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THE RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM

by
Colleen Schroeder

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Masters of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
April 11, 2004

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved April 11, 2004

ABSTRACT

Colleen Schroeder

The Responsive Classroom, A Study of Social Curriculum.

2004

Dr. Theodore Johnson

School Administration

The purpose of the study was to have a better understanding of the concept *Responsive Classroom*, and to develop a discipline code and strategy that would meet the needs of the Rush School students emotionally, socially, as well as cognitively. The intern used a case study approach by working with the third grade teachers who actively implemented the concepts of the *Responsive Classroom*. The study resulted in a cultural picture of the climate of the third grade and the impact the *Responsive Classroom* had on school discipline referrals, bullying, classroom climate, and achievement.

The intern clustered the participants into two sub-groups A and B. The intern then used the results from each group to compare the data. The data was gathered by using a qualitative and quantitative survey that was designed by Dr. Stephen Elliott based on his research instrument of the Social Skills Rating System. The intern received direct permission from Dr. Stephen Elliott.

The intern found that the implementation of *The Responsive Classroom* approach was beneficial for students and the concept made a positive impact on students' social behaviors, as well as achievement.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Colleen Schroeder

The Responsive Classroom, A Study of Social Curriculum.

2004

Dr. Theodore Johnson

School Administration

The purpose of the study was to have a better understanding of the concept *Responsive Classroom*, and how the approach meets the needs of the Rush School students emotionally, socially, as well as cognitively.

The data was gathered by using a survey that was based on Dr. Stephen Elliott's Social Skills Rating System. The intern received direct permission from Dr. Stephen Elliott.

The intern found that the implementation of *The Responsive Classroom* approach was beneficial for students and the concept made a positive impact on students' social behaviors as well as achievement.

Acknowledgments

I would like to take this time to give many thanks to the people that have made all of my hard work and success possible. I would like to thank my husband, David for encouraging me and supporting me through my long journey. Without his encouraging words I would not have the drive and determination to be the best person that I am able to be. I would also like to thank my parents John and Maureen Sherry. They have instilled in my sister Mary Beth and I their love and passion for helping others and given us the gift of education.

Table of Contents

| | | |
|-------------------|---|----------------|
| Chapter 1 | Introduction | Page 1 |
| Chapter 2 | Review of Literature | Page 6 |
| Chapter 3 | Design of Study | Page 18 |
| Chapter 4 | Presentation of Research Findings | Page 23 |
| Chapter 5 | Conclusions, Implications and Further Study | Page 29 |
| References | | Page 32 |
| Appendix A | Permission for Surveying Students | |
| Appendix B | Permission for Utilization of Survey Instruments | |
| Appendix C | Research Instruments | |

Chapter 1 Introduction

Focus of the Study

Responsive Classroom is a philosophy that was designed and implemented by the Northeast Foundation for Teachers. The purpose of the philosophy is to create a safe, challenging, and joyful classroom for all learners. The focus of the study was to have a better understanding of the concept *Responsive Classroom* and the implementation of the philosophy as well as the effect the philosophy and ideals had on the students at the Eleanor Rush School in addition to the teachers, and parents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to have a better understanding of the concept *Responsive Classroom* and, to develop a discipline code and strategy that will meet the needs of the Rush School students emotionally, socially, and cognitively. The intern used a case study approach by working with the third grade teachers who will actively implement the concepts of the *Responsive Classroom*. The study will result in a cultural picture of the climate of the third grade and the impact the *Responsive Classroom* has on bullying, classroom climate, and achievement.

The study is significantly important to elementary, and middle school principals, local Boards of Education, teachers and parents that are interested in making school a safe and stimulating environment for the children.

Definitions

Responsive Classroom- a philosophy designed by The Northeast Foundation for teachers in Boston, the philosophy is for teachers to create safe, challenging and joyful classrooms for all learners

Morning Meeting Greeting-an activity used by teachers to create and foster a responsive classroom, students each sit in a group circle with their classmates and use a type of formal greeting system to begin each school day.

Sharing-an activity that follows Morning Meeting Greeting when a teacher chooses a student in the classroom to reveal something about themselves to the class.

Group activity- an activity that takes place after sharing that contributes to the sense of community in a classroom.

News and Announcements- the final activity in the sequence of the Morning Meeting Greeting, where the teacher will begin to bring in the academic part of the students day, may be used as a transition from Morning Meeting Greeting to the classroom day.

Limitations of the Study

The study took place in the third grade at Eleanor Rush Intermediate School in the district of Cinnaminson. The intern had direct access to both the teachers and the students throughout the study.

The limitations included that the studies will not only last a year and results will not be completely concluded until June of 2004.

During the summer of 2004 the intern will be able to compare the year and test scores with the 2002-2003 school year.

Setting of the Study

The school district of Cinnaminson is a small town made of seven square miles that is divided socially-economically as well as physically by Route 130.

In its early days, Cinnaminson thrived as a river front community that offered jobs for people in the town as well as housing opportunities for people that worked in Philadelphia. In the late 1960's development housing began to be built on the north side of Route 130. Traditionally the "new" development homes were more expensive than the homes on the south side of Route 130. Many families that purchased the "new" homes in Cinnaminson were coming from Philadelphia. At the time of 1970, Cinnaminson had two elementary schools, one middle, and one high school. The student population was booming so much that the district was forced to build a new elementary school. New Albany School was built. When the board redistricted the schools, children attended their neighborhood schools.

Because certain neighborhoods are more "well to do" than others, the elementary school has gained a reputation as the "wealthy" school or later as the "better" school. Where the other two elementary schools had lower socio-economic families. The children were viewed as making up a more needy population. The beliefs and stereotypes of the town persisted true until the school year of 2001-2002, when the board voted to reconfigure the schools.

By reconfiguring the schools the board created New Albany Elementary, which houses grades K-2, Rush Intermediate including grades 3-5, Cinnaminson Middle School including grades 6-8 and Cinnaminson High School housing grades 9-12.

The reasons for the reconfiguration were to create more continuity through the grades and to foster a school community atmosphere through out the district.

The Eleanor Rush Intermediate School is the site for the research. The Rush School is made up of 506 students, 159 students are enrolled in the third grade, and 162 students are enrolled in the fourth grade and 185 students in the fifth grade. There are over sixty special education students.

Twenty-three percent of the Rush School population is classified and receiving special education services, and 100% of the school's students only speak English. The average class size is twenty students as well as 11 students to every teacher ratio and Rush School has 400 students to every one administrator. In the school year 2001-2002 93.5% of all fourth graders were proficient in Reading/Language Arts area, 4.5% were advance proficient and 2% were partially proficient. In the school year 2002-2003 52% of fourth graders were proficient in Mathematics, 24.9% were advanced proficient, and 23.2% were partially proficient. At the current time only 26% of the Rush School staff has their advanced masters degrees and no teacher has acquired their EdD or PhD.

School budgets have been a very difficult issue for Cinnaminson to deal with for the past fifteen years. From 1988 to 1998 the town had never passed a budget. Because of the defeated budgets teachers have created a very unionized environment that would only allow teachers to work between the hours of 8:24 to 3:09.

Anything above and beyond the call of duty was looked down upon from unionized staff. The idea of working the clock made it very difficult and uncomfortable for many staff members to feel as though they were fulfilling their duties and obligations as a teacher.

As a result of ten years of defeated budgets and an \$11,000 surplus teachers salaries are not comparable with many other South Jersey school districts.

Significance of Study

By studying and implementing the *Responsive Classroom* the intern has made a contribution to the recurring social policy issues that arise at the Eleanor Rush School. The social policies that will be impacted by the study are the discipline policy and the bullying policy.

The intern believes that the study and implementation of the *Responsive Classroom* is critically important to the school because previously the school has been working to decrease the discipline referrals for the year 2002-2003. After just one year the school has little or no decrease in referrals. Therefore there is a direct need to find a program to decrease Rush School's discipline referrals. By implementing the *Responsive Classroom* the school will begin to take steps to eliminate many of the discipline issues.

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

Review of Literature

Introduction

Fran Ravid is an early childhood educator who has been teaching preschoolers at the Independent Day School, located in Middlefield Ct. In the article entitled Early Childhood Teacher Fran Ravid on: the Responsive Classroom Approach, published in *Early Childhood Today*. In the article Fran speaks about her experiences in the responsive classroom. As an experience classroom teacher in early childhood education, Fran Ravid's knowledge and opinions are well valued by the Northeast Foundation for Children.

Ravid believes that the core idea behind the *Responsive Classroom* approach is to help children develop an ability to "care about themselves, others, and the world". The approach confirms the teacher's commitment to teaching social skills, and says that discipline is a subject to be taught. The teachers at Ravid's school say the *Responsive Classroom* approach complements their school's commitment to teaching children to care and compliments the school's philosophy and values of self-discipline and citizenship. Ravid explains in the article that many of the teachers involved in implementing the *Responsive Classroom* approach believe that the approach has allowed them to formalize and clarify the work they have been doing for so many years in their classrooms.

Ravid also explains that the *Responsive Classroom* has many activities that are helpful in the classroom.

For example Ravid explains that the language capacities of the lessons have been the most helpful because she believes that she has clear and concise communication with her students. As a result of the *Responsive Classroom*, Ravid and her co-workers have seen dramatic changes in their students' behaviors from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

Ravid and her co-workers also compared different years to the one when they implemented the *Responsive Classroom* and found that during the *Responsive Classroom* year students have made a commitment to the classroom to make it a community where learning takes place as well as continuing to keep the classroom a safe and happy learning environment.

Madeline Brick is a principal of John F. Kennedy Middle School in Hudson, Massachusetts. In the article Q & A School Principals, *Curriculum Review*, Madeline gives reasons for embracing the *Responsive Classroom* approach, as well as descriptions of her program at the middle school, and other practices that have been adopted from the program. Brick explains in an interview that "JFK middle school became a model site for the *Responsive Classroom* because initially the district had adopted the concept in the elementary grades".

Brick explains that it was a natural progression for *Responsive Classroom* to come to her middle school since the students started with the concepts in elementary school.

Brick also states that Responsive Classroom is an approach that was needed in the middle school level since adolescents is such a crucial time for students they need a way to communicate with adults and peers and Responsive Classroom is exactly the tool the students require to implements that communication skill.

Brick describes Responsive Classroom I middle school “as a program meant to decrease cliques and increase the students’ sense of belonging.”

Brick backs he statement by explaining that “just means and process go hand in hand, and the greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.” Brick elaborates by explaining that students need social skills to survive in life therefore, social skills turn into life skills training.

Brick describes how the students learn these life skills through “Morning Meeting”. Morning Meeting is a time that is put aside by each homeroom teacher to sit with their children and discuss events that are taking place in the world, school, team, or home. Morning Meeting allows students time to realize that they may not be the only one with problems, or they begin to identify with students they never took time to get to know. Morning Meeting also allows teachers to take a peak into their students’ lives outside the academic classroom.

Along with the Morning Meeting Brick has also adopted “Rules and Consequences”, which is a logical view at responsibility and rule making and breaking in a school. Brick describes the Rules and Consequences as “a common sense approach to what we want kids to know and be able to do.”

Brick also makes clear that the Responsive Classroom is not a one-day commitment, it is a philosophy that must be enforced by all participants in the school community, including parents, teachers, students and administrators.

“True learning requires time to wonder, time to pause, time to look closely, time to share, time to pay attention to what is most important” is a direct quote from Chip Wood, the co-founder of the Northeast Foundation for teachers.

The quote appeared in an article entitled Changing the Pace of School: Slowing Down the Day to Improve the Quality of Learning that was recently published in *Phi Delta Kappan*. Wood goes on to explain that time is a major resource, and teachers must address how to use their time to improve academic learning. Wood’s ideas are in direct correlation with *The Responsive Classroom* philosophy and approach.

Wood expresses his concern for the amount of change and fast paced results that educators are trying to receive in today’s world that is full of standardized test scores, changing curricula, and new initiatives. Wood believes that it is the children who suffer the most from the “suffocating layers” that leave little time for the children to reflect upon their day.

One belief that Wood has is that “rather than being the democratic, child-centered learning communities that they should be, our schools are once again becoming fact factories, cramming more into every minute of every hour of the day”.

The point he makes is that many schools are feeling the same pressures of the educational world and districts are no longer serving their purpose as a learning community, instead the schools are becoming little factories.

Wood explains that in this day and time we cannot afford to be a factory, schools need to “improve the quality of learning”.

In his model of change, Wood explains how to take your school from the factory to *The Responsive Classroom*. Wood offers a six-step strategy to more quality learning environments.

Step 1 consists of “allowing more time for in-depth learning, investigation, and contemplation by narrowing the scope of the curriculum”.

Step 2 is created by “starting the school year slowly, encourage teachers to take the time to set clear social and academic expectations and establish an atmosphere of trust.”

The third step “allows students time to reflect and review throughout the year”. The fourth step encourages administrators to “adjust the schedule of the school day to change the nature and productivity of the afternoon”.

Step 5 tells administrators and teachers to “make the playground time a priority. Learning time is maximized in school environments in which playgrounds are peaceful, friendly, and active.” The last step recommends that administrators and teachers “change the school schedule to allow more time for teachers, staff, administrators, and parents to interact with one another.”

Wood closes by explaining that a day filled with well-paced learning has enormous benefits.

“By changing classroom structures, schedules, and teaching practices to reflect appreciation for children’s real experiences of time, we can dramatically improve learning.”

Horsch, Chen, and Nelson describe the changes that have taken place at the John B. Murphy Elementary School since the introduction and implementation of *The Responsive Classroom*, in a recent article Rules and Rituals in *Phi Delta Kappan*.

The Responsive Classroom approach is described by teachers at Murphy Elementary School as a program that “acknowledges children’s need to feel both pleasure and significance as members of a classroom community. It is grounded in knowledge about children’s development and capitalizes on their natural desire to engage in learning when they feel safe, valued and respected.”

The Murphy Elementary School uses all six responsive classroom approaches in their day-to-day teaching and learning experiences. The Morning Meeting event builds a sense of community while setting positive tone for the day. Morning Meeting Greeting- an activity used by teachers to create and foster a responsive classroom, students each sit in a group circle with their classmates and use a type of formal greeting system to begin each school day.

Rules and logical consequences are a classroom management strategy that is intended to instill “habits of goodness” in children. Logical consequences are “no punitive responses to student wrongdoing.” There are three categories of consequences; “you break it, you fix it, loss; of privilege; and thinking time. All three strategies are designed to be “situation-child-specific”. Logical consequences are meant to support children as they learn to behave in a socially responsible way.

Guided practice is another teaching method that allows students to use an exploratory process of learning that focuses on open-ended questions tasks in order to promote conceptual thinking. A guided discovery lesson is when students are introduced to classroom materials to enhance their writing workshops and any other content area.

Classroom organization is important to *The Responsive Classroom* because the actual classroom environment impacts the learning process.

In time responsive teachers will allow their students to design the working environment. Initially the room allows students to work in-groups, pairs, and individually. The teacher will also incorporate the students' artifacts into the classroom.

Academic choice is a time that a teacher may give to students to initiate ownership of their academic progress. The teacher will regularly create lessons that allow the student to make choices about what they would like to learn. Assessment and reporting to the parents initiates ongoing communication between home and school, a concept that responsive teachers view as being very critical in success of *The Responsive Classroom*.

Dr. Elizabeth Bondy: Creating The Responsive Classroom, *Intervention in School Clinic*, is an informative article that allows the researcher to read a different perspective regarding *The Responsive Classroom* approach. Dr. Elizabeth Bondy is an associate professor working at the University of Florida with the faculty in special education to improve the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. She teaches classes in the unified elementary and special education teacher education program and works closely with general education teachers to facilitate the development of inclusive academic and social curriculum.

Dr. Bondy describes *The Responsive Classroom* in great detail in her interview with the authors of the article Chris Walther-Thomas and Mary Brownell. Bondy illustrates *The Responsive Classroom* as an approach that is based on a philosophy about teaching and learning that focuses on creating a balance between academic and social learning in classrooms.

Dr. Bondy says, "I believe that the dual focus is extremely important for all teachers, because many teachers, particularly those in general education, tend to focus primarily on academic learning".

To facilitate academic and social learning, *Responsive Classroom* advocates believe that in their classrooms teachers must put in action the seven important principles:

1. The social curriculum must be as important as the academic curriculum. Students cannot learn in environments that are not socially healthy and safe.
2. How a student learns is just as important as what the student learns. The emotional and social context for learning is just as important as the content of academic learning.
3. The greatest cognitive and social growth comes from interaction with peers.
4. Students need a specific set of social capacities with related skills and attitudes to be effective in and out of the classroom.
5. The teacher must know each student individually, developmentally, and culturally to teach them well.

6. Families must participate as partners in the learning process in order for their child's social and emotional learning to be maximized. Teachers are responsible for ensuring families are welcomed, encouraged, and supported as partners.
7. Collegial relationships among adults in schools are essential because we are the role models for our students. We must show our students how to respect and care for our peers, so that they can demonstrate the same attitude and behaviors with their peers.

What these principles have in common is a focus on the social context for learning.

They highlight the belief that a positive learning environment is critical to the effectiveness of teaching and learning and that schools have a responsibility to teach students the skills to establish cohesive social relationships.

The Responsive Classroom proponents help students learn positive social abilities and attitudes because they want them to become responsible citizens in a world community that values peace and nonviolence. To put these beliefs into action, students and teachers work to create caring classroom members. Specifically, teachers engage students in learning the following essential social capacities: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control (CARES). *The Responsive Classroom* teachers believe these are the capacities that are essential to a positive school culture and successful academic learning.

Dr. Bondy describes some of the basic responsive classroom strategies. She starts with "The Morning Meeting" that has been described in several other articles.

Besides the “Morning Meeting” Dr. Bondy describes several other strategies that are good to use at the beginning of the school year. For instance, *The Responsive Classroom* proponents recognize the importance of having students establish rules and determine the logical consequences that need to be associated with the rules. Teachers need to include parents in the rule determining process as well as the students.

Effective classroom rules must be constructed with the participation from all stakeholders to gain support and to ensure that important individual and groups’ hopes and dreams are achieved.

Another strategy that Dr. Bondy describes is known as “Guided Discovery”, a strategy that helps students understand guidelines for using the classroom materials. Guided discovery provides a structure for introducing students to a new classroom features such as materials, equipment, rotation routines, and independent centers. This strategy helps students who are not risk takers to try something new.

It also helps students with impulsive behavior to stay on track so they follow rules and have a positive learning experience.

During Dr. Bondy’s interview she responded to the question “How do teachers respond to this approach?” meaning *The Responsive Classroom*. Dr. Bondy replied, “They respond in powerful and moving ways”. An example of Dr. Bondy’s experience is that she worked with teachers that saw an impact on not only the students but the staff at the school as well. “The students become friendlier and more willing to help one another”. Teachers talked about having more fun teaching and sharing and laughing more with their students.

One third-grade teacher told Dr. Bondy that “The Responsive Classroom has changed her life. It has helped her become the kind of teacher she’s always wanted to be”. The teacher needed some type of guide to strategies and structure to her classroom to create the kind of community she wanted.

Dr. Bondy currently completed a study connecting The Responsive Classroom approach to student achievement. During the school year teachers were thrilled because student achievement was increasing, especially in the basic skills area.

The teacher had felt that her use of the morning meeting and The Responsive Classroom approach attributed to the increase in test scores. To determine if the teacher’s idea was true, Dr. Bondy conducted interviews with the students.

“We knew we could determine if morning meeting caused the difference in student achievement, but we thought student interviews might be illuminating and they were.”

After individually interviewing third grade students, Dr. Bondy found three strong patterns. First, students said that the morning meeting helped them to know each other and to be comfortable members of the class. Second, students emphasized the fun they had together. Third, students said the morning meeting helped them focus for the day.

Even when a program runs so well and has a very specific goal it still has concerns. Teachers, parents and administrators share the common concern about the time it might take to implement and use the approach on a daily basis.

Dr. Bondy makes suggestions that some teachers are just not going to buy into the approach. It may be that they have a conflict with the philosophy. Other issues arise with administrators and their faith and belief in the philosophy.

Often there is a scheduling problem and an administrator needs to buy into The Responsive Classroom approach as much as the teachers do, so that they make accommodations to schedules to help the teachers meet their students needs.

Chapter 3 Design of the Study

Introduction

General Description of the Research Design

The study for the school year 2003-2004 included the third grade teachers, students and parents. The purpose of the study was to have a better understanding of the concept *Responsive Classroom*, to develop a discipline code and strategy that will meet the needs of the Rush School students emotionally, socially, and cognitively. The intern used a case study approach by working with the third grade teachers who actively implemented the concepts of *The Responsive Classroom*. The study resulted in a cultural picture of the climate of the third grade and the impact *The Responsive Classroom* has on school bullying, classroom climate, and achievement.

The study is significantly important to elementary, and middle school principals, local Boards of Education, teachers and parents that are interested in making schools a safe and stimulating environment for the children. At the beginning stage of the study *The Responsive Classroom* was generally defined as a concept and philosophy that promotes courtesy, values, and comradely among students in the third grade.

As a result of *The Responsive Classroom* teachers have created a safe, challenging, and joyful classroom that meets the needs of its students socially, emotionally, as well as cognitively.

By studying and implementing the *Responsive Classroom* the intern has made a contribution to the recurring social policy issues that arise at the Eleanor Rush School.

The social policies that will be impacted by the study are the discipline policy and the bullying policy.

The intern believes that the study and implementation of *The Responsive Classroom* is critically important to the school because previously the school had been working to decrease the discipline referrals for the year 2002-2003. After just one year the school has little or no decrease in referrals. Therefore there is a direct need to find a program to decrease Rush School's discipline referrals. The implementation of *The Responsive Classroom* at the school has begun to take steps to eliminate many of the discipline issues and implement a new discipline strategy.

Developmental and Design of the Research Instrumentation

The intern has to learned about the philosophy and ideals of *The Responsive Classroom*. *The Responsive Classroom* is a philosophy and practice designed by the Northeast Foundation for Children. The philosophy of the foundation was to create a safe, challenging, and joyful classroom for all learners. The purpose of the study is to have a better understanding of the concept *Responsive Classroom*, to develop a discipline code and strategy that will meet the needs of the Rush School students emotionally, socially, and cognitively. The intern used a case study approach by working with the third grade teachers will actively implemented the concepts of *The Responsive Classroom*. The study will result in a cultural picture of the climate of the third grade and the impact *The Responsive Classroom* has on school discipline referrals, bullying, classroom climate, and achievement.

During the school year 2003-2004 the third grade teachers at Eleanor Rush Intermediate School in Cinnaminson have participated in training for creating and implementing *The Responsive Classroom*.

The implementation of the ideals of *The Responsive Classroom* coincides with the district's philosophy, the school's 2003-2004 Thorough & Efficient objective to decrease the amount of discipline referrals as well as the district wide bullying policy.

Description of the Sampling and Sampling Techniques

The Eleanor Rush School is an intermediate school that consists of grades three through five, in the town of Cinnaminson. Within the past two years the district has gone through a reconfiguration and has merged the two elementary schools to make one elementary school made up of grades kindergarten to second and one intermediate school made up of grades three through fifth grade. As a result the teachers and staff of Eleanor Rush are working through many issues.

One of the issues is agreeing upon a discipline policy, and the second is creating a cohesive learning environment where teachers, students and parents feel mutually respected. As a result of the school-wide problem the intern has had the opportunity to study and implement the philosophy of *The Responsive Classroom*. The study for the school year 2003-2004 included the third grade teachers, students and parents.

The purpose of the study was to have a better understanding of the concept *Responsive Classroom*, to develop a discipline code and strategy that will meet the needs of the Rush School students emotionally, socially, and cognitively.

The intern used a case study approach by working with the third grade teachers who actively implement the concepts of *The Responsive Classroom*.

The study resulted in a cultural picture of the climate of the third grade and the impact *The Responsive Classroom* had on school discipline referrals, bullying, classroom climate, and achievement.

The study was significantly important to elementary, and middle school principals, local Boards of Education, teachers and parents that are interested in making school a safe and stimulating environment for the children.

The study took place at Rush Intermediate School in the town of Cinnaminson. The third grade students at Rush School participated in the study as well as the third grade teachers. Given that the intern previously worked with the third grade staff, as a fellow grade level partner the intern was confident that the teachers would be agreeable to try *The Responsive Classroom* approach. The third grade staff also has a very good reputation for trying new techniques in their classroom's as well as collaborating together as a grade level to review the strengths and weaknesses of the plan.

Dr. Stephen Elliott provided the instruments that the intern used in the study. Dr. Elliott is a nationally prominent researcher in the area of School Psychology. He is currently working at the University of Wisconsin as a professor in the School of Psychology. Dr. Elliott excels in the areas of study in the social-emotional assessment research. He is well known for *The Social Skills Rating System*, a system that many school psychologist use in their everyday work.

The surveys that Dr. Elliott designed for the review of *The Responsive Classroom* project in Washington D.C. were used in the interns study as well. The intern received permission directly from Dr. Elliott. The instruments used consist of both qualitative and quantitative surveys.

Description of the Data Collection Approach

The intern clustered the grade levels into subgroups A and B. Group A was made up of the third grade teachers that were trained in the concepts of the *Responsive Classroom*. The second group, subgroup B was made up of fourth and fifth grade teachers that were not trained in the theory of the *Responsive Classroom*. The intern then used the results from each group to compare the data and formulate the conclusion.

The data was gathered by using a qualitative and quantitative survey that was designed by Dr. Stephen Elliott based on his research instrument of the Social Skills Rating System. The intern received direct permission from Dr. Stephen Elliott.

Description of the Data Analysis Plan

The surveys were used to compile the effect the implementation of the philosophy of the *Responsive Classroom* had on the third grade at Rush School. By reviewing the subgroup B's answers, the intern was able to determine if in fact the implementation of the *Responsive Classroom* had a true impact on the students achievement, problem solving skills and decrease in bullying, or are the strategies just "best practices" that are already being done by the teachers in the school.

Chapter 4 Presentation of Research Findings

Introduction

After the review of the surveys that were completed by both teachers and students in subgroups A and B the intern has determined that the philosophy of *The Responsive Classroom* does have an impact on students and teachers socially, emotionally as well as cognitively. The intern has learned that parent involvement was not increased by the implementation of the philosophy. Overall the implementation of the philosophy has made a positive effect on the students and their daily lives at school. During the *Responsive Classroom* year students have made a commitment to the classroom to make it a community where learning takes place as well as continuing to keep the classroom a safe and happy learning environment.

Grand Tour Question

After implementing, observing, and practicing *The Responsive Classroom* the intern has learned that *The Responsive Classroom* approach and philosophy does have an effect on the social, emotional, and cognitive experiences of the third grade population at Rush Intermediate School. The ideals and values of *The Responsive Classroom* have created a safe, challenging and joyful classroom for all students.

Third grade students describe their classrooms as a place that they feel comfortable with their peers. Students stated that they would have no problem sharing information with their teacher if they felt they were in danger. In fact, teachers remarked that students had no problem sharing any information with them or their classmates.

As a result of *The Responsive Classroom* approach known as “The Morning Meeting” students learned about each other’s similarities and differences. Students also learned that they had something in common with each student in their class.

Another result of “The Morning Meeting” is that teachers were able to learn that some families were not receiving Christmas presents, or a family was experiencing turmoil because of a divorce. Teachers believed that the above examples of issues a child may be experiencing would not normally be talked about during an average day at school. Teachers believed that these severe experiences would not be shared because of the busy schedule, lack of time to share, as well as the comfort level a child may have with the teacher and classmates. By implementing the concept of the “Morning Meeting” both teachers and students felt that they had an opportunity to share and become settled for their day of work. Students said that “Morning Meeting” gave them the opportunity to talk about something that was bothering them. Once the issue was discussed, students felt calm and able to prepare for their day at school.

The favorite part of *The Responsive Classroom* experience for children was the sharing in “Morning Meeting”. An overwhelming response from children said that their “least favorite part of *Responsive Classroom*” was nothing. Students enjoyed each aspect of their morning exercises. About 1% of the surveyed population said they didn’t like it when they had to shake hands or when their teachers shared, however 99% of students enjoyed some aspect of their morning exercises as a result of *The Responsive Classroom* approach.

Students were ask to respond to the question “This year my skills for getting along with other... a) got worse b) did not change much c) improved d) improved a lot”. The percentage of students that believed their ability to get along with others had improved was at 10%.

The percentage of students that believed their ability to get along with others had improved a lot was at 85%. The rest of the population believed that their ability to get along with others did not change much.

After reviewing the student surveys and having brief discussions with randomly selected third graders the intern has found that *The Responsive Classroom* has made a positive impact on the students social, emotional and academic experience at school each day. Students believe that they did better in school because they felt that their teachers cared about them. Students also said that they felt that school was a safe place for them to go each morning and they would be sad when the school year is over. During the *Responsive Classroom* year students have made a commitment to the classroom to make it a community where learning takes place as well as continuing to keep the classroom a safe and happy learning environment.

The Responsive Classroom is a challenging classroom because teachers apply the approaches and strategies of the philosophy into their teaching. By applying the strategies in their teaching students become a partner in their learning. More independent work is completed, where, students choose a topic and research the topic and become an owner of their learning process.

Rather than have one particular project the teachers allow their students to choose between several different learning styles and assessment strategies.

The third grade teachers met with the intern in November to discuss the progress. During the meeting the intern introduced the second phase of *The Responsive Classroom*, the independent study or “Guided Discovery”. During the “Guided Discovery” period teachers were allow more time in their classrooms for independent study. The intern gave the teachers several strategies that they use to implement the “guided Discovery” approach.

One strategy used was to have the teachers teach a unit in Science or Social Studies. At the conclusion of the unit the teacher creates an assessment piece. Rather than having the assessment piece as a test it becomes an activity that allows the student to utilize their strengths in their learning style. Students may decide to be an actor, artist, author or engineer. Whatever their preference may be is the median they use to exhibit what they have learned from the unit. The learning style culminating activity is one example of how a teacher may choose to make their *Responsive Classroom* more challenging.

The Responsive Classroom is a joyful classroom because children responded that they want to come to school. The children want to come to school to learn, socialize and to feel safe. One child describes his experience coming to school like coming home. The effectiveness of the philosophy *The Responsive Classroom* is that it serves as a template for teachers to use as a guide in their introduction to instruction. The philosophy intertwines social curriculum with everyday instruction in a classroom. *The Responsive Classroom* creates an environment for all learners needs to be met by allowing the child to feel comfortable enough to put their worries aside for a moment

The intern found that the implementation of *The Responsive Classroom* approach was beneficial for students and the concept made a positive impact on students' social behaviors. The philosophy allows students to put their worries aside and work on learning life skills through the social curriculum of *The Responsive Classroom* approach.

The teachers learned that by creating a safe and joyful learning environment you are then able to reach your grade level goal; which may be to have students accomplish and learn all of the school curriculum and be prepared for the following grade. By bringing the students into the classroom each day and having them follow a routine that fostered comradely, personal skills, and communication skills the teachers believe that the increase in learning did occur.

The teachers did believe that they needed more in-service for implementing the program or a type of follow-up training from the current school year. The teachers believe that *The Responsive Classroom* is time consuming, but worth the effort. The teachers felt that the philosophy or approach is not something that can be accomplished without the support of the school's administrative staff.

At the beginning of the study the intern posed the question; "Will the experience effect student achievement and to what extent?" at the current time the intern is not able to conclude regarding the above question. The intern will need to wait for the state assessment scores to return to be reviewed.

The intern also plans to implement the same program with the 2004-2005 third graders at Rush School to review if the approach impacts their assessments. The intern will also review the 2003-2004 fourth graders state assessments and compare with the current third grade. By doing the later the intern hopes to find an increase in achievement.

Overall the teachers, parents and students believe that achievement has increased.

However, the intern poses the question of environment versus curriculum and developmental age, what is making the biggest impact on the increase of achievement?

In conclusion to the interns research project and the effectiveness of *The Responsive Classroom* approach and the effect it has on social skills and school achievement, the intern has learned that she must collect more data to analyze the level and standard of achievement. However due to state requirements the intern must wait until the state tests are reported back to the school to conclude.

The intern has learned that *The Responsive Classroom* approach does create a safe, joyful learning environment for all learners.

Students that participated in the study found *The Responsive Classroom* to be a place that they felt they could share information about themselves, it is a place where they make friends and a place that they learn curriculum, social skills and a place where they learn about themselves as well.

Teachers believe that the approach is effective and it is able to be adapted into any learning environment. Teachers look for more administrative support with the particular approach. All of the teachers' surveyed believed that they would like to learn more about the *Responsive Classroom* philosophy.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

The Responsive Classroom is a joyful classroom because children responded that they want to come to school. The children want to come to school to learn, socialize and to feel safe. One child describes his experience coming to school like coming home. The effectiveness of the philosophy *The Responsive Classroom* is that it serves as a template for teachers to use as a guide in their introduction to instruction. The philosophy intertwines social curriculum with everyday instruction in a classroom. The Responsive Classroom creates an environment for all learners needs to be met by allowing the child to feel comfortable enough to put their worries aside for a moment

The intern found that the implementation of The Responsive Classroom approach was beneficial for students and the concept made a positive impact on students' social behaviors. The philosophy allows students to put their worries aside and work on learning life skills through the social curriculum of the *Responsive Classroom* approach.

The teachers learned that by creating a safe and joyful learning environment you are then able to reach your grade level goal; which may be to have students accomplish and learn all of the school curriculum and be prepared for the following grade. By brining the students into the classroom each day and having them follow a routine that fostered comradely, personal skills, and communication skills the teachers believed that the increase in learning did occur.

The teachers did believe that they needed more in-service for implementing the program or a type of follow-up training from the current school year.

The teachers believe that *The Responsive Classroom* is time consuming, but worth the effort. The teachers felt that the philosophy or approach is not something that is able to be accomplished without the support of the school's administrative staff.

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Teachers believe that the approach is effective and it is able to be adapted into any learning environment. Teachers look for more administrative support with the particular approach. All of the teachers' surveyed believed that they would like to learn more about the *Responsive Classroom* philosophy.

The effect that the particular study will have on leadership skills is that it is important for all administrators to know that unless your staff approves of a project or is interested in a particular approach, it will not be accomplished unless the staff truly believes in what they are doing. The staff also needs great guidance from the administrator to know that they are doing an excellent job as well as the support of the administrator to ensure that the teachers will have all of the resources and time they need to make the program a success. Without all of these aspects of the administrator the project will be a failure. The end result would not be an effective impact on students learning but a disjointed staff that loses faith in their purpose and their administrator. *The Responsive Classroom* approach is for the school administrator that views themselves as a facilitator in the school. The school administrator views the importance of life skills and social skills for a child. The school philosophy would relate to the approach by providing an atmosphere that is conducive for all learners and providing them an opportunity to become a respectable citizen in our society.

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Appendix A

Permission for Surveying Students

January 14, 2004

Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Colleen Schroeder and I am a fifth grade teacher at Rush School. Currently I am working on my Masters degree in Educational Leadership. As a culminating activity to my Masters thesis I will be surveying the third grade students regard their experiences in their classroom this year. The survey will be anonymous and the information will only be used for my written thesis. Once the thesis has been completed I will be disposing of the surveys.

I ask that you please fill out the portion below and **return to your child's teacher no later than January 21, 2004.**

Please remember that your child's opinion is greatly needed and will be able to contribute to research on classroom management strategies. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me via email schroederc@cinnaminson.com or 829-7778 x 570. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Colleen Schroeder

Third Grade Survey Permission Slip

I _____ grant permission for my child
_____ to fill out a survey. I understand that the information
will be used to help complete Mrs. Schroeder's Masters thesis.

I _____ do not grant permission for my
child _____ to fill out a survey for Mrs. Schroeder's Masters thesis.

Appendix B

Permission for Utilization of Survey Instruments

Dear Dr. Elliott,

My name is Colleen Schroeder and I am a fifth grade special education teacher at Rush Intermediate School in Cinnaminson, NJ. I am writing to you because currently I am a graduate student at Rowan University. I am working to complete my Masters thesis for my degree in Educational Leadership. My thesis is the study of the practices and classroom management strategies known as *The Responsive Classroom*.

I am very familiar with your work given that I work with the special education population and I was very interested to see that you also have experience with the *Responsive Classroom* approach.

I am writing to ask permission to use your surveys that you created for the Washington DC project and the Responsive Classroom. I find that the surveys are very comprehensive and address the questions that I am looking to answer for my thesis. I am willing to pay a copyright fee and share my findings with you. I am aware that you have many other surveys such as the SSRS that may be purchased for a fee, however I have not found that much information pertaining to *The Responsive Classroom*.

I would appreciate if you could please direct as to the correct procedure so that I may give credit to you. I appreciate your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,
Colleen Schroeder

Colleen, Nice to hear from you about your work with the Responsive Classroom. You have my permission to copy and use the DC surveys. If you wish to use the SSRS, however, you will need to purchase them from AGS (www.agsnet.com) . I would love to hear about the results of your work. Please note that my email address is: snelliot@wisc.edu. Thanks Stephen Elliott

Appendix C
Research Instruments

Responsive Classroom Evaluation Project

Grade: _____

Date Received: _____

Check one:

 I have been trained to use *The Responsive Classroom* methods and currently use these methods in my classroom.

_____ I have been trained to use *The Responsive Classroom* methods but **do not** currently use them in my classroom.

_____ I have not been trained in *The Responsive Classroom* methods.

Instructions: *The Responsive Classroom (RC) Program* is being used in some of the Rush Intermediate School's classrooms. For the days in Week 1, please estimate how often you used each of the six main components of the program with your class last week. For the days in Week 2, please record your actual use of the program components for the current week. Complete the chart below using a () check mark to indicate you used the (RC) component on a given day and a 0 to indicate you did not use the (RC) component for the day. Please write any comments or suggestions on the back of this sheet.

Please return the completed chart to Colleen Schroeder at the end of the week. Thank You!

[illegible]

Responsive Classroom Evaluation Project

Grade: _____

Date Received: _____

Check one:

I have been trained to use *The Responsive Classroom* methods and currently use these methods in my classroom. .

_____ I have been trained to use *The Responsive Classroom* methods but **do not** currently use them in my classroom.

_____ I have not been trained in *The Responsive Classroom* methods.

Instructions: The *Responsive Classroom* (RC) Program is being used in some of the Rush Intermediate School's classrooms. For the days in Week 3 & 4 please record your actual use of the program components for the current week. Complete the chart below using a () check mark to indicate you used the (RC) component on a given day and a 0 to indicate you did not use the (RC) component for the day. Please write any comments or suggestions on the back of this sheet.

Please return the completed chart to Colleen Schroeder at the end of the week. Thank You!

[illegible]

Responsive Classroom Evaluation Project

Responsive Classroom Evaluation Project

September 2003-2004

Dear Teachers,

Your perceptions and opinions about *The Responsive Classroom* (RC) Program are requested. Some teachers at Rush Intermediate School have had brief training with this program, while others have little or no experience with the program. Regardless of your experience with the (RC) program, your feedback is important to the ongoing evaluation of this approach to classroom instruction and management.

This survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete and will be used as part of an evaluation of efforts to improve the social behavior of young student in your school. Your honest responses to a series of questions would be valued. Your responses will remain confidential (your name not requested) and the information will be used solely for the writing of my Masters thesis.

To help summarize and more fully understand the responses from all teachers, I would appreciate having the following background information:

Background Information

Sex: ____Female ____Male

Instruction Level: (*Check all that apply*)

____BSIP ____Special Education ____3rd grade ____4th grade
____5th grade

Trained to use *The Responsive Classroom*: ____Yes ____No

Instructions for Completing the Survey

On pages 2 through 4 of this survey, you are asked to respond to questions about your students' social behavior, implementation of instructional innovations like *The Responsive Classroom*, and finally about yourself. Please be honest, **there are no right or wrong answers**. Your opinions and observations are valuable.

Once you have completed this survey, please return to Colleen Schroeder's mailbox by Friday, January 30, 2004.

About My Class This Year (Circle one answer for each question)

1. **My students' interpersonal or social skills with peers in general are**
Very Poor Poor Good Very Good Exceptional
2. **My students' abilities to solve problems with other people in general are**
Very Poor Poor Good Very Good Exceptional
3. **My students' interpersonal or social skills overall this year**
Did Not Improve Improved Slightly Improved Significantly
4. **My students' overall achievement level this year has been**
Very Poor Poor Good Very Good Exceptional
5. **My students' reactions to school this year have been**
Very Negative Slightly Negative Neutral Positive Very Positive
6. **Parental involvement in my class this year could be characterized as**
Very Low Low Moderate High Very High

Reactions to The Responsive Classroom Program

Some teachers at Rush Intermediate School are implementing the program (RC). This program is designed to build a classroom into a learning community where social and academic goals are attained are using this program.

This program involves:

- **Classroom organization** which provides for active interest areas for students, space for student-created displays of work, and an appropriate mix of whole class, group, and individual instruction.
- **A Morning Meeting** which provides children daily opportunities to practice greetings, conversation, sharing, and problem solving.
- **Rules and Logical Consequences**, which are generated, modeled, and role-played with classmates and facilitate order and discipline in the classroom.
- **Choice Time** for all children each day which provides students opportunities to take control of their own learning in some meaningful way, both individually and cooperatively.
- **Guided Discovery**, which is a deliberate method of instruction for introducing students to new curriculum content, learning materials, and ways of behaving.
- **Assessment and Report to Parents** which is an evolving process of mutual communication and understanding.

7. Before receiving this survey, had you heard anything about The Responsive Classroom Program? (check) ☐ No ☐ Maybe ☐ Yes

8. Based on my understanding of The Responsive Classroom Program, the best way to characterize my reaction to it would be (circle one answer)

Strongly Dislike It Slightly Dislike It Slightly Like It Strongly Like It

9. Based on my understanding of The Responsive Classroom Program, I believe the effectiveness of this program for improving my students' social behavior would be (circle one answer)

Not Effective A Little Effective Effective Very Effective

10. My interest in using The Responsive Classroom Program can best be characterized as (circle one answer)

Very Low Low Moderate High Very High

11. Most teachers would find implementing the RC Program (circle one answer)

Very Easy Easy Difficult Very Difficult I'm Unsure

12. The aspect of the RC Program that I like most is

13. The aspect of the RC Program that I like least is

14. The aspect of the RC Program that students like most is

15. The aspect of the RC Program that students like least is

16. What type(s) of support is (are) needed to implement the RC Program?

About Me and Innovations in My Classroom

The Responsive Classroom Program represents an instructional innovation designed to affect students' social behavior and academic functioning. Your reactions to this innovation can affect its use and ultimately its effectiveness. Please respond to each of the next twelve statements by circling the number 0, 1, 2, or 3 to indicate how true each statement is for you.

- | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|----------------|----------|------------|-----------------|
| Irrelevant | Not True of Me | Somewhat | True of Me | Very True of Me |
| 17. I would like to know more about the purpose of this innovation. | | | | 0 1 2 3 |
| 18. I am concerned about criticism of my work with this innovation. | | | | 0 1 2 3 |
| 19. I wonder how use of this innovation will affect my relationship with my teaching colleagues. | | | | 0 1 2 3 |
| 20. I would like to develop working relationships with administrators to facilitate the use of this innovation. | | | | 0 1 2 3 |
| 21. I am concerned about facilitating use of this innovation in view of limited resources. | | | | 0 1 2 3 |
| 22. I spend little time thinking about this innovation. | | | | 0 1 2 3 |
| 23. I would like to help others in the use of this innovation. | | | | 0 1 2 3 |
| 24. I see a potential conflict between facilitating this innovation and overloading staff. | | | | 0 1 2 3 |
| 25. I am concerned that communication and problem solving with this innovation takes too much time. | | | | 0 1 2 3 |
| 26. I have alternative innovations in mind that would better serve the needs of our students. | | | | 0 1 2 3 |
| 27. I am concerned about finding time needed for this innovation. | | | | 0 1 2 3 |
| 28. I would like to inform others of the progress from this innovation. | | | | 0 1 2 3 |

If you have any additional comments about The Responsive Classroom program, please attach a separate sheet to this survey. Your thoughts are appreciated! Please use the unaddressed envelope to return this questionnaire. Thank you!!!

Student Reactions to the Responsive Classroom

Dear Student,

This year your teacher has been working with you and your classmates to improve your abilities to develop good relationships with others and to make your classroom a good place to learn. Your teacher has been using teaching methods, which are part of an approach called The Responsive Classroom. We want to know what you honestly think of this program and how it worked in your classroom. Please take your time and answer each of the nine questions below. There are no right or wrong answers and we do not need to know your name. Please complete the information in the box below before answering the questions. If you have questions about the meaning of words or what to do, it is okay to ask your teacher for help. Thank you!

Sex: _____ Girl: _____ Boy Rush School Third Grade

Circle the Best Answer

1. Learning to get along better with my classmates was talked about in class

Just About Every Day Very Often Sometimes Almost Never

2. Spending time in class to practice social skills and ways to solve problems with others is

Not Important Kind of Important Important Very Important

3. Morning meetings are usually

Not Useful Kind of Useful Useful Very Useful

4. Chances to make personal choices about learning and working in the classroom are

Not Important Kind of Important Important Very Important

5. Classroom rules and consequences for not following the rules in my classroom are

Not Clear Kind of Clear Clear Very Clear

Write a Brief Answer to Each Question

7. The thing I liked most about Morning Meetings is

8. The thing I liked least about Morning Meetings is

Circle the Best Answer

8. The best way to describe how I feel about The Responsive Classroom is

Very Good Good Okay Bad Very Bad

9. This year my skills for getting along with others

Got Worse Did Not Change Much Improved Improved A Lot

Thank you for completing this survey. Please return it to your teacher when you are finished.