with, the student eventually no longer fears the thing that scares them. For example, public speaking is scary for many people. By having students work together and become comfortable, it is easier for the student to speak in front of the class. Having as much practice as possible with speaking in front of the class, the student becomes less afraid to do so.

### Studies That Have Been Done

There have been many studies about social anxiety and how it affects academic achievement. There have also been many studies that have created interventions to reduce social anxiety. Interventions have been created for both teachers and students and are usually in the form of a questionnaire. However, some studies have created intervention programs that help both teachers and students to reduce social anxiety.

A study conducted by Vassilopoulos (2013) found that social anxiety starts as early as age nine to ten. They attempted to start an intervention at the pre or early adolescent stages to stop the social anxiety from progressing and staying with the students. The study was designed

to be comprehensive and delivered in eight short sessions. The program focused on social anxiety, depression, and social skills in students with the hopes of teaching students how to recognize their anxiety and how to deal with it. The study wanted to teach students skills that would help them overcome their anxiety and gain social skills. There were forty students in the study, all in fourth, fifth, or sixth grade. The study started with a pre-test. It asked students questions on various topics within the focus of the study; social anxiety, depression, and social skills. After completing the test, the students could ask questions for clarification and to expand on their ideas. Two weeks after taking the pre-test, the sessions began. The first session was an icebreaker. The students shared information about themselves to the group. After sharing information about themselves, the students worked in small groups to create rules that would be used throughout the sessions. The students worked together to create rules that would be in place for the sessions. Session two was called *A Cube Full of Feelings*. The students rolled a cube and it landed on a feeling. The student shared a story about a time when they felt that feeling either on their own or with someone else involved. The goal was to get students to understand how their actions affect how they make others feel. The next session was called *Making and Keeping Friends*. The students were asked to work together to create a list about how to make friends and keep them and then to use this list in their everyday lives. The students needed to identify and apply skills that help them make and keep friends. Session four was called *The "Mystery" of My Stress*. The students were given a stress survey. After they finished the survey, the leaders of the study would read the questions out loud and the students would walk to stand next to a sign that read "agree" or "disagree." The students were

then asked to explain why they chose the sign that they did. The goal was to get students to understand where their stress came from and then talk about how to cope with it as a team. The fifth session was called *The Stress Shield*. This session was taught in three steps; the act step, breath step, and the get out of the anxiety trap step. In the act step, the students learned about activities that they can do to relieve stress, such as call a friend or watch television. In the breath step, students were taught how to control their breathing and thoughts to help them calm down in a stressful situation. Lastly, in the get out of the anxiety trap step, students were taught to recognize their anxiety and what triggers it. Then, they could avoid situations that give them anxiety. The sixth and seventh sessions were called *Looking at the Bright Side*. The students were given scenario cards and were asked to interpret their feelings about the scenario and write them down. Students with social anxiety tend to have a negative interpretation of scenarios (Vassilopoulos, 2013). The students were then asked to work in groups to come up with different interpretations that were positive and rationalize why the positive interpretations made sense. The goal of these sessions was to help students have a positive interpretation in scenarios that they will encounter throughout life. Session eight was called *Saying Goodbye*. The students were asked to draw a picture of the path of their future and then share it with the class. The goal of this lesson was to help students realize that they can still be friends and support each other even though the sessions are over. They can draw paths that intercept and continue to engage. After the sessions were over, the students took a post-assessment to see the results. The results showed that the students benefited from this study and showed a decrease in social anxiety. Vassilopoulos (2013) states that younger



children, around nine or ten years old, have an easier time overcoming social anxiety than people who are older. It is more difficult for students in secondary grades to reduce social anxiety, therefore it is imperative that social anxiety is addressed early.

Fisher (2004) conducted a study called *Skills for Academic and Social Success (SASS)*. The intervention was made up of twelve, forty-minute sessions that helped students, parents, and teachers learn how to deal with social anxiety. The students received two sessions with Fisher (2004) and his team of leaders, which taught them different techniques of coping with social anxiety. Then, the students, Fisher (2004), and his team of leaders would meet in a social setting and exercise real life practices of social anxiety. The parents and teachers attended two, thirty-minute psychoeducational meetings to learn how to help the students cope with their social anxiety. Fisher (2004) set the focus of the twelve sessions to teach students and parents about five components; psychoeducation, realistic thinking, social skills training, exposure, and relapse prevention. During the psychoeducation sessions, the students would learn about what caused their social anxiety and what the body and mind experience when they have social anxiety. Realistic thinking session taught students that the negative thoughts that come with social anxiety are often exaggerated. For example, a student might have social anxiety when giving a presentation for the class because they are afraid that they will make a mistake and look stupid. Fisher (2004) and the group leaders taught the students that these thoughts are exaggerated and to instead, ask themselves questions that make the situation more realistic. Some of these questions are, “how many times has this happened before?” Or, “how do I feel when I watch others in similar situations?” During the social skills training, students learned

about four skills to help them in a social setting where they might have anxiety. The skills taught are initiating a conversation, maintaining conversations and establishing a friendship, listening and remembering, and assertiveness. These four social skills are taught to lower the student's social anxiety. In the exposure sessions, Fisher (2004) would ask the students to face their fears. The group leaders of the sessions would put the students in a situation that will cause them anxiety and the students are expected to use their training and face their fears. The idea is that the anxiety of a situation will decrease as the student has more exposure and practice to face the anxiety directly. Avoiding a situation that will trigger anxiety reinforces the anxiety while facing the situation will decrease the anxiety (Fisher, 2004). In the last session, relapse prevention, the students, parents, and teachers are taught about warning signs of a relapse. The students are also trained on how to the relapse and regain control of the anxiety. Fisher (2004) set up fifteen-minute one-on-one checkup meetings with the participants to see how their progress was going. Fisher (2004) found that the results proved that the sessions were effective, however, there were difficulties inserting the intervention in schools for various reasons such as concerns from school personnel and parents, who were hesitant to let their students be in an experiment.

Developing social skills is a key component in helping students achieve academic success, but helping students build a sense of community is another key component for having academic success for students. Miller (2017) conducted an intervention, called *Relationship Building Intervention (RBI)*, that focused on building a sense of community for all fifth graders in an elementary school. The intervention taught the students social and emotional skills, self-

awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making by creating a supportive learning environment. The study was conducted over five units and contained a total of twelve activities. At the end of the study, the results proved that students had higher academic success after completing the RBI and felt more connected to their school, peers, and school engagement.

Another study was completed by Wong (2015) that focused on building students peer relationships in elementary school students. The students attended sixteen, one-hour sessions that taught them social skills and behavior management. At the end of the study, Wong (2015) found that the sessions improved students' behavior and relationships in the class. In this study, the students met for 10 to 12 sessions that were 35 to 50 minutes long. During these sessions, the students learned how to understand the six universal emotions (happy, sad, angry, afraid, surprised, and disgusted), how to manage their anxiety, use basic thinking skills, conflict resolution, and stress reduction techniques. When the study was complete, the students showed higher social skills and a decrease in behavior problems.

### **Building a Sense of Community**

Building a sense of community in the classroom and across the school is a crucial component of academic success. Students will not learn to their highest capability if they do not feel confident or comfortable in the school setting. Torres-Harding (2016) found that the two highest reasons that students do not enjoy school is that they have problems speaking in front of the class and that they feel too nervous in class and in the school. Building a sense of

community within the classroom and the school will build a foundation of trust between students and their teachers. Students will feel more comfortable communicating with their peers and with their teachers.

Miller (2017) found that students who participated in the RBI felt a greater sense of classroom identifications and inclusion which helped them be less aggressive and perform better academically. By creating positive peer relationships, students can feel more connected to school and are more academically motivated. Students will be more engaged in learning, especially when they can have peer collaboration. When students feel that their peers are emotionally supportive, they have a positive identification with school and are more academically engaged (Miller, 2017).

Wong (2015) states that students who have high social emotional development have longer attention spans, better memory, and self-regulation skills, which are all crucial components of academic success. School is not just about learning academic skills to have academic achievement. It is important for teachers to realize that students are more likely to learn academics when they have social skills to build positive peer relationships and feel connected to people at school to feel connected to the curriculum.

Students spend most of their time in the classroom with peers and the teacher. The experiences that they have in the school setting greatly impact their emotional and academic success. Rucinski (2017) states that student experiences in the classroom are just as important as the quality of teacher instruction and curriculum. A good experience at school where students feel safe and have positive relationships will allow the student to obtain the

information from the curriculum and the teacher. Rucinski (2017) found that when students are stressed, they spend much of their cognitive function focusing on the stress rather than learning. Building a positive sense of self and community in the classroom will decrease the amount of cognitive function that the student is dedicating to stress and redirect their cognitive function to the content that is being taught in the classroom. According to Rucinski (2017), a positive classroom community is made up of high emotional support, warmth, respect, sensitivity and responsiveness, and a child-centered focus. The classroom should have low levels of anger, sarcasm, and irritability from both the teacher and students.

Building a sense of community in the classroom can be an intimidating process. Students are asked to open up and share their vulnerabilities. Students can learn that they are not alone in their fears and anxiety. They become closer and more connected to each other by sharing their vulnerabilities. Fletcher (2014) states that a teacher can create a positive sense of community with structure, routines, and social patterns that require students to be responsible for their learning, take risks, seek help from others, and show concern for their peers. Fletcher (2014) found that it is better for the well-being of the students and the teacher by creating a sense of community. Students are more willing to share ideas and ask difficult questions that might have given them anxiety before.

### Molding A Community

There are several interventions that have been created to help students with social anxiety and creating a sense of community in the classroom. The studies that were mentioned

previously are focused on intervening with social anxiety and how to build a sense of community based on solving their social anxiety. These studies were meaningful but had a few limitations. The schools struggled to find time during the school day to implement the interventions and the parents were concerned about their children being in an experiment. Also, they would only get partial results on some of the interventions. For example, the study that Wong (2015) conducted was based on only the parent's responses. The results would have been more beneficial with student and teacher responses as well as parent responses. In this study, results will be based on teacher, student, and parent responses for the most accurate results possible. In this study, sessions were created to build a sense of community across an elementary school involving each grade level. The sessions use an integration of the theories of Jean Piaget's stages of development and Lev Vygotsky's theory of zone of proximal development. These theories are used as rationale and support for why the sessions in the thesis are effective in building a sense of community. It is important to understand what students are cognitively capable of and what their thinking ability is at their stage of development to create effective instruction.

Eni (2017) states that most elementary school students are at the concrete operational stages of Piaget's stages of development, which means that the students are capable of thinking logically but are still limited on their understanding of concrete things. This means that students struggle to solve problems that they directly face. Eni (2017) found that teachers can create instruction at this level by developing student's motivation to learn and increasing their learning quality. Teachers should use a constructivist approach when creating lessons to obtain

this goal. Students at this stage will learn the material through hands on activities, cooperative learning, and utilizing visualizations. Instruction time should be brief and put into words that the students can comprehend.

Lev Vygotsky (1896) created a theory called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The zone of proximal development is defined as the distance between the actual developmental level determined by individual problem solving and the level of development as determined through problem solving under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Guseva, 2017). This means that students are capable of learning information given that they have the guidance of the teacher. Teachers need to create lessons that stimulate students learning and development based on their zone of proximal development. Students are capable of learning information on their own, but they can learn more information with the guidance of a teacher.

Using information from these theories, the sessions were created to meet the needs and capabilities of the students and teach them how to be a part of a community and increase their academic achievement. The sessions are meant to inform the students of their social anxieties in a way that they can comprehend and to use that information to create a positive sense of community with their teachers and with their peers. The sessions take into consideration what level of cognitive ability the students should have at their age and create activities that will obtain the goal of the sessions.

During the sessions, the students learn skills that will help them in social settings. They learn how to communicate with their peers, teachers, and people outside of the school setting.

They learn how to have a positive perspective on themselves and on the people that are around them. The students will work individually and collaboratively to accomplish these goals.

The next chapter will describe how research was found and evaluated to the benefit of this thesis. It will also discuss the limitations for this research. Then, the following chapter will discuss the program that was created to accomplish the goal of this thesis.



## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This thesis explores the importance of building a sense of community in a classroom and how to implement a program into the classroom to achieve a sense of community. I have researched programs on the internet that have been created in the past that teach students about life skills and the importance of relationships. I have also read text books that aim to teach children the same skills. While each program discussed important characteristics that children should have, they lacked an element of engagement for students. The programs did not include various hands on activities for students to take part in or a way for students to make a connection to a real-life situation. I used my research to enhance the learning for the sessions in *Molding A Community*.

### Design of Study

The purpose of this thesis is to create a series of sessions that teachers can use to create a sense of community in the classroom. To help guide how to create the sessions, I researched the internet to find programs that have been previously created to accomplish a similar goal. I have also read text books that were used in classrooms that I received from a teacher who used to teach life skills. I evaluated the programs that I was able to find by focusing on student engagement. While reading through the different programs, I broke the idea of student engagement into three characteristics: collaboration, hands-on learning, and relatability. I also created a rubric that evaluated the effectiveness of each program.

I obtained the text books from my supervising teacher during my internship. My supervising teacher taught life skills for seven years and had various resources to read through. I also researched programs on the internet by using Google. I would search the phrases, “elementary bullying interventions” and “elementary classroom community interventions.” I selected programs that shared ideas that are related to building relationships and a sense of community in the classroom. I found many programs but chose to use the programs for this thesis if they met certain criteria. The criteria are found in the rubric in chapter four; collaboration, hands-on learning, depth of knowledge questions, age appropriate, relatability.

A rubric was created to evaluate the effectiveness of each program that was researched for this thesis. I chose to evaluate each program based on characteristics that I believe are necessary for learning to take place. Rombot (2018), states that collaboration in the classroom and using a Jigsaw strategy helps students build confidence and take responsibility for their learning. These are key goals that students should learn to become a valued member of a community. Hands-on learning helps students learn by doing and follows a discovery learning strategy. Asking depth of knowledge questions will help teachers know that they are teaching to mastery. Blooms Taxonomy (1956) is a guideline to ensure that the questions are being formed appropriately. Following the theories of moral development by Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget will help ensure that the sessions are age appropriate for students. Lastly, students should be able to relate and make connections to the sessions to enhance their learning and help them understand the importance of building relationships and being a part of a

community. The rubric was divided into four scores. A score of four is exemplary, a three is satisfactory, a two is developing, and a one is unsatisfactory.

### Limitations

While completing my research, I recognized two limitations. The first limitation is that the programs that I evaluated did not share the same focus as the sessions for Molding A Community. The programs that I was able to find were focused on teaching students about life skills and bullying prevention, rather than being a part of a community. However, the programs that I researched taught students about the importance of building relationships and how to do so. These skills are paramount for students to understand in order to be a valuable member of a classroom community. I used the research to help guide topics that could be used in the sessions but made changes to the overall goal and outcome.

The second limitation is that I did not create a teacher and/or student survey. It would be beneficial to ask teachers and students about their opinion of the sessions in Molding A Community. For teachers, I would want to know if they feel that Molding A Community is effective and if they would use it. If the teachers would like to use Molding A Community, I would ask them how they plan to implement it and why they feel it is effective. If the teachers do not want to use Molding A Community, I would ask them why and how the program could be better. For students, I would ask them how they feel about their school relationships before and after going through Molding A Community. I would also ask the students if they feel like they have benefited from Molding A Community and to explain why they say either yes or no.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE FINDINGS

### Characteristics of a Community

Molding A Community teaches students about various characteristics that people in a community have. The sessions discuss how to be kind, dependable, trustworthy, and respectable. Students know what these characteristics are and how to perform them but Molding A Community teachers' students how to amplify utilizing these skills and why they are important. Teachers need to teach more than just academics to their students. Students spend most of their time in the classroom with their peers and with their teacher. Teachers can teach students about morals that the students might not be practicing outside of school. O'Flaherty (2017) states that a teacher's job is more than just preparing students for standardized testing. Teachers can help students develop their social conscience and "a truly integrated and owned personal morality."

### Integration of Literacy and Art

Integrating other subject areas into the sessions of Molding A Community will further enhance the student understanding of the content. Carney (2016) states that integrating the arts challenges students to use reasoning skills, both concrete and abstract, to create ideas. The students will create authentic work and will have a lasting impact on their learning. The sessions in Molding a Community integrate both literacy skills and the arts. The students practice their writing skills while also creating visuals for the class and the school. Teachers can

also add aspects of what is currently being taught into the sessions to provide further practice for the students.

### The Search for Programs

Searching for programs that were beneficial to the purpose of this thesis proved to be a difficult task. As previously mentioned, most programs were created with a different goal in mind other than building a sense of community in the classroom. To begin my search, I read through various scholarly articles through the University of Central Florida Libraries. After reading through some articles, I decided to change my resource for searching. I made this decision because I used programs from scholarly articles in chapter two and I want to add different resources to make my research more authentic. I started to use Google and found many programs that were done in the past and some that are still being used today. When searching, I used key phrases such as “elementary bullying interventions” and “elementary classroom community interventions.” I was able to find many programs and selected to use the ones that followed predetermined criteria; collaboration, hands-on learning, depth of knowledge questions, age appropriate, relatability. While looking through the programs, I was choosing programs that focused on teaching students about skills that would be beneficial for the purpose of this thesis. I chose programs that were teaching students about life skills and the characteristics that are important for that skill. I also chose programs that used different strategies from other programs. For example, one of the programs that was chosen uses worksheets as a main resource to teach the skills. Other programs use scenario cards and a

little bit of collaboration. Having different teaching strategies in the programs allowed me to learn which were effective or not effective to create the sessions for Molding A Community in a way that would reach all learning styles.

While researching programs, I used a predetermined rubric to select programs that would meet the criteria. I created the rubric prior to searching for programs and made the criteria based on what I believe to be effective practices. My beliefs on what effective practices are were determined by research that I have done to create the rationale for this thesis. I chose to focus the criteria for the rubric on student collaboration, student ability to relate to the topic, the topics being age appropriate and comprehensible for students based on theories of moral development, the opportunity for students to learn through hands-on activities, and asking questions to ensure student understanding. While reading through the programs, I rated them on the rubric on a scale of one through four. A score of one being unsatisfactory, a score of two being developing, a score of three being satisfactory, and a score of four being exemplary. The criteria to achieve a score of four is that the programs must provide an opportunity for students to use what is being scored in an effective way. The criteria to achieve a score of three is that the students must have use the skill being evaluated in eighty percent or more of the lessons. The criteria to achieve a score of two is that the students must use the skill in 50% or more of the lessons. Lastly, the criteria for a level one is that the students use the skill in 50% or less on the lessons.

### The Data: A Review of Previous Programs

Camfel Productions have created a program that targets three areas; social and emotional life skills, engaging character education, and bully prevention. They have created six presentations for elementary students, middle school students, and high school students. For the purpose of this thesis, we will focus on the presentations that were created for elementary school students. There are two different presentations that Camfel Productions calls discussion guides. The first discussion guide is called *Count on Me*. *Count on Me* focuses on teaching students about being dependable for themselves and those around them. Students will learn to develop social awareness, have positive social interactions, and how to handle social conflicts (Camfel Productions, 2017). The presentation starts with an opening conversation that asks students to think about things that they depend on each day. It then asks the students to think about what life might be like if they couldn't depend on those things. The presentation offers an example of people counting on running water to drink and shower with. Discussion session one presents students with five different scenarios. The scenarios are about people who are displaying characteristics that are categorized as being dependable or not. The focus of discussion one is to help students realize the importance of being dependable and how they can become dependable. In discussion two, the speaker tries to turn on a flashlight, but it doesn't work. The students talk about why this would be frustrating in a situation when a flashlight might be crucial. The speaker then describes characteristics of a dependable person; someone who keeps their promises, someone who finishes what they start, someone who is truthful, and someone who respects others time and their won. The students are then asked to discuss with each other how they can be dependable in class. Discussion three asks students to

work in groups of five to six to create a two-minute scene of their parents asking them to do their chores. After the students present their scene, the speaker discusses the importance of following through on what you tell others that you will do. The speaker provides an example of the army saying “roger” during a mission. The person on the receiving end knows that the person is saying “roger” to indicate that they have received the message and will follow through with the order. Discussion four opens with the music video of Taylor Swift’s song “Look What you Made Me Do.” After the students listen to the song, the speaker explains why people have a hard time owning their mistakes and blame others. The reasons are to protect our image, to hurt someone else, and to avoid consequences (Camfel Productions, 2017). The speaker will then explain to the students that taking responsibility for our mistakes will build character and make us a better person. Discussion five focuses on teaching students that making an occasional mistake is okay. Continually making mistakes, knowing that we are in the wrong, is when it becomes a problem. The speaker gives an example of having a good diet. Having an occasional treat is perfectly fine. Eating foods that are bad for you every day is when we display poor choices and need to take responsibility for our actions. The last discussion is about working together and helping others. The students are split into two groups. The first group has one student who completes a puzzle by themselves while the other group is the remainder of the students working together to put the same puzzle together. This activity shows students how working together is more productive. The speaker closes out the *Count on Me* presentations by talking about bully preventions. The speaker gives five actions that people can do to stop bullying. The five actions are to tell an adult, tell the bully to stop, be a friend to



the one being bullied, walk with the person being bullied through negative areas, and get others involved in helping the victim. The second discussion guide is called *Eye to Eye*. This discussion guide teaches students about the importance of getting to know someone before making judgements. *Eye to Eye* teaches students to look beyond outside appearances and help those around them feel accepted (Camfel Productions, 2017). The presentation starts by asking students to think about the phrase “don’t judge a book by its cover.” The speaker ends the presentation with the quote, “You don’t have to see eye to eye to walk hand in hand. You just have to want to go in the same direction.” Camfel Productions, 2017) Discussion one provides five scenarios that are examples of people judging each other before they know the other person and people getting to know someone before making judgements about them. The purpose of this discussion is to provide students with examples of the importance of getting to know someone before judging them. Discussion two is about stereotyping. the students are given cards and then asked to group themselves. The students will then discuss why they grouped themselves the way that they did. Did they do it by suite? Did they do it by color or number? After the students discussed how they group themselves, the speaker helps the students make a connection to how they group themselves at school with their peers and to think about why they should get to know other groups. Discussion three teaches students that we are missing information about someone when we judge them based on their appearance. We can’t make an accurate judgement if we are missing information about their personality. In discussion four, the speaker reads the story of *Chicken Little* (Henny Penny, 1849) to the students. The speaker explains that the character was trying to help everyone based on false

information. This discussion focuses on teaching students to have accurate information on someone before judging them. The fifth discussion asks students to defend their favorite movie. The speaker helps students see that everyone has a different opinion and favorite movie. This discussion teaches students that it is okay to have different opinions and like different things. Students learn that it is wrong to bully people and judge people because they like something different than they do. The last discussion is about getting along with others. The students work together to make chocolate chip cookies with the different ingredients. The activity teaches students that each ingredient is valuable to the recipe and each person is valuable to relationships in their own way.

Camfel Productions built the *Count on Me* and *Eye to Eye* presentations to reduce the amount of bullying in a school. The presentations provide fun topics and demonstrate examples that students can easily relate to. The presentations also require students to think critically and at a higher level rather than just answering questions without thought. For example, students were asked to think about how they would feel or react in certain scenarios rather than just recall information that was given to them. However, the presentations lack hands on opportunity for students to make connections with. The students are asked to have plenty of discussions with their peers but are not given the opportunity to work collaboratively in an activity. Overall, the presentations engage the students to help them understand what it means to be dependable and accepting.

Cary Trnavonich has created a program called *Champions for Kindness* (2016).

Trnavonich has spoken to many people of various ages to understand bullying and how to stop it. He has taken the time to understand why kids bully and created a prevention program based on that information to reduce bullying. Trnavonich believes that adults need to model what good character looks like because if kids don't learn about good character from adults, then they learn it from their peers. Trnavonich has created assemblies that incorporate humor and topics that will help students understand bullying and how to stop it.

Cary Trnavonich's assemblies have three message topics. The first message topic is about choosing kindness over bullying. During this assembly, Trnavonich discusses why kids bully, which is crucial for all to understand, empathizing with hurting students and giving them helpful advice, explaining the importance and rewards of reporting bullying, challenging students to take a stand against cyber-bullying, and selflessness, respect and kindness towards others (Trnavonich, 2016). The next message is how to be a friend magnet. Students learn about positive peer relationships. This message extends on what students learned in the first message. Trnavonich explains what characteristics are seen in good friends which is selflessness, respect, and kindness. The last message is called nothing but the best. This is less of a message for the students and more of a performance. Trnavonich focuses on congratulating excellence and having fun reiterating what the first two messages have taught the students.

Champions for Kindness engages students with humor and relatability. Trinavonich is funny and great at speaking for students of all ages. Discussing bullying is often discussed in a serious tone and comes across somber. Champions for kindness has found a way to discuss bullying with humor while still emphasizing the seriousness of the situation. Champions for Kindness requires students to put themselves in the shoes of a victim and think about what they can do to be kind to everyone. While the assemblies are fun and engaging for students, they lack collaborative and hands on activities for students. Champions of Kindness could benefit from adding on to their assemblies with activities that students can practice their peer relationship skills and work together.

*Roots of Empathy* is a unique program that focuses on teaching students about empathy. The program was formed in 1996 by Mary Gordon and is still being used today. The goal is to improve social and emotional competence and increase empathy. Its vision is to change the world, child by child, by building caring, peaceful and civil societies (Roots of Empathy, 2018). Elementary students learn about empathy by caring for a baby. An instructor for the program invites a parent to bring her baby to a classroom and allow students to care for it and observe his emotions. Students are able to discuss how the baby is feeling and determine how to keep the baby happy while interacting with it. By doing this, children can understand and empathize with the baby's feelings and become aware of how that makes them feel. The program offers students the opportunity to feel strong and empathetic towards another life and envision a society based on those emotions (Mary Gordon, 2005).

*Roots of Empathy* offers a lot of hands on experience for students to connect to their emotions and understand empathy. Instilling empathy in young students can be helpful for reducing their likeliness to bully others later in life (Mary Gordon, 2005). However, the program instructors do not spend a lot of time explaining to students the importance of empathy. Students are discovering the emotion and know what it feels like but do not understand the importance behind it. The instructors should teach students how to use their empathy to change the world and respect those around them.

Overcoming Obstacles is a program that offers a curriculum for life skills for all ages. For this thesis, we will discuss the curriculum that was created for grades 3-5. (Overcoming Obstacles, 2018) The main skills taught in this curriculum are communication, decision making, and goal setting. However, students also learn about listening, exhibiting self-control, developing empathy, cooperating to resolve conflicts, gaining and giving respect, developing integrity, creating a positive attitude, understanding fairness, working as a team, learning positive coping skills, becoming responsible, and building good friendships (Overcoming Obstacles, 2018). The curriculum offers twelve lessons, each focusing on a different skill. The lessons are flexible for modification so that teachers can use the curriculum during class or teach them before and after school. Each lesson is designed in the “I do, we do, you do” format. The lessons also have extensions for each subject area such as art, drama, English Language Arts (ELA), Literature, Music, Social Studies, and technology. The extensions are there to add the life skills into the school curriculum and make them a hands-on experience. The lessons also provide “talking points” for the teacher to use to help students understand the skills. Lastly, the

lessons provide all materials that students would need to learn the skills during the lessons such as short stories and graphic organizers.

Overcoming Obstacles offers a lot of life skills rather than focusing all its attention on one skill, like bullying. The curriculum teaches students about skills that could help them not only in their academic achievement but also in their daily and future success. The curriculum is engaging and allows for students to work collaboratively and learn about academics alongside the desired life skill of the lesson. The curriculum is also helpful for implementation because it can be taught inside and outside of the classroom. It is also worth noting that the curriculum is split into different grade levels to ensure that the information is age appropriate for the students learning the skills. The objectives in each lesson plan includes a section of teaching the students about why it is important to learn the skill that is being taught. Not only do the students learn the skill and practice using it, they also learn why it is important to utilize the skill. The only thing that this curriculum lacks is a chance for students to work collaboratively in the “I do, we do, you do” strategy. The students have the opportunity to work with peers when they complete the lesson extensions, but they should be given that opportunity during the initial lesson as well.

The Center for the Collaborative Classroom is a program that promotes building a sense of community in the classroom. It believes that building a caring community will build caring relationships among teachers, students, and parents (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2019). The program hopes to accomplish this goal by setting rituals. One ritual is having daily

morning and closing circle activities. The students spend this time practicing their social skills and getting to know their peers. The second ritual is weekly class meetings which gives the students the opportunity to share common concerns and issues. Another ritual is cross-age buddy activities. During these activities, students work with older or younger students in another grade and make connections. Lastly, there are weekly home connection activities which promotes students to talk to their family members about the focus of the program for the week. The Center for the Collaborative Classroom provides lesson plans for teachers to follow to address each skill. The lessons are split into sections; beginning of the year skills, self-management skills, interpersonal skills, and executive function skills (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2019). During the beginning of the year lessons, students learn about classroom and school rules. They also learn about the importance of greeting one another by name. During self-management lessons, students learn how to reflect on their own behavior and how to ask for help when necessary. During the interpersonal lessons, students learn how to include one another and how to share work. Lastly, during the executive function lessons, students learn how to monitor their attention and re-focus themselves. These lessons are stretched out to last for the school year and give students the opportunity to practice these skills as much as possible. The lessons are formatted for both whole group and small group instruction.

The Center for the Collaborative Classroom helps students learn how to control themselves and their emotions. It promotes building relationships with others but puts an emphasis on being responsible for one's own self. This is an important skill for students to

understand because it will help students learn to effectively stay on task and have conflict resolution skills. The students will be able to redirect themselves on academic and social activities. The students will also realize that they can take control of their emotions and diffuse a stressful situation with a peer rather than arguing and trying to persuade the peer to agree with their feelings. The Center for the Collaborative Classroom gives students an opportunity to work collaboratively with peers and practice the skills being taught throughout the entire school year both inside and outside of the classroom. The only thing that this program lacks is assessments to know if the students have truly mastered the skills that have consumed much of the student's time throughout the school year.

Dr. Becky Baily believes in an approach called conscious discipline. Conscious discipline focuses on social emotional learning as classroom management rather than punishments. It creates a sense of belonging for students and lowers their stress levels. Dr. Becky Bailey wrote a book called, "I Love Your Rituals." I Love You Rituals have four goals; to optimize a child's brain for success at school and in life, increase a child's learning potential and effectiveness through touch, to create loving rituals that hold families together even through difficult times, and to create a strong bond between children and adults that help children avoid drugs, violence, and peer pressure (Becky Bailey, 2000). The rituals are fun for both adults and children and include songs, games, silly interactions, and physical interactions. Children can perform the rituals with their peers and with an adult.



The "I Love you Rituals" book is full of great ideas that help adults and children to make connections with each other, both emotionally and physically. Using these rituals will help build strong and positive relationships inside the classroom will help with building a sense of community. However, the rituals listed in this book are more for primary age students but can be adjusted to meet the needs of intermediate students. The songs used in the book are nursery rhymes, but teachers can take the same ideas and apply them to a different song that will be more suited for an older student.

The Character Counts Coalition is a series of books that focus on teaching students about character and how to build it. For this thesis, we will discuss the book, "Good Ideas to Help Young People Develop Good Character." This book focuses on six pillars of character; trustworthiness, responsibility, caring, respect, fairness, and citizenship. Each pillar has activities for the students to complete to help build the character trait. There are different lesson plans for each pillar depending on their age group. For the purpose of this thesis, we will discuss the lessons for children nine to eleven years old. Pillar one is trustworthiness and there are three lessons to teach it. The first lesson is called "Tower of Trust." The students will write down something that they have done to be considered trustworthy. For example, a student might write that they cleaned their room when their mom asked them to rather than ignoring her. After the students have written on their card, they will tape the card to a block and work together to build a tower. The teacher will then show the students how being untrustworthy will cause the tower to fall by taking blocks out from the tower until it falls. The students learn the importance of being trustworthy and that it takes time and effort to show someone that

you are trustworthy. Lesson two is a game called "Continue the Story." The students learn why it is important to tell the truth, even when they are afraid of the consequences (Character Counts, 1998). In this activity, the teacher starts by giving the students a scenario about someone who lies. Then the teacher taps a student on the shoulder, and they add two sentences to continue the story, Then the students taps another student for them to add to the story. This process continues until everyone has had a chance to add to the story. The teacher and the students then talk about the negative consequences of lying and replay the scenario with telling the truth. The third activity in the trustworthiness pillar is called "The Boy Who Cried Wolf!" The students learn that trustworthiness is earned and lying repeatedly will destroy your trustworthiness (Character Counts, 1998). The next pillar is respect and there are four activities. The first activity is called "Identifying Respectful Behavior." Students learn how to identify respectful behavior in public and how to modify behavior to be respectful. The students are given ten scenarios and are asked to identify whether the person was acting with respect. If they were not, the students write down how they could have changed it to show respect. Lesson two is called "Respectful Rides on Roads and Rails." This lesson teaches students how to be respectful while traveling in public. The students are given new scenarios and repeat the activity from lesson one. Lesson three is called "Role-Playing Respectful Behavior." Students act out a scenario and the class decide if the person was showing respect or disrespect. If the student was showing disrespect, the class discusses how to modify the scenario to show respect. The last lesson in the respect pillar is called "To Fight or Not to Fight." The students learn that conflict is inevitable. At some point or another, people disagree. Solving the problem

with conversation is much more beneficial for everyone involved rather than fighting. The teacher gives students scenarios and the students discuss how to resolve the conflict without fighting. The next pillar is about responsibility. The first lesson in responsibility is called "Accept the Challenge Pledge." The teacher challenges the students to take a pledge to their learning. The students sign a contract that states eight tasks that they will do to challenge their learning and do the best that they can. The students learn to take responsibility for themselves and their learning. The next lesson is called "What it Means to Do Your Best." The students identify things that they can do to strive for excellence and be their best selves. The teacher gives students a list of situations and the students describe how they could be their best selves in that situation. For example, the situation is "you are helping organize a party." The students write down that they help set the party up and make phone calls to different venues. The last lesson for responsibility is called "Responsible Choices." The students are given multiple choice questions about being responsible that they can complete with a partner. The next pillar in the book is fairness. The first lesson in this pillar is called "The Big Book of Judgement." The students are split into groups labeled "good judgement" and "bad Judgement." The students write down examples for their group and then make a book. There are a few blank pages in the back of the book for students to make comments about the judgements listed in the book. The last lesson in the fairness pillar is called "Unfair Advantage." The teacher instructs the students to play a game of kickball. One team must follow the regular kickball rules and the other team does not have to follow the rules. The students learn that the team with no rules had an advantage and makes the game unfair. The fifth pillar is caring. Lesson on in the caring pillar is called "Kindness

Letters.” The students randomly select other students’ names out of a jar and then write something kind about them and their personality. The students learn about seeing good qualities in other people and be kind to them. The next lesson is called “Caring Coupons.” The students make coupons for their parents about different chores that they will do when the parents redeem the coupon. The students learn that by helping out their parents with chores they are being caring to their wants and feelings. The last lesson in the caring pillar is called “Helping Those in Need.” The students learn that they can be caring when they help someone that they see is struggling. The teacher discusses with the students how being a caring person makes them feel and why it is important. Then, the students read scenarios about people who are in need and how the students can help. The last pillar is about citizenship. The first lesson in this pillar is called “Collage of Civic Responsibility.” The students receive a review of the responsibility pillar and learn that they can do things in their society to be a good citizen. The students work together to cut out magazine and newspaper pictures about things like voting, recycling, and respecting the law to make a collage. The last lesson is called “Good Citizen Interviews.” The students create interview questions about being a good citizen and then interview their peers. The students learn what it means to be a good citizen and why it is important.

“Good Ideas to Help Young People Develop Good Character” is a helpful book toward teaching students about good character. Each pillar represented in the book is a beneficial character trait to build not only a sense of community in the classroom, but also in a society. The book offers many scenarios for students to relate to with a peer and make decision about

how to grow in the character trait. However, the book lacks integration of other subjects and opportunities for students to learn hands-on. Social sciences can easily be integrated into the citizenship pillar. English language arts and writing is easily integrated into all pillars. Also, after doing many lessons that are similar, the teacher may struggle with classroom management and student engagement. Both the teacher and the students would benefit from adding hands-on and collaborative work into each pillar.

Patty Smith wrote a book called “Character Education Through Story.” This book teaches students about good character by reading stories that are related to the social sciences. There are six units that have several lessons about different celebrations. In each lesson, the students read a story that relates to the celebrations and then answer questions about the text. The students then complete a hands-on activity that requires collaboration with their peers. The first unit is making lifetime memories: celebrating/honoring special times with family. In these lessons, students learn about different traditions and celebrations that bring families closer together (Smith, 2001). The second unit is harvest: celebrations of Thanksgiving. These lessons explain how Thanksgiving traditions around the world were started and how some of them celebrate a specific crop and others celebrate in hopes of having good crops grow that year (Smith, 2001). The third unit are a masquerade: celebrations of frolic and fantasy. In these lessons, students learn about different plays, musicals, and masquerades from the past. This celebration also includes Halloween stories, so the teacher may need to consult with the parents before discussing certain topics. The fourth unit is festivals of light: celebrations of illumination. These lessons teach students about different traditions, like birthdays, that include

sources of light such as candles, fireworks, and stars. The fifth unit is New Year: celebrations of optimism and hope. In these lessons, students learn that celebrating a new year is a tradition throughout the world and puts an emphasis on rejuvenation, reassessment, and resolutions (Smith, 2001). Lastly, the sixth unit is Spring: celebrations of birth and rebirth. Students will learn that Spring is related to the idea of new life and renewing an existing life (Smith, 2001).

The book discusses various cultures and celebrations with the students and is very diverse. Social science is a neglected subject in a lot of schools and this book gives students an opportunity to learn about cultural differences and diversity. The book is heavily focused on social sciences and does not make connections to other subjects. The students are asked recall questions that they can easily find in the text rather than asking them to think critically and make inferences. Lastly, there are a lot of references to holidays that are related to religion, which can be a complicated subject for many teachers. While the lessons do not show bias, the teacher should consult with parents before discussing these topics.

Botvin Life Skills Training focuses on substance abuse and violence prevention. This program has been known to increase self-esteem, develop healthy attitudes, and improve knowledge of essential life skills in upper elementary school students (Botvin, 2018). The Botvin program has three learning objectives; personal self-management skills, general social skills, and drug resistance skills. In the personal self-management lessons, students learn how to boost their self-esteem, solve problems, reduce their stress, and manage their anger (Botvin, 2018). In the social skills lessons, students learn to set and meet personal challenges, overcome

shyness, communicate clearly, build relationships, and avoid violence (Botvin, 2018). Lastly, in the drug resistance lessons, students learn how to stand against peer pressure towards tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs (Botvin, 2018). The program is designed to teach each grade level these lesson in eight sessions that are thirty to forty-five minutes long. During the lessons, the students are given important and helpful information towards the topic being discussed. Then, the students reflect on what they learned and themselves to complete a series of worksheets. The lessons also show teachers how to integrate subjects such as math and social sciences.

Botvin Life skills Training covers various topics that help students build as individuals and become an asset to their community. It is based on the belief that students need to understand and like themselves before they can expect to be helpful towards their community. The lessons in his program provides students with great information and require students to reflect on themselves. However, students complete a lot of worksheets and have very little time to work with peers and hands-on activities. The worksheets are independent work and don't allow students to have the opportunity to collaborate with their peers.

The purpose of the rubric is to ensure that the programs are being evaluated with consistency. There were various factors to consider when evaluating the programs. Some programs were created to accommodate all grade levels of third through fifth grade. Other programs created different lesson plans for each targeted grade level. When evaluating the programs, I would focus on how effectively each program was meeting the criteria for each

section of the rubric. I would determine how much each program was using collaboration and hands-on learning. I would determine how effectively each program was making connections to the students and relating with their lives. Lastly, I would determine if the programs were seeking student understanding or if they would move forward without doing so. All criteria are focused on student's engagement. The rubric below describes each criterion in detail.

Student Engagement Chart:

	<b>4 Exemplary</b>	<b>3 Satisfactory</b>	<b>2 Developing</b>	<b>1 Unsatisfactory</b>
<b>Collaborative:</b> Students are actively engaged with their peers to enhance their learning. Students are discussing and expanding their thoughts and ideas.	The program provides opportunities for students to collaborate with peers throughout each lesson and activity.	The program provides opportunities for students to collaborate with peers throughout eighty percent or more of lessons and activities.	The program provides opportunities for students to collaborate with peers throughout fifty percent or more of lessons and activities.	The program provides opportunities for students to collaborate with peers throughout fifty percent or less of lessons and activities.
<b>Hands-on Learning:</b> Students are given the opportunity to learn in a variety of ways; kinesthetic, movement, auditory, and visual.	Each lesson in the program allows students to learn in a variety of ways such as kinesthetic, movement, auditory, and visual.	Eighty percent or more of the lessons in the program allows students to learn in a variety of ways such as kinesthetic, movement, auditory, and visual.	Fifty percent or more of the lessons in the program allows students to learn in a variety of ways such as kinesthetic, movement, auditory, and visual.	Fifty percent or less of the lessons in the program allows students to learn in a variety of ways such as kinesthetic, movement, auditory, and visual.
<b>Depth of Knowledge for Questions:</b>	The lessons in the program provide	Eighty percent or more of the lessons in the	Fifty percent or more of the lessons in the	Eighty percent or less of the lessons in the



<p>Questions and reflections in the program are on a variety of levels following Blooms Taxonomy. Students are asked to answer questions that work their way up to an analysis level.</p>	<p>questions that follow levels of Blooms Taxonomy and measures student learning.</p>	<p>program provide questions that follow levels of Blooms Taxonomy and measures student learning.</p>	<p>program provide questions that follow levels of Blooms Taxonomy and measures student learning.</p>	<p>program provide questions that follow levels of Blooms Taxonomy and measures student learning.</p>
<p><b>Age Appropriate:</b> The programs are designed for students to learn the material based on their level of development (Piaget and Vygotsky).</p>	<p>The lessons in the program are age appropriate for the students according to research of moral development by Piaget and Vygotsky.</p>	<p>Eighty percent or more of the lessons in the program are age appropriate for the students according to research of moral development by Piaget and Vygotsky.</p>	<p>Fifty percent or more of the lessons in the program are age appropriate for the students according to research of moral development by Piaget and Vygotsky.</p>	<p>Eighty percent or less of the lessons in the program are age appropriate for the students according to research of moral development by Piaget and Vygotsky.</p>
<p><b>Relatability:</b> The students are able to make connections with the topics being discussed.</p>	<p>The students are able to make connections based on past experiences and prior knowledge with the topics being discussed in the lessons.</p>	<p>The students are able to make connections based on past experiences and prior knowledge with the topics being discussed in eighty percent or more of the lessons.</p>	<p>The students are able to make connections based on past experiences and prior knowledge with the topics being discussed in fifty percent or more of the lessons.</p>	<p>The students are able to make connections based on past experiences and prior knowledge with the topics being discussed in fifty percent or less the lessons.</p>

While reading each program, the rubric listed above was used to evaluate each program. I read each program thoroughly and gave them a score that I believe to be accurate. The rubric below shows the scores that each program received.

Evaluation of Programs Chart:

	<b>Collaborative</b>	<b>Hands-On Learning</b>	<b>Depth of Knowledge for Questions</b>	<b>Age Appropriate</b>	<b>Relatability</b>
<b>Camfel Productions</b>	2	2	3	3	3
<b>Champions for Kindness</b>	1	1	3	4	3
<b>Roots of Empathy</b>	2	3	2	2	2
<b>Overcoming Obstacles</b>	2	3	2	2	2
<b>Center for the Collaborative Classroom</b>	3	3	2	2	2
<b>Conscious Discipline</b>	4	3	1	3	2
<b>Character Counts Coalition</b>	2	2	3	2	2
<b>Character Education Through Story</b>	2	3	1	2	2
<b>Botvin Life Skills Training</b>	2	2	3	3	2

After evaluating each program, I used the evaluations to help guide the instruction and effectiveness of the sessions for Molding A Community. While keeping in mind that the

programs have a different goal from Molding A Community, I looked for things that were lacking in the programs that I researched and incorporated those things into the sessions.

### The Sessions for Molding A Community

After carefully reading and evaluating nine programs, I have created five sessions for Molding A Community that follow criteria that was used to evaluate the programs that I researched. The sessions' focus on teaching students about how to become a valued member of a community and why that is important while maintaining student engagement. The sessions have been created to ensure that students are engaged and able to relate to the content. The sessions also ensure that students are learning the information through various learning styles. Molding A Community is targeted at students who are the third through fifth grade and are created to be age appropriate in all aspects. The rubric below shows how the sessions in Molding A Community have been evaluated.

Evaluation of Molding A Community Rubric:

Sessions	Collaborative	Hands-on Learning	Depth of Knowledge for Questions	Age Appropriate	Relatability
Session 1: Let's Make a Classroom Community Project	4	4	3	4	4
Session 2: What Makes a Community	3	4	4	4	4
Session 3: We Have a	4	4	4	4	4

Problem, Let's Solve It					
Session 4: Differences Among Us	4	4	4	4	4
Session 5: Classroom Community Project Gallery Walk	3	4	3	4	4

## Molding a Community Sessions A Teachers Guide

This is a teacher's guide for the program Molding a Community. These sessions are intended for elementary students in third, fourth, and fifth grade. The sessions will last for an hour and focus on teaching students about how to come together and build a sense of community within their classroom. These sessions are designed to help teachers build a sense of community within their students and classroom. It is recommended to utilize these sessions at the beginning of the year so that the sense of community can grow throughout the year. However, the sessions can be implemented at any point.

### *Session 1: Let's Make a Classroom Community Project*

The teacher will start the session with a discussion about what it means to be a part of a community. Suggested teacher instruction is: *Being part of a community is an important thing. People who are in a community enjoy being with each other and achieve a lot of hard work. People can use their unique attributes and skills to help the community. People in a community are reliable, trustworthy, respectful, and kind to others. In this classroom, we will learn how to use these qualities and practice using them daily. We will learn how to work together and depend on each other when we need help. We will also learn about how to solve a problem with another person in the most effective way. It is not wrong to disagree with someone or not like something that they do. However, how we solve the problem is very important. Today, we will work together to bring our creative ideas together and make a choice that we all agree upon.*

The students will create a representation of their classroom community. The students can choose to create anything that they want. Their project should represent the most important aspects of a community to them. Ask the students, “what is the most important thing about being a part of a community?” The teacher should model options of what the project can look like. For example, the students can make a video to show how they will create a sense of community in their classroom. Or they can create an artistic poster board. The students can use paint, molding clay, different forms of paper, technology, and other resources to create their project. The students can also choose to make a song. The students can use any resource to create something creative that the whole class decides to do. The students will spend the last twenty minutes of each session to work on their classroom community project. During the last session, the students in each class will present their classroom community project to other classes in a gallery walk. Teachers should decide upon a date and location for students to attend and present at the gallery walk.

The teacher will introduce the Classroom Community Project. This project will require students to work together and use conflict resolution skills to make a unified decision about what the project should be. The teacher will facilitate conflict resolution skills as the students discuss their ideas and help them work together to make the decision. The students will spend the first session decided upon what they will build together and plan on how they will accomplish their goal.

## *Session Two: What Makes a Community*

The teacher will start session two with a discussion about characteristics that create a community. The first characteristic is kindness. Suggested teacher instruction is: *Being kind is about making others feel good about themselves. We should encourage each other to be our best selves and compliment people as much as possible. We should never make someone feel sad about who they are. In this classroom, we will learn how to look at the positive things in a person rather than the negative.* The next characteristic is dependability. *To be dependable, people need to feel like they can rely on you. People will know that they can come to you for help and you will help them without judging them. For example, we all learn in different ways and at different paces. If a classmate comes to you for help with an assignment, don't make them feel bad because they don't understand. Just do your best to help them understand and succeed. That classmate will know that you are someone that they can count on.* The third characteristic is being trustworthy. *Being trustworthy is very important in a community. People in a community work together and communicate about many things. If people cannot trust someone, it will be hard for the community to work together and communicate. We earn trust by following through with promises, always being honest, not spreading gossip, and being kind.* The last characteristic is being respectful. *Respect is something that you can't have if you do not give it. We respect people by accepting their differences from ourselves. If we call people names, make fun of what they like, make fun of what they look like, or tease them then we are being*

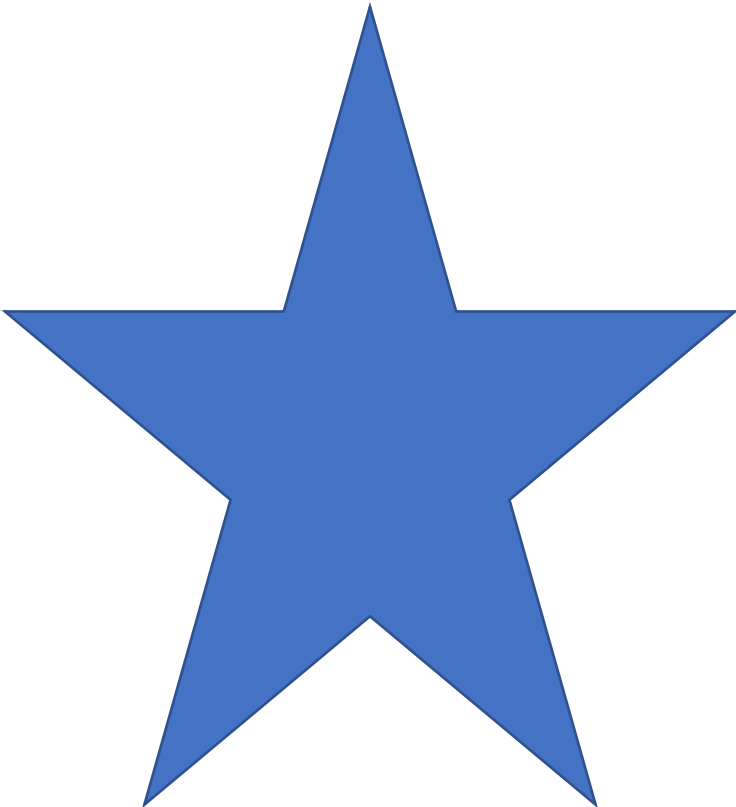
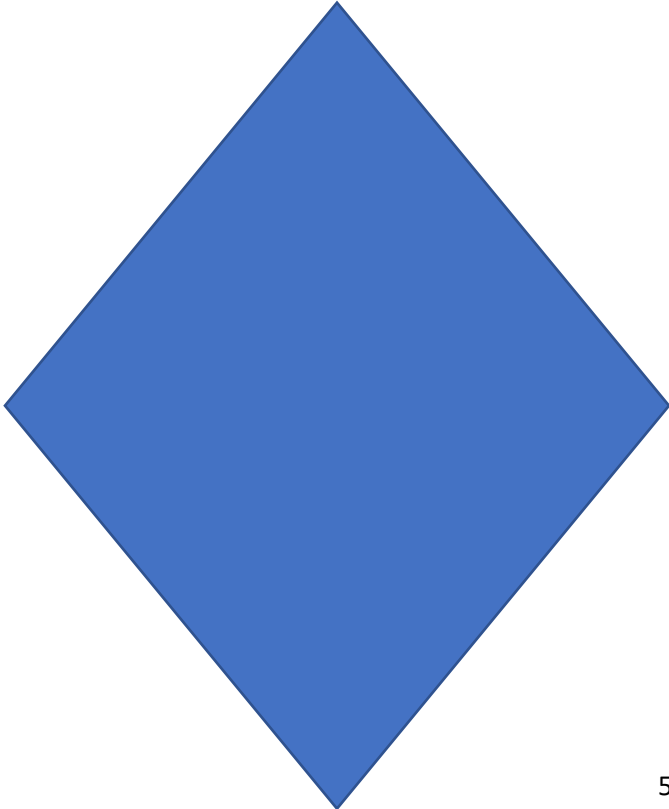
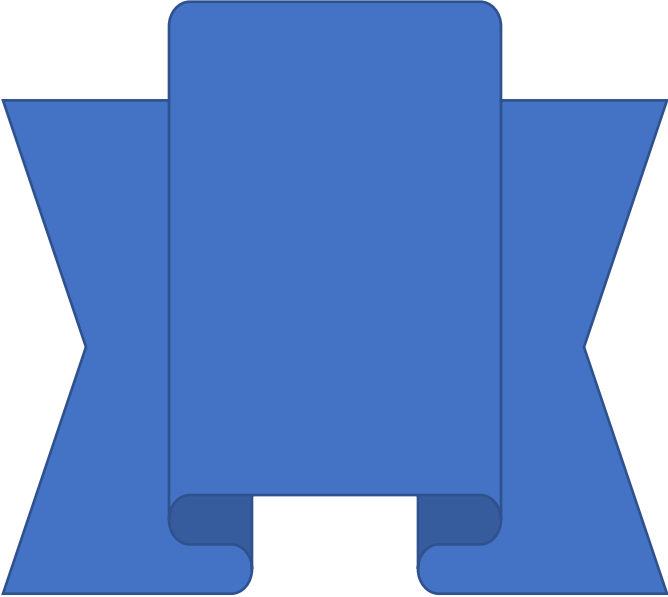
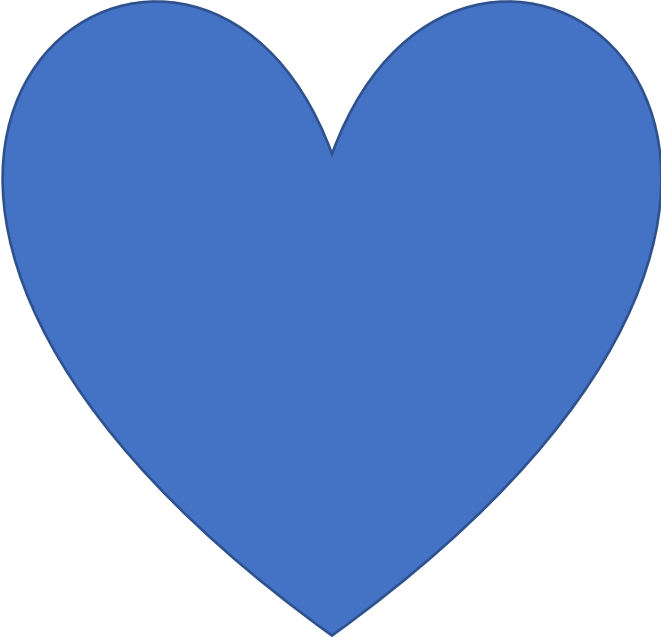
*disrespectful, and that person will likely not have respect in return. We should never hurt someone's feelings or put them down. We should make people feel good about who they are and help them when they feel sad.*

The students will create a classroom bulletin board that elaborates on four characteristics of people in a community; the characteristics are kindness, dependability, trustworthy, and respectful. The bulletin board should be split into four sections. The center of the bulletin board should be titled "What Makes a Community." After the teacher and students briefly discuss each characteristic, the students will get four pieces of paper in different shapes; a heart for kindness, a star for dependability, a diamond for trustworthy, and a ribbon for respectful. The students will write down how they can show their classmates each of these characteristics throughout the year. The students will then share their responses and discuss them. The teacher can prompt conversation by asking probing questions like, "explain when you have used these characteristics before." The students will post their responses on the bulletin board and may add to their response at any time.

The students should spend the last 20 minutes of the session working on their classroom community project.



Cut-Outs for Session Two



### *Session Three: We Have A Problem, Let's Solve It*

Session three is about teaching students conflict resolution skills. They will learn that everyone is different and has something unique and important to offer in a community. The students will learn how to evaluate their feelings and redirect themselves in a way that is good for everyone involved. The teacher should start this session with a class discussion. Suggested teacher instruction is: *We do not live in a perfect world and people are not perfect. We are going to get mad at our classmates from time to time. You guys are going to get mad at me too. This is okay. Getting upset is normal and we all do it. In this classroom, we are going to know what to do when we get upset and work through the problem. Today we are going to learn about conflict resolution. This means that when we have a problem with ourselves or with someone else, we will know how to deal with the problem and overcome it.*

The students will discuss different coping strategies with the teacher. The teacher will make two columns on the board labeled *I Feel* and *I Should*. The teacher will facilitate a conversation about different feelings and how to work throughout them. Examples are listed below:

<b>I Feel...</b>	<b>I Should...</b>
Angry! I want to: Yell and scream Hit and kick	. Stop. Breath. Think about what I should do next . Go somewhere private to cool down

Quit Throw things	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Think about word choices</li> <li>. Think about the consequences of how you handle the situation</li> <li>. Talk to someone who makes you feel better</li> <li>. Think about something that makes you feel happy</li> <li>. Realize your role in the situation, apologize if necessary</li> </ul>
Sad. I want to: Cry Quit Avoid people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Talk about how you feel with someone who makes you feel better</li> <li>. Think about something that makes you happy</li> <li>. Give and get a hug</li> </ul>
Happy. I want to: Learn Play and communicate with peers Work Hard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Help others</li> <li>. Be kind</li> <li>. Be honest</li> </ul>

If the teacher has more ideas to add to this chart, he or she should add them. When the teacher is done teaching a few coping strategies, the students should walk around the room and collaborate with peers. The students will create scenarios that they can use these strategies in and write them down. The students can also discuss real situations that they have been in that required them to use these strategies. The students should work with at least five different peers.

The students should spend the last 20 minutes of the session working on their classroom community project.

### *Session Four: Differences Among Us*

Session four is about helping students realize that we are all different. The students will learn how to accept their differences and find ways to work together despite their differences.

The teacher should start the session with a discussion about how people are different.

Suggested teacher instruction is: *Today we are going to talk about how we are all different. It is not a bad thing to be different from someone else. We all have unique and important qualities to offer. If we were all the same, the world would be a boring place and would never evolve into something better. To have a successful community, people need to recognize their strengths and weaknesses and learn how to use them in a way that is beneficial.*

In this session, the students will be presented with different scenarios in small groups of three or four. Their groups will change periodically to ensure that they work with different strengths and weaknesses. In each scenario, students will start by writing down their strengths and weaknesses in that scenario. Then the students will discuss what they wrote and how they can use their strengths and weakness to work together. The activity requires students to evaluate themselves and realize that they are a valuable member of a community despite their weaknesses. The activity also presents students with an opportunity to practice conflict resolution skills. Listed below are ten scenario cards that the teacher can cut out and use. The teacher can certainly make more scenarios to meet the needs of the class.

Emily accidentally bumps into a classmate when they are trying to walk to centers.

The classmate gets mad and starts to scream at Emily. Emily gets mad for being yelled at and starts to yell back at her classmate. How could this scenario be changed to avoid having a problem?

The teacher asked Derek to read aloud a paragraph for the class. Derek makes mistakes and a few classmates laugh at him. Later, Derek realizes that his classmates are spreading rumors that he can't read. He starts to cry. How could this scenario be changed to avoid a conflict?

Theresa is tapping her pencil and trying to talk to a classmate while the teacher is talking to the class about fractions. The teacher asks Theresa to stop talking and tapping several times, but she continues to disturb the class. The teacher asks Theresa to move to a desk in the back of the class for the remainder of the fraction lesson. Theresa gets mad at the teacher and knocks things off her classmates' desks on the way to the back of the class. The teacher decides that Theresa needs to sit out at recess for ten minutes. How could this scenario be changed to avoid conflict?

Joseph was walking by his classmates at recess and hears them making fun of a new student named Lisa because she has a hard time following direction in class. Lisa sits next to Joseph in class and he knows that she does not speak English because she just moved to the United States. Joseph feels bad that his classmates are making fun of Lisa. How could this scenario be changed to avoid conflict?

Stacey and Perri have been friends for a long time. Stacey shares a secret with Perri and makes her promise to not tell anyone about the secret because it will embarrass her. Later, Stacey hears other classmates that are talking about her secret. Stacey is

very embarrassed and upset with Perri. How could this scenario be changed to avoid conflict?

Isaiah often comes to school wearing dirty, worn, run-down shoes, and sometimes has a strange smell. People in your class refuse to work or play with Isaiah and make fun of him. You later discover that Isaiah is homeless and doesn't always get to wash his clothes or take a bath. How could this scenario be changed to avoid conflict?

Karri is a student in your class. There are three people in your class who make fun of Karri because she is repeating the third grade. They say that Karri is not smart and couldn't pass the Florida Standardized Assessment. How could this scenario be changed to avoid conflict?

Stephanie is trying to listen to work on a fraction assignment. Mike is talking to Stephanie, tapping her desk, and taking her supplies. Stephanie asks Mike to stop, but he continues to do things that frustrate her. Stephanie decides to yell at Mike and eventually, start a physical fight. How could this scenario be changed to avoid conflict?

Angel is a new student from another country and does not speak English. Today is his first day of school and he is nervous. At the end of the day, Angel missed his bus because he could not understand the language. Angel becomes frightened and doesn't know how to get home, so he begins to cry. The students in Angel's class

laugh at him for missing the bus and crying. How could this scenario be changed to avoid conflict?

Christina and Amy are in the same class. At lunch, they have an argument and get very frustrated with each other. After arguing for a few minutes, Amy makes a comment to Christina that hurts her feelings. Christina responded by pouring chocolate milk on Amy's head. The entire class begins to laugh, and Amy is embarrassed. How could the scenario be changed to avoid conflict?

The students should spend the last 20 minutes of the session working on their classroom community project.

#### *Session Five: Classroom Community Project Gallery Walk*

The teachers should allow students in third, fourth, and fifth grade class display their classroom community project for the other classes. This could be done in the library or in another room that has vacancy times for students to set up their work.

The students will walk around and view the projects made by other classrooms. Half of the class should walk around and view other work while half the class stays behind to discuss their project with students who come by to see it. The students can switch roles after a while to give everyone a chance to view the gallery.

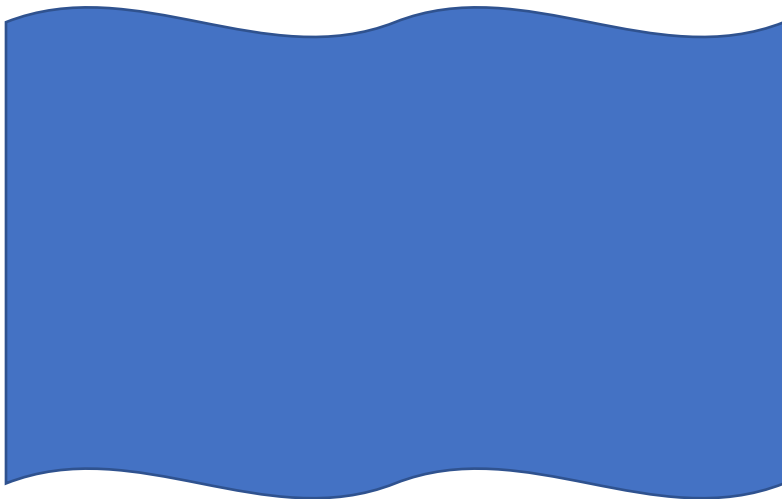
The students should discuss why they chose to create their project the way that they did and what the most important quality of a community is to them. The students should discuss with other classes how they came to a unified decision on what to build and how to do it. Each class should have a comment box for students to leave comments after they have come by to see the project. Students should also hand out thank you cards to students who come by to see their project. Listed below are comment cards that students can write a message on and place in the comment box. There is also a thank you card that students can customize and pass out to students who come by.



Figure 1: Comment Cards



Figure 2: Thank You Cards



## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to explore social anxiety, school relationships, and building a sense of community in an intermediate elementary classroom. I focused on the importance of relationships and how they can affect academic achievement for students. I researched programs that have been created in the past and evaluated them on criteria that I believe to be important for success. Although the programs that I researched had a different goal than this thesis, they allowed me to see aspects that were lacking and incorporate them into Molding A Community. The research had important goals but lacked the necessary elements for students to learn the goals on a mastery level. Molding A Community maintains student engagement and allows the students to learn the goal in various learning methods.

This thesis discussed the importance of school relationships and how they can harm or benefit students. Information about relationships and how to build them were researched through the internet by finding programs that have been created in the past with a similar goal to this thesis. The programs were evaluated with a rubric and demonstrated the importance of building a school community. The programs also demonstrated strategies that could be successful for students to learn the goal. After evaluating the programs supported the idea that school relationships are important and can affect academic achievement.

After thoroughly evaluating the programs, I realized that they lacked mostly in student engagement. The programs were repetitive and didn't offer the material in multiple learning styles. Not all students learn the same way and that is why is it important for teachers to

present information in more than one way. It is also important to know the age group of the students and what that age group is capable of understanding, especially in the topic of building relationships. The sessions use an integration of the theories of Jean Piaget's stages of development and Lev Vygotsky's theory of zone of proximal development to ensure that the students can understand what the learning goal. Molding A Community was created to keep students engaged while they learn morals that are appropriate for their age.

This thesis explores the relationships, academic achievement, and building a sense of community. After researching various programs and theories, I believe that building relationships and a sense of community is essential for academic achievement and good psychological health.

### Recommendations for Future Research

There are two limitations that I have recognized during this thesis, which were discussed in chapter three. The first limitation is that the programs that I was able to find and evaluate did not share the same goal as this thesis. The programs were targeted at bullying prevention or socioemotional health. The second limitation is that I decided to not create teacher and student surveys that would have provided valuable information towards teacher and student feelings about Molding A Community. I decided against creating surveys because I would need an IRB, which would be difficult to obtain since I cannot demonstrate Molding A Community in a classroom.

When I have my own classroom, I intend to use the sessions from Molding A Community. I believe that they can have a great impact on a teacher and the students in a classroom. Based upon the research in this thesis, I believe it is essential for students to have a positive relationship with their teacher and with their peers. Having these positive relationships can help students while they are young and can continue to benefit them as they grow into adulthood. Knifsend (2018) states that if students have negative feelings towards school starting in elementary school, they will struggle to overcome these negative feelings as they progress through grades. Students that have negative feelings towards school and the people that they encounter at school will continue to have low academic achievement, this could lead to dropping out and not going to college. Building a sense of community in the elementary school can help prevent these issues.

A teacher is not just a teacher. A teacher is a role model that can mold a young mind into something powerful that will last a lifetime.

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