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### Perceptions of Circle Time in a Third-Grade Classroom

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Perceptions of Circle Time in a Third-Grade Classroom

Nicole Santangelo

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### **Abstract**

Positive student-student and student-teacher relationships are the cornerstone to a strong classroom community, and one way to strengthen these relationships is through the use of circle time. The purpose of this study was to discover how students and the teacher perceive circle time. In addition, the researcher wanted to know what type of relationship the students and teacher see between circle time, classroom community, and student attitudes toward school. The researcher collected data through the use of student surveys, teacher and student interviews, and headnotes, and the data was analyzed using the constant comparative method for recurring themes. The researcher found five major themes through this analysis. These themes that emerged included positive perceptions, negative perceptions, themed days, circle time and school, and classroom community. This study may be helpful to other educators considering implementing circle time into their classrooms.

### **Perceptions of Circle Time in a Third-Grade Classroom**

“Mom, I don’t want to go to school!” wept Suzie. Tears streamed down her face as her mother grabbed her daughter’s backpack and lunch pail and strolled out the door. “It’s only the second week of school sweetie. I’m sure you’ll make some friends soon!” she said. Suzie dreaded going to school every day. She always tried to come up with some kind of excuse to get her out of going. As Suzie’s mom pulled into the school drop off lane, Suzie felt her face get hot. Fear began to creep in. All she could think about was how she felt so alone. She felt like an outcast in her classroom and thought that none of the other kids liked her. Her mom hugged her and said goodbye, and she slowly walked into the dark stone building. Suzie sluggishly walked down the hallway for what felt like an eternity. Her heart started to beat faster and faster with every step she took until she got to the door. The door creaked as she nudged the handle, and she walked to her desk avoiding the eyes she could feel glued on her. She stared at her teacher as she was teaching, but all she could think about was how she would rather be anywhere but here.

A student should never feel this way about going to school every day because one of the top priorities a teacher should have is to create an environment in which students feel safe and welcome in (Smith, Frey, & Fisher, 2018). Without this need being met, it is going to be difficult for any kind of learning to take place. Students need to feel valued and important in the classroom, and they should never feel like a burden (Kriete, 2003). It is important that teachers dedicate time to building relationships in the classroom and cultivate a strong classroom community (Sreckovic, Schultz, Kenney, & Able, 2018). Fortunately, circle time may be a way to foster this kind of classroom environment.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to discover how students and the teacher perceive circle time. Circle time is an activity that occurs at the beginning of each school day. During circle time, the students and teacher sit in a circle where they can all see each other and a question of the day is asked (Collins, 2013). A talking stick is then passed around so everyone is able to speak and answer the question. This study answered the following research questions:

- **Research Question:** What are students' and the teacher's perceptions of circle time?
  - **Sub Question:** How do students and the teacher view the relationship between circle time and classroom community?
  - **Sub Question:** How do students and the teacher view the relationship between circle time and their attitudes toward school?

During the implementation of this study, I was a graduate student fulfilling a year-long clinical teaching placement. My placement was a third-grade self-contained classroom at Oaktree Elementary School (all names have been replaced with pseudonyms). Oaktree Elementary School is located in West Texas and is a Title 1 school. This school ranged from kindergarten to fifth grade, and there were approximately 450 students that attended the school. The student population consisted of 44% Hispanic students, 36% Caucasian students, 13% African American students, and 4% of students were two or more races. Approximately 80% of the students in attendance at Oaktree Elementary were economically disadvantaged, 13% of students were English Language Learners, and 13% were classified as special education.

### **Literature Review**

Circle time can take many shapes and forms, and it may look different in every classroom because there is not a consistent definition of what this activity should look like (Lown, 2002). Circle time typically involves a talking stick or some other object that is passed around by students that are sitting in a circle (Collins, 2013). As the stick is passed around, the students take turns answering a certain question or sharing something about themselves. Students also have the option to pass if they do not want to answer that specific question.

Others may refer to this time as morning meeting. Morning meeting consists of four different components. The first component is known as greeting, and it entails students greeting

each other by name (Kriete, 2003). The second component is call sharing, and this is when students answer a question or share something about themselves with the rest of the class (Kriete, 2003). The third step is some form of a short group activity that involves full class participation, and the final step is news and announcements which leads as a transition to the rest of the school day (Kriete, 2003).

Circle time is one way that teachers can foster a strong classroom community. During the school day, students need time to get to know their classmates as well as collaborate and interact with each other (Sreckovic et al., 2018). Circle time provides students with a sense of belonging and helps build the community of the classroom (Kriete, 2003). This is because circle time is a way for students to build relationships with one another as well as with the teacher. Cefai et al. (2014) stated that students positively benefit from circle time because they learn how to socially interact and make friends with their classmates. They learn how to play with each other without conflict occurring as well as how to build better relationships with their peers. According to Mary (2014), circle time promotes a sense of unity in the classroom, increases the number of positive interactions that children have at school, and decreases the number of incidents of peer rejection. This is because this time of community building provides children with a chance to interact with classmates that they typically would not communicate with throughout the school day.

Additionally, circle time can influence the environment of the classroom. An ideal classroom environment can be described as a safe space that permits students to be risk-takers and express themselves as well as openly communicate their ideas (Holley & Steiner, 2005). The classroom climate should be a place in which “all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school—socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically” (Smith et al., 2018, p. 76).

One of the main goals of circle time is to establish a classroom environment that is safe and caring as well as promoting values such as respect, listening skills, sharing, etc. (Cefai, Ferrario, Cavioni, Carter, & Grech, 2014). These are values that can benefit students in their everyday lives. Not only can these values benefit their everyday lives, but they can also enhance the learning that is being done in the classroom. When students learn skills through circle time such as being a good listener and asking good questions, they can positively benefit their academic and intellectual growth (Kriete, 2003). Effective communication, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities are important skills for students to have, and many of these skills are needed for group work and other activities in the classroom (Gardner, 2012). Not only can these skills be beneficial in relation to student learning, but the relationships they have built through circle time can help as well. This is because students are able to work well together and help each other through the process of learning due to the relationships they have built through circle time (Mary, 2014).

Although circle time and morning meeting appear to be a topic of increasing interest in the education field, there is limited research on perceptions of circle time. A study conducted by Lown (2002) looked to identify student and teacher perceptions on the impact of circle time on students, and it was discovered that there were consistent positive perceptions of circle time by both students and teachers. Other than Lown's (2002) study, there is minimal research about the perceptions of students and teachers on circle time. Most of the research that has been done on circle time relates to the reasons behind the implementation of circle time by teachers. Although these studies exist, the majority of the research that has been done on circle time has been done in preschool classrooms with younger children rather than in upper elementary classrooms (Bustamante, Hindman, Champagne, & Wasik, 2018). There are also no studies that look at the

variation of circle time that occurs in my classroom. Therefore, this study can benefit educators by helping them understand student and teacher perceptions of circle time in an upper elementary grade level. It will also give insight into the relationship between circle time and classroom community as well as students' attitudes toward school.

### **Methods**

In the following sections, I describe the process of collecting and analyzing the data. My data collection methods consisted of circle time surveys, student and teacher interviews, and headnotes. The data from the interviews and headnotes was then analyzed by using the constant comparative method (Hubbard & Power, 2003). The survey data was analyzed using frequency counts (Hendricks, 2017). This study was conducted during my year-long clinical teaching placement so I had already established rapport with all participants. The teacher and students had been doing circle time since the beginning of the school year and were accustomed to this routine.

### **Participant Selection**

The participants of this study included a single classroom of third-grade students and one classroom teacher. The third-grade classroom was a self-contained classroom and not departmentalized. I sent home a parent letter and consent form with information about the study, and the students were asked to sign an assent form. All of the students who received parent permission and assent participated in the study. My class consisted of 10 boys and 12 girls. Four of the students were Caucasian, eight were Hispanic, two were African American, and eight were of mixed race. Approximately 80% of the students were classified as low socioeconomic status. Of the 22 students in the class, I received permission forms from 17 students. The teacher also



returned a signed consent form to participate in the study. The classroom teacher was a Caucasian female.

### **Data Collection**

I accumulated data from a variety of sources. My first data collection method was a survey. All of the student participants were given a circle time survey. This survey consisted of ten questions relating to circle time, classroom community, and the relationship between circle time and participants' attitudes toward school (see Appendix A). The students responded to each question using a Likert scale or sentence stems. My second data collection method was interviews. Based on the data from the survey, I chose a sample of students to interview. This is known as purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). There were a total of nine students that I interviewed. I interviewed three students who had a positive perception of circle time, three students who had an indifferent perception of circle time, and three students who had a negative view of circle time. Each of the student interviews were one-on-one interviews, and they each lasted approximately 15 minutes long. I also conducted a one-on-one interview with the teacher. The teacher interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. All of the interviews were semi-structured (Hendricks, 2017). The interview protocol included pre-planned but open-ended questions (see Appendix B). Additional questions were asked based on the responses of the participants. All of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed at a later date.

Furthermore, I observed the participants during circle time four days a week for four weeks. I carried around a notepad to jot down brief headnotes about the experiences that occurred during circle time as soon as it was over and fleshed these notes out later in the evening when I left school.

### **Data Analysis**

The qualitative data was analyzed using the constant comparative method, with initial coding followed by creating hierarchies of categories and supporting codes (Hubbard & Power, 2003). The qualitative data included the interview transcriptions, headnotes, and the open-ended sentence stem survey questions. I began by looking through the first twenty percent of my data and creating level 1 codes. Level 1 codes are descriptive codes that focus on what is present in the data, and they require little explanation (Tracy, 2013). I had a list of approximately twenty level 1 codes that arose from the first 20% of my data. Next, I continued to look at the other 80% of the data and created level 2 codes (Tracy, 2013). The level 2 codes arose from the level 1 codes that I created from the first 20% of the data. Level 2 codes synthesize and explain the data that is collected (Tracy, 2013).

As I selected the level 2 codes, I began indexing the data. This entails listing the codes in a table of contents type format and including the supporting data sorted with the codes (Hubbard & Power, 2003). As I created the codes, I wrote analytic memos about each of the level 2 codes which included the name of each code and a reflection of each code describing the meaning of the code and why it was significant to the study (Tracy, 2013). The level 1 and 2 codes were color-coded and recorded in a codebook (see Appendix C). The information in the codebook included the code name, the color of the code, the code level, a brief definition of the code, and an example of the code from the data. The data from the student Likert scale survey responses was analyzed using descriptive statistics (Hendricks, 2017). All of this data is displayed through frequency counts (see Appendix D).

### **Findings**

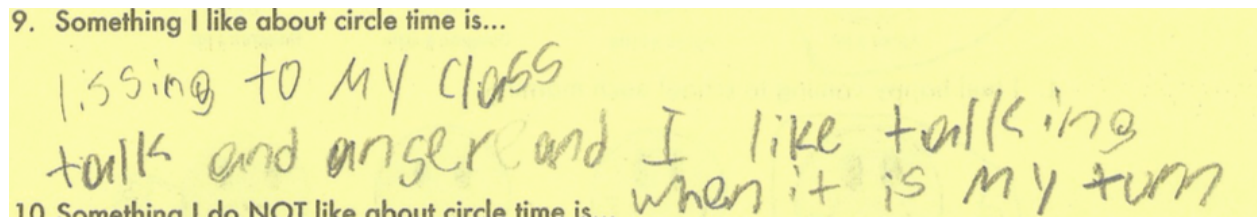
As I analyzed the data I collected, five major themes emerged. These major themes are my level 2 codes: positive perceptions, negative perceptions, themed days, circle time and

school, and classroom community. These codes derived from student surveys, student and teacher interviews, and observations. In the following sections, I will explain how this data relates to the level 2 codes.

### **Positive Perceptions**

Overall, all of the students who participated in this research have a generally positive perception of circle time. Based on the circle time survey, 100% of students agreed a lot or agreed a little with the statement “I like having circle time with my class every day.” (see Appendix D). At the end of each survey, I included an open-ended question for students to write what they like about circle time. As I analyzed this data, I noticed a pattern in their responses. Nine students wrote that they like getting to talk and share with the class on this question. This was the most popular response to the question even though it was open-ended. This was also frequently mentioned in the interviews that I conducted with students. During an interview with a student named Patrick, he told me that he likes circle time because “we all get to share the things that we like, and we get to share about our family and friends and what you’ve been doing at home and how great it’s been.” Throughout these interviews, it became very apparent that students value getting to share about themselves. This is also something that Mrs. R has noticed throughout her six years of implementing circle time in her classroom. During her interview, she discussed how she can tell students enjoy sharing with the class because they get excited when it’s their turn to share, and they have the talking stick. She also told me that one of the reasons she enjoys circle time is because it is a way to get the class talking in the morning.

Another popular response to this open-ended survey question was that students like learning and getting to know each other through circle time. An example of one student’s response to this question can be found in Figure 1 below.



*Figure 1.* Nick's survey. "Listening to my class talk and answer and I like talking when it is my turn."

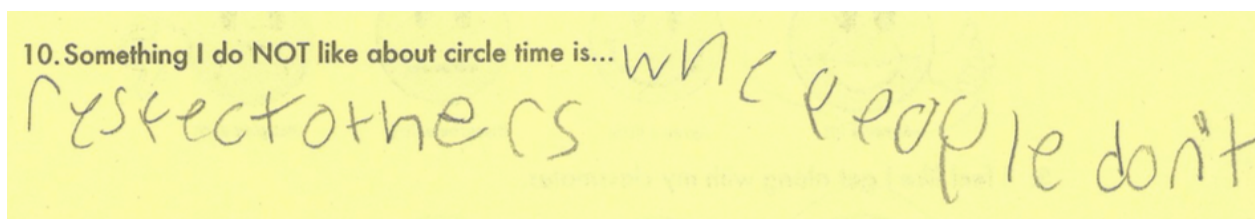
When I interviewed a student named Megan, she told me that she thinks circle time is lots of fun because "you get to share things but then you get to know more and more and more until we know all about each other, and it feels like you have a family at school!" During another interview, a student named Kelsey told me that she thinks that she has gotten to know people in our class better because of circle time, and she recalled an example of this happening to her. In the interview, she told me that she thought a student named Allyson's favorite sport was soccer but found out during circle time that it was something else. She stated that "I thought she liked soccer and then she said football, and I was like, 'Oh!... So I'm not the only girl who likes football!'" This was also something that Mrs. R shared that she likes about circle time. During our interview, she told me that sometimes it can be difficult to find time to talk to students throughout the day and get to know them better. This is why she enjoys using circle time as an opportunity to learn more about her students. She is genuinely curious about her students' responses to the questions that she asks. Mrs. R discussed that "some of them will just say really funny things...to get a reaction out of the class, but I enjoy listening to their little personalities and the comments that they have to make."

In addition to this, another pattern that I noticed was that students think that circle time helps them start the day in a positive way. On the circle time survey, 94% of students who completed the survey agreed a lot or agreed a little with the statement "Circle time helps me start

my day in a positive or good way.” (see Appendix D). This theme also emerged during some of the interviews. While I interviewed a student named Zoey, she said that “I feel like circle time brings us all up in the beginning of the day, and we can start our day off with a good question.” During an interview with a student named Jacob, he shared that “I just want to answer the questions and learn math and get to writing,...and it actually gets my blood flowing on answering the questions.” Mrs. R also believes that circle time helps start the day off positively. She discussed in her interview that she likes starting off the school day every morning in a safe environment, and circle time helps create a comfortable routine for her students. Overall, the data showed me that students enjoy participating in circle time, and it is something valuable to them.

### **Negative Perceptions**

As I analyzed the student survey data, it quickly became apparent that many students shared the same negative perceptions about circle time. At the end of the survey, I included an open-ended question for students to write what they do not like about circle time. I was not expecting to get the same answer from multiple students, but when I saw the responses I realized I was mistaken. On this survey question, over half of the students wrote that something they did not like about circle time is when students are disrespectful and interrupt the person who is speaking. Some examples of survey responses to this question can be seen in Figure 2 and Figure 3 below.



*Figure 2.* Kelsey’s survey. “When people don’t respect others.”

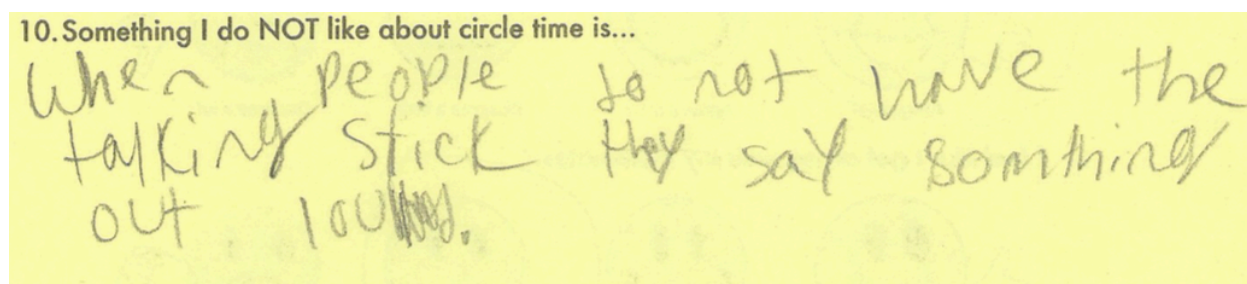


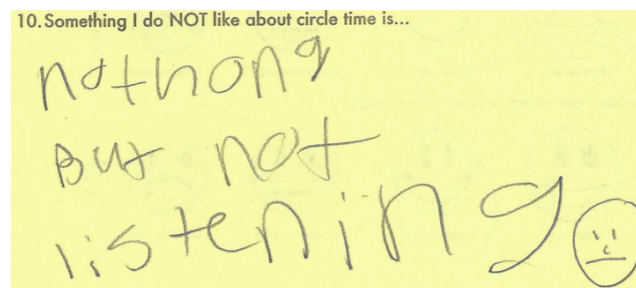
Figure 3. Sofia's survey. "When people do not have the talking stick, they say something out loud."

Not only was this apparent in the survey data, but it also frequently came up during interviews. I asked Kelsey to expand on what she meant by her survey response above and if she could give me an example. During her interview, the example she shared was that when "you're talking and then the person says, 'Oh, I did that!' and they're just interrupting and you can't really remember what you're going to say, so you just pass it and then they come back to you." Kelsey is one of the many students who felt this way. As I was interviewing a student named Patrick, I asked him to describe to me how he felt about circle time. After I asked him this, he said, "I think it's fine, but most of the time when we have circle time everybody starts to get loud...and when I talk sometimes people keep talking and that makes me a little bit aggravated." When interviewing my co-teacher about what she does not like about circle time, she also said that she wishes student behavior could be different during circle time. The following is an excerpt from the interview.

I have these expectations for how [circle time] should go, and how we should listen to each other. When it doesn't or when students are disrespectful or when they're talking when someone else is talking, that is really hard for me because it could be during a time when a shy student is talking, and I want them to feel this love and support from their class.

This behavior is something that was evident during my circle time observations as well. For example, during one of my circle time observations, the students passed the talking stick around and shared where they wanted to travel to if they could go anywhere in the world. When Patrick had the talking stick, he said, “I want to go to Minnesota. I want to see the Minnesota Vikings, or I want to go to Atlanta to see the Atlanta Falcons.” As Patrick had the talking stick and was sharing this, Adam interrupted him and blurted out, “ooh Minnesota!” This constant blurting out is something that many people perceive negatively.

In addition to interrupting, another common negative perception that students had is when students are not listening during circle time. This is something that I noticed multiple times during my observations. Sometimes when the talking stick would get to a certain student, they would remain silent or ask to be reminded of the question again because they forgot it or were not paying attention. This behavior was written in surveys and discussed in multiple interviews. An example of this survey response can be seen in Figure 4 below.



*Figure 4.* Zoey’s survey. “Nothing but not listening.”

During Mrs. R’s interview, she said, “when it comes to listening, they don’t have those good listener qualities. Their eyes aren’t on the speaker or they’re fidgeting with something.” Based on these common negative perceptions, it is clear that students need to have clear expectations of what is expected of them during circle time. This would help circle time run smoothly and effectively if there were not as many behavior problems.

**Themed Days**

Circle time occurs every day in our classroom, but it can look a little bit different depending on the day. This is due to the themed days that take place during circle time throughout the week. As my co-teacher discussed the various themed days in her interview, she shared that she likes to do themed days because it provides more structure and routine to circle time. She also believes that it makes circle time more engaging for students. The first themed day takes place on Monday and is called Star Student. Every Friday, a new star student is picked based on how the students acted throughout the week. The star student gets to take home a poster to decorate with pictures and drawings that help the class get to know him or her better. The star student brings back their finished poster the following Monday and gets to present it during circle time. After this, the class can ask questions and learn even more about the star student. Finally, the star student gets to pick the circle time question for the class to answer.

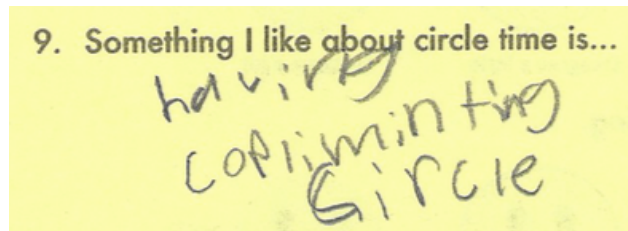
During the student interviews, I had the opportunity to ask them what they liked about the star student day. A student named Zoey shared during her interview that she likes it because “people get a chance to be a star and that people have a chance to share their love for each other and be respectful and kind.” Other students shared that they liked getting to learn more about the star student as they shared their posters. Mrs. R discussed that she feels like she gets a lot of positive reaction whenever the star student brings in their poster. They always ask her if they get to do circle time too and are very interested in it. She said that she feels like there is a different level of excitement from both the star student and the rest of the class during circle time. The star student enjoys being a leader and picking the circle time question, and the rest of the class gets excited that the question is coming from their friend instead of a teacher.



The next themed day occurs on Wednesday during circle time, and it is called Would You Rather Wednesday. Every Wednesday, a would you rather question is asked during circle time. The students have two options to choose from and must only pick one. When they have the talking stick, they can pick an option, and they can choose to explain why they prefer that option if they would like to. During the student interviews, many of the students said that they enjoy these types of questions. When I interviewed a student named Jacob, I asked him if he had a specific themed day that he like the most. After this, Jacob shared that he likes the would you rather questions the best. When I asked him to explain why he likes these questions the best, he said, “because you have to choose, and if I choose it’s either going to be something silly or cool.” Other students shared that they like answering silly questions during circle time as well. My co-teacher also said that she enjoys Would You Rather Wednesdays because it is fun to hear their responses to the questions.

The final themed day of the week takes place on Thursday, and it is called Thankful Thursday. Every Thursday, the question for circle time revolves around sharing something that you are thankful for. Compliment circle is also something that is done during Thankful Thursday sometimes. During the compliment circle, everyone sits on the carpet and sticks their legs out. One person will start the compliment circle by choosing someone with their feet out and telling them something you like about them or why you are thankful for them. Once you receive a compliment, you cross your legs so they are not sticking out and choose someone else to compliment with their feet out. This process continues until no one has their feet out anymore. Based on the data from the interviews and surveys, Thankful Thursday appears to be the favorite themed day out of all of them. Many of the students shared reasons why they liked Thankful Thursday during their interviews. This is also the only themed day that was written down on the

open-ended survey question that asked the students to write something that they like about circle time. An example of this can be seen below in Figure 5.



*Figure 5.* Zoey's survey. "Having complimenting circle."

While I interviewed a student named Michael, he said, "on Thankful Thursday I like how Jason thanks me and says something to me, that made me feel good inside." Another student named Kelsey told me that her favorite themed day is Thankful Thursday. When I asked her why she said, "because they give you compliments and it makes you feel proud." During my interview with my co-teacher, Thankful Thursday was also brought up. When I asked Mrs. R what her favorite part about circle time was, she discussed Thankful Thursday and the compliment circle. She shared that during Thankful Thursday, "sometimes we give compliments or we talk about what they like about each other. I just love to see their reactions to things. When someone is speaking to them or when someone is listening to them, it just brings them joy and so then it brings me joy." This is something that I observed many times during the compliment circle, and I wrote it down in my headnotes. It was evident that students were appreciative of the compliments that they received during my observation. For example, in my headnotes, I wrote that "Victoria chose Mary and said, 'Mary, I like the way you always cheer people up and you always play with me.' Mary smiled and said, 'Aawh!' after she heard this." Another time that I observed the compliment circle, I wrote in my headnotes that "Jacob chose Patrick and said, 'Patrick, I like how you are always running around and are full of energy and whenever you need to get somewhere you have the energy to do it.' After this, Patrick smiled and said 'thank you!'"

Based on the data I collected, the themed days make circle time more engaging for the students, and they look forward to their favorite day throughout the week.

### **Circle Time and School**

One of my research sub questions for this action research study was to determine how students and the teacher view the relationship between circle time and their attitudes toward school. As I analyzed the student survey data, it quickly became apparent that my students have highly positive perceptions of school. Based on the circle time survey, 100% of students agreed a lot or agreed a little with the statement “I feel happy coming to school each morning.” (see Appendix D). This circle time question had the highest number of students that selected agree a lot out of all of the questions on the survey. A total of 94% of students agreed a lot, and only one student agreed a little.

Since I already determined that students have positive attitudes toward school with the survey data, I used the interviews to figure out if their positive attitudes toward school had anything to do with circle time. During the student interviews, none of them said that circle time makes them think negatively about school or make them want to go to school less. However, my results were split down the middle during the interviews. Some students said that circle time makes them want to come to school even more, and some students said that circle time did not change how they feel about school at all. During my interview with Megan, I asked her if circle time affects how she feels about school, and she told me that it does. When I asked her how, she said it “makes me feel great, better, and makes me have the rest of the school day being happy.” As I was interviewing Michael, I asked him if circle time makes him like school more, less, or the same. After this, he said, “more...because you get to tell how you feel inside and other people get to show how they feel inside.” Other students said that circle time makes them feel the

same about coming to school every day during their interviews. However, it is important to note that none of them said it makes them enjoy coming to school less, and none of them had a negative attitude toward school to begin with.

Although it appears to depend on the student whether there is a relationship between circle time and how they feel at school, my co-teacher does think there is a relationship between the two. The following is an excerpt from her interview:

I feel like students who don't have a voice in their classroom don't like to go to school.

My hope is that they take the chance during circle time to be a part of something that is bigger than just one person. It's also that chance for them to know that their teacher is listening to them. Their teacher is interested in what they have to say, and so I think that is just all part of building relationships. As your relationship continues to build, I think that's when they enjoy coming to school. I think it has everything to do with relationships in the classroom...Overall, the feeling of being accepted and being listened to I think really correlates with their attitude.

In conclusion, the students' and teacher's perceptions indicate that circle time does not negatively affect students' attitudes toward school in any way, and it can only enhance their attitude toward school if anything.

### **Classroom Community**

My final research sub question for this action research study was to determine how students and the teacher view the relationship between circle time and classroom community. According to the survey data, 88% of students agreed a lot or agreed a little with the statement "My class is like a family." Also, 82% of students who completed the survey agreed a lot or agreed a little with the statement "I feel like my classmates know a lot about me because of circle

time.” (see Appendix D). Based on this data, I thought that students would speak positively about the relationship between circle time and classroom community in their interviews. However, I realized that there was a lack of clarity on what classroom community means to the students. This was a word that some of them had never heard before or knew the meaning of. Because of this, some of their responses about classroom community were negative. For example, when I asked Kelsey about how she felt about our classroom community during her interview, she started to talk about how sometimes people can be disrespectful to each other in class. She shared an example with me about a time when she was working on an activity with a partner, and she was working on a problem she didn’t know the answer to. Then, her partner told her the answer in a mean way so they could move on to the next question. Other students also related their answers to classroom community about disrespect in the classroom. Based on survey data, 47% of students agreed a lot and 29% agreed a little with the statement “Students in my class treat each other with respect.” This statement had the lowest number of people that selected agree a lot and the highest number of people that selected agree a little. This is also the only statement that someone selected the disagree a lot option on the survey.

Although it was not evident in everyone’s responses to the direct question about classroom community, it is clear based on how they answered the rest of the questions about circle time that they do see a relationship between the two. Even though Kelsey talked about disrespect when I asked her about classroom community, her answers were different when I asked her if she thinks circle time makes our class feel like a family. When I asked her this, she said, “It makes me feel like our class is a family because we’re spending a lot of time with each other and it’s really fun, and you’re getting to spend time with them so...whenever you’re gone...especially on the last day of school, I get mad because I don’t want to leave.” I received

many other positive responses like this during my interviews which showed me that they do think circle time helps build classroom community.

Mrs. R discussed her viewpoint on the relationship between circle time and classroom community during her interview. She does believe that there is a relationship between the two. This is what she had to say:

Any type of thing that we do that they get to know each other or any time that they have to listen to each other. I feel like that's building our class community just because it's a shared experience. It's something that we do every day, but it's also a time where hopefully they feel safe to share stuff. I think that really adds to their idea that this is a place where I'm going to be heard, and I think that gives them value and it helps build our relationships.

Based on how Mrs. R described classroom community and circle time, it is clear that there is a relation between circle time and classroom community. It is not going to completely stop disagreements and fighting from happening, but can anything really stop that from happening? Based on the overall survey, interview, and headnotes data, the participants do see a relationship between classroom community and circle time because they are learning about their peers and spending time with each other solely for the purpose of building relationships.

### **Implications for Teachers**

Based on this research, it is clear that students enjoy having a voice in the classroom and sharing with their peers. They also appreciate getting to hear from their classmates and learning about them as well. The negative perceptions that the students and teacher discussed in their interviews lead to important implications for teachers. In order to prevent interrupting and disrespect from happening during circle time, it is important to communicate your expectations

clearly with your students. Students should be aware of these expectations on the first day of implementation and throughout the whole school year. It may be important to include lessons on what a good listener looks like as well. These expectations will need to be consistent in order for them to be effective, and reteaching expectations and what a good audience member looks like may be important to discuss with the class again if they appear to not be following the expectations.

Although I was not intentionally searching for other benefits of circle time, I discovered some additional positive effects throughout this research process. During my interview with Mrs. R, she told me that she feels like students are less likely to blurt out or become off-topic throughout the day because of circle time. This is because they are already given a chance to speak and share what they would like to during circle time. She also shared that she has noticed throughout the years of implementing circle time that students can be “shy in front of their peers sometimes when it comes to presentations or even talking. I think just asking a question of the day is kind of teaching them how to speak in front of each other and about different levels of volume [when speaking].” This is significant information to be aware of when considering if circle time is something you want to implement in your classroom.

Another implication for teachers considering implementing circle time is to be mindful of the shy students you have in your classroom. Speaking out in front of the entire class can be daunting to timid students, especially at the beginning of the year when they may not know anyone else in their class. Some examples of survey responses from shy students can be seen in Figure 6 and 7 below:

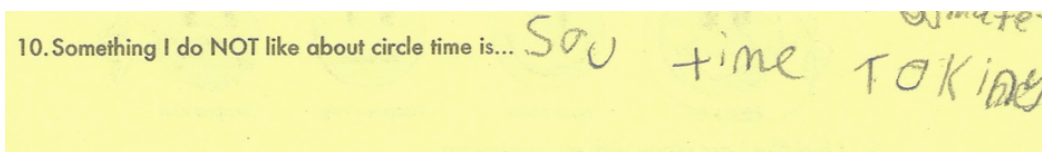


Figure 6. Victoria's survey. "Sometimes talking."

A photograph of a handwritten survey response on a yellow background. The text is written in black ink and reads: "10. Something I do NOT like about circle time is... even one looking at me." The handwriting is casual and slightly slanted.

Figure 7. Emma's survey. "Everyone looking at me."

Because of this, it is crucial to choose your questions carefully. During Mrs. R's interview, we discussed the reasoning behind the questions she chooses for circle time. She shared that "a lot of the questions are just surface level and kind of just fun. I don't want to make anyone feel exposed. They do always have the option to pass it, and so if I ever do ask a deeper question, I've had people pass it if they don't feel comfortable." As I interviewed students, I learned that they actually prefer random and silly questions regardless of if they were introverted or more outgoing. During my interview with Jacob, I asked him if he had any recommendations for circle time that could make it better. After I asked this, he said, "What would make it better is if there is more silly questions." As I analyzed my data, I even created a level 1 code called silly over serious because it was mentioned so many times in the interviews. Therefore, it is important to make sure every student in your classroom feels as comfortable as possible and this will require being intentional about the questions that you ask.

As mentioned earlier, there is not an extensive amount of research available about circle time. This is especially difficult because circle time can look different in every classroom and is loosely defined. Therefore, one additional question I am left with after this study is how are circle time perceptions different depending on the variation of circle time being implemented? I am also wondering how the results would have been different if students had negative perceptions of school before implementing circle time. It would be interesting to see if circle time made a difference in their attitude toward school if they started with negative perceptions. During this kind of study, we would be able to see if students' attitudes changed at all because of



circle time. In conclusion, more research is still needed in order to continue to understand circle time and the different variations of circle time that exist in the education field.

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## Appendix A

## Circle Time Survey

1. I like having circle time with my class every day.



Agree a lot



Agree a little



Disagree a little



Disagree a lot

2. Circle time helps me start my day in a positive or good way.



Agree a lot



Agree a little



Disagree a little



Disagree a lot

3. I think circle time helps my class care about each other.



Agree a lot



Agree a little



Disagree a little



Disagree a lot

4. I feel happy coming to school each morning.



Agree a lot



Agree a little



Disagree a little



Disagree a lot

5. I feel like I get along with my classmates.



Agree a lot



Agree a little



Disagree a little



Disagree a lot

6. I feel like my classmates and teachers know a lot about me because of circle time.



Agree a lot



Agree a little



Disagree a little



Disagree a lot

7. Students in my class treat each other with respect.



Agree a lot



Agree a little



Disagree a little



Disagree a lot

8. My class is like a family.



Agree a lot



Agree a little



Disagree a little



Disagree a lot

9. Something I like about circle time is...

10. Something I do NOT like about circle time is...

## Appendix B

### One-on-one Student Interview Protocol

1. Can you tell me about what circle time is and how it works? (like I have no idea what it was)
2. How do you feel about circle time?
  - a. What do you like about it?
  - b. What do you not like about it?
3. How do you feel about the circle time questions that we ask you?
  - a. Why? (do you like them or wish we would ask you different questions)
4. How did you feel about circle time on the first day of school?
  - a. How do you feel about circle time now?
  - b. Why?
5. How do you feel about the students in our class?
  - a. Why?
6. How do you feel about school?
  - a. Why?
  - b. How do you feel about our class?
7. How do you feel about our classroom community?
  - a. Why?
  - b. Do you think that this is because of circle time? Why or why not?
8. Do you think that circle time makes you enjoy coming to school?
  - a. Why?
9. Do you think that circle time has helped you make friends in class?
  - a. How/why?
10. Does circle time make our class feel like a family?
  - a. How/why?
11. Have any of your other teachers before third grade done anything like circle time before? Tell me about that.

### **One-on-one Teacher Interview Protocol**

1. Walk me through the process of circle time as if I had no idea what it was.
2. How long have you been implementing circle time in your classroom?
  - a. Have you changed it at all throughout the years? (implementation wise)
3. Why did you decide to start doing circle time in your classroom?
  - a. Circle time a campus wide requirement, right? How did that happen?
4. Circle Time takes on many forms like morning meeting and some people do greeting, sharing, activities, tie it into academics – how did you decide how you wanted to do circle time?
  - a. Have you always included the star student presentation with circle time?
5. How do you decide what kinds of questions you want to ask during circle time?
6. How do you feel about circle time? Why?
7. How do you think students feel about circle time?
  - a. Why?
  - b. Do you think all of your classes throughout the years have felt this way? Why?
8. Do you think there is a relationship between circle time and the classroom community?
  - a. Why? Do you have any examples of this?
9. Do you think there is a relationship between circle time and how students view school?
  - a. Why? Do you have any examples of this?
10. Do you notice a difference in the students from when we do or don't do circle time?

Tell me about that.
11. What is your favorite part about circle time? Why?
12. Is there anything you don't like about circle time? Why?
13. If you could change anything about circle time, what would you change?
14. Is there anything you would like to add about circle time or talk about?

## Appendix C

## Codebook

Color	Code Name	Level	Definition	Example
	Negative perceptions	II	Reference to any negative feelings about circle time	Me – “What do you not like about circle time?” Jacob – “That everyone might be saying about like fighting games or something like that.”
	Interrupting and disrespect	I	Any mention of students blurting out and interrupting during circle time or being disrespectful	Me – “What do you not like about circle time?” Michael – “When people blurt out.” Me – “When people blurt out? Can you give me an example?” Michael – “So when I’m talking, say someone is talking over me.”
	Not listening	I	Any mention of students not listening or paying attention during circle time	Next, the stick was passed to Jacob. Jacob said, “what was the question again?” Mrs. R responded with, “Go ahead and pass it then.”
	Positive perceptions	II	Reference to any positive feelings about circle time	Me – “So how do you feel about circle time?” Megan – “I feel great!”
	Sharing with the class	I	Any mention of getting to share with the class and answer circle time questions	Me – “Is there anything that you like about circle time?” Patrick – “That we all get to share the things that we like, and we get to share about our family and friends and like what you’ve been doing at home and how great it’s been.”
	Learning about others/making friends	I	Any mention of learning about others and making friends during circle time	Megan – “Circle time is much fun because you get to know about each other and it makes people feel good...”
	Starting the day off right	I	Any mention of circle time being a good start to the day	Mrs. R – “Really it started as a way for me to get to know my kids or my students, and so I like the idea of starting off the day in a safe environment and a comfortable routine where it’s like every day they know we’re gonna do this.”
	Themed days	II	Reference to the themed circle time questions dependent on the day of the week	Mrs. R – “and so, you know, like now there’s like every day has a theme that kind of gives us different topics of questions...”



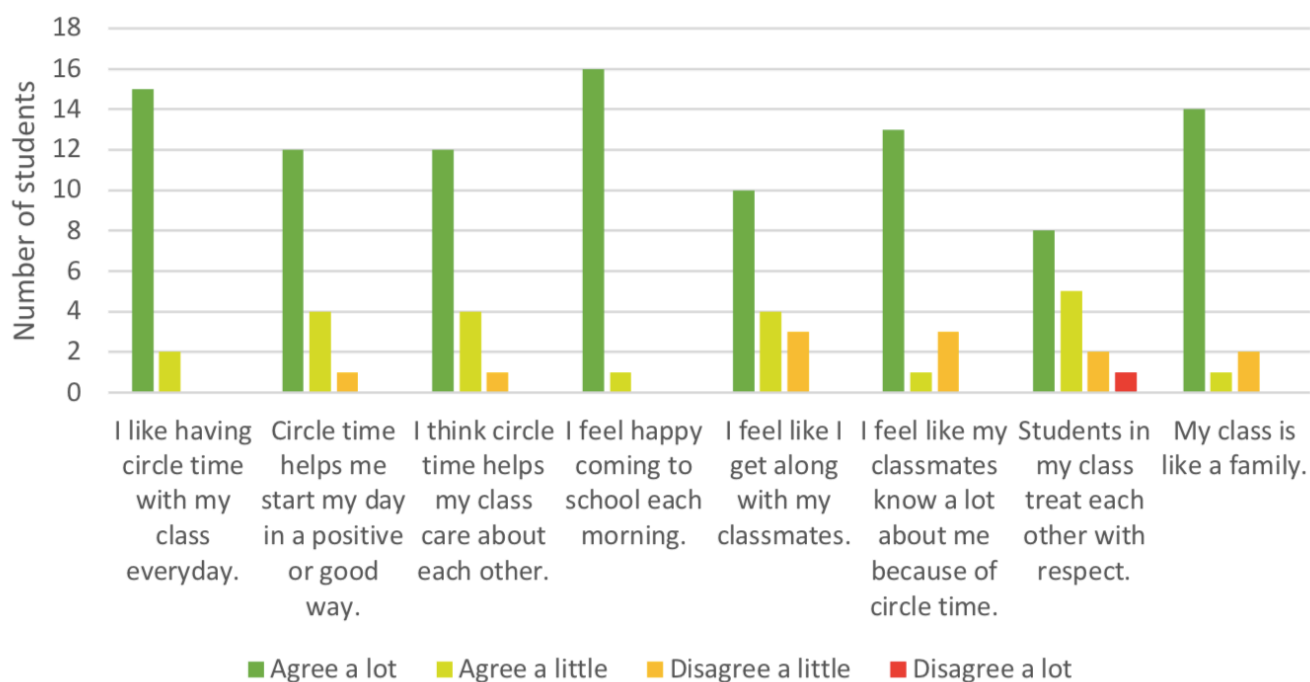
	Thankful Thursday	I	Refers to the Thursday theme for circle time	Patrick – “when it’s Thankful Thursday we all put our feet out and you get to tell what you’re thankful for or what person in the class you’re thankful for...”
	Would You Rather Wednesday	I	Refers to the Wednesday theme for circle time	Jacob – “I would say would you rather.” Me – “...Why do you like that one the best?” Jacob – “Because you have to choose, and if I choose it’s either going to be something silly or cool.”
	Star Student	I	Refers to each Monday during circle time when the star student presents their poster and chooses the circle time question	Me – “Do you have a favorite [themed day]?” Michael – “When people do their poster.” Me – “Oh, you like the star student the best? Why?” Michael – “Because they get to share half of their life.”
	Circle time and school	II	Any reference to the relationship between circle time and school	Me – “Do you think that Circle Time makes you enjoy coming to school?” Zoey – “Yes.”
	First day feelings	I	Mentions of how students felt about circle time on the first day of school/ beginning of the year	Me – “How did you feel about circle time on the first day of school? Do you remember kind of how you felt about doing circle time?” Megan – “I felt happy but a little bit nervous.”
	Current feelings	I	Mentions of how students feel about circle time now	Me – “How do you feel about it now compared to at the beginning of the year?” Ryan – “I like it now.”
	Classroom Community	II	An environment where students feel cared for and have strong relationships with the rest of the class	Me – “How do you feel about our classroom community?” Victoria – “Good.” Me – “Why good?” Victoria – “Because we’re all a team and none of us are getting separated.”
	Circle time questions	I	Any mention of the circle time questions that are answered	Me – “How do you feel about the circle time questions that we ask you? What do you think of them?” Kelsey – “I think some of them are really funny and calming.”
	Fun/silly	I	Instances when students/teachers express	Me – “Which circle time did you prefer and why?”

			that circle time is fun or silly	Jacob – “Third grade because you get pass something around and get to answer silly questions...”
	Silly over serious	I	References to answering silly and random questions instead of personal questions	Mrs. R – “I think like a lot of the questions are just surface level and kind of just fun. I don’t want to make anyone feel exposed.”
	Circle time preferences	I	References to student circle time preferences or suggestions	Me – “Do you have any suggestions that would make circle time better?” Patrick – “Since everybody takes forever to sometimes share, I would give them like let’s say 20 seconds to share.”
	Excitement/Engagement	I	Any time a student or teacher shows engagement during circle time or mentions it	Mrs. R passed the talking stick to Patrick, and he said, “I would rather be a bird – Sike! A fishy.” After this, everyone giggled.
	Appreciation	I	Any time a student or teacher shows appreciation for someone in the class	Victoria chose Mary and said, “Mary, I like the way you always cheer people up and you always play with me.” Mary smiled and said, “Aawh!” after she heard this.
	Effects of circle time	I	Mention of how circle time effects students or the classroom	Mrs. R – “something that I really have notice throughout the years of doing circle time is they’re really shy in front of their peers sometimes when it comes to presentations or even talking, and so just asking a question of the day is kind of teaching them how to speak in front of each other.”

## Appendix D

## Quantitative Data from Survey

## Circle Time Survey Results



Name	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	TOTAL
Megan	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	32
Chris	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	32
Emily	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	32
Ryan	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	32
Michael	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	32
Madison	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	32
Hannah	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	32
Nick	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	31
Kelsey	4	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	30
Emma	4	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	30
Adam	4	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	29
Zoey	4	4	3	4	3	4	3	2	27
Sofia	4	4	4	4	2	4	2	2	26
Jacob	4	3	4	4	2	2	3	4	26
Patrick	4	3	4	4	2	2	2	4	25
Mary	3	2	3	3	3	4	2	4	24
Victoria	3	3	2	4	3	2	1	3	21