Supplement to Dissertation

Understanding and Supporting the Role of Facilitator in Teacher-Led Class Meetings

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Interview A – First Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: So my first question for you is: What has it been like for you to facilitate class meetings?
P: Successful and unsuccessful both. Depending on the group and the age level and whatever, you know, the current constraints of the classroom would be. I have had good success with it and have had situations where it’s been really frustrating.
I: Can you speak to that a little bit more?
P: Um, it just depends on the kids a lot of times. If they are willing to be involved in it and if I haven’t done a good job of setting it up to begin with then it tends to never get underway. If I have done a better job and they are more receptive to it then it can be more successful.
I: What do you think then like leads to their receptivity?
P: Probably my modeling. But I also think age has a lot to do with it. I think at second grade they aren’t quite ready for wanting a meeting and kind of understanding the underlying purpose of problem solving in a class meeting that they run versus maybe a fourth or fifth grade classroom where they can be more successful with that. So I think what happens is sometimes I push it thinking they can handle it better instead of just using it as a way to build you know a class-building activity or to build that trust within a classroom with a whole-class activity, rather than problem solving, you know. Um, so most of its on me to set it up properly and not rush it, trying to make it something that its not.
I: What do you think um leads to setting it up properly?
P: I think time more than anything. Having a consistent time to meet. I like to do it daily. I like to have daily circle time but time is not really an option sometimes, so at a minimum weekly. And then keeping a consistent format to the meeting so they know what expect, it feels safe, and they grow to understand how it works, those kinds of things. So those are the kinds of things that regular elementary schools run into problems in having that kind of consistency you know for something that is not academic, you know.
I: Okay, thank you. How does your training affect your experience of facilitating class meetings?
P: Um, I haven’t had a lot of training in class meetings, specific to that. I’ve had a lot of class management and sometimes they’ll mention a class meeting but it hasn’t been like formal training in class meetings. I don’t even feel like Tribes really taught me how to run a class meeting. I feel like I’ve had to figure it out on my own. And I feel like I’m not really that great at it. You know, I hear teachers talk about how wonderful they can be. I’m still struggling with how to make it effective.
I: Um, would you say that the limited training you’ve had is related to classroom management?
P: Yep, yep.
I: And is that like in your graduate or teacher training program, your pre-service, or during professional development?
P: I would say all of the above. I think its been such a long time since I went to school for that kind of thing. One of the things when you take a class that involves management, they touch on it. "Oh you should have a class meeting". You know. And everyone throws it out
there like it's a no-brainer, but really there is a lot involved in it. And its kind of like, once I set it up wrong its really hard to go undo it, you know. So that kind of makes me hesitant to get too involved in it.

I: Um, who has affected your experience of facilitation and how have they affected you?
P: Hmmm, I would say fellow teachers and how other teachers talk about how they run their class meetings, or the kind of questions that they ask, or format, what's successful for them, and what's not. Just kind of listening. I've done a little reading on the Internet about it to see what works. Typically what I looked on the Internet, fourth and fifth grade teachers, you don't really read about primary class meetings. I don't even really know what constitutes a class meeting versus circle time. Some people think it's synonymous, some people don't. So, um, just mostly listening, you know. Kind of paying attention to what other people are doing, and what they think is working.

I: So would you say like that teachers within your building...?
P: Yeah.

I: Okay.
P: I don't really discuss things like that outside of my own building (laughs), you know.

I: Okay. What about higher up, like is there anyone you feel like has really...
P: I really don't. I don't feel like anybody in administration um looks at that as anything that's really that important. Its always, observations are always academic focused. Of course student engagement focused, but they want them engaged in the academics. So there is that pressure to make sure that is happening when administration comes in. I hear a lot from up above about that whole piece, so.

I: What feelings have you had about facilitating class meetings?
P: Oh gosh, I've had good feelings, you know, excited, positive feelings about doing it. I read about "oh it's going to be so great". But then I have feelings of frustration as well when it doesn't run quite as smoothly as I would like it too. It makes it hard to want to do it again. Um, I'm kind of ambivalent about the whole thing, honestly. I kind of see the power of it, but I don't feel like I am good at making that happen. So, you know, the feelings aren't so bad that it prevents me from doing it, but I feel, during the actual event, I'm feeling like this is not what I want, its not enough. But, I don't know how to elicit more.

I: From the kids.
P: Yeah. Without me being always the one talking. That's the hardest part, I think. I need to shut up and get them to take over. But they're seven. So that's the rub for me. Second grade is funny. Its right on that border line of being more independent, and being led by the nose in everything they do. So I think it's probably a good year to really start that transition. But I don't feel equipped to do a really good job of transitioning them.

I: So, that's where the feelings of ambivalence come from.
P: Yeah

I: What about that excited feeling? Where is that coming from?
P: Well, I think when you get the kids together. And I always do it in a circle on the carpet, for something that is not academic, it is really class and people building. Just the sense of being together and talking about anything that is not related to math or literacy or you know, just us being together. Its like our few minutes a day to get to know each other. So in that respect it can be so fun. And I look forward to it, at the beginning of the year, doing that, you know. So, um, then kind of reality happens and kind of poo-poos. And then its like, how can I get back to that fun part, you know, where we all get to be together? Its
much more relaxing, its much safer, there’s no wrong answers. You know what I mean? There’s nothing anybody has to write. Or you don’t have to be smart. You can be high academically, you can be low academically, and everyone can participate. So, I like that um feeling, that potential, you know.
I: When it "poo-poo’s", as you say, um is that, what is that? What’s happening?
P: I feel like for me I feel like that is time related. I’m very linear, and I like things very cut and dry. So at the beginning of the year there’s more time, because things haven’t gotten underway yet, there’s more time to build that in everyday or every-other-day. But, then once everything takes off, all the interventions, and the literacy block, and the schedule is set, your kids are going to all the things that they are supposed to finally go to. It seems like that’s the time that gets cut. And that’s where my frustration comes from. How do I continue to have that time? Because, the kids love it. They love to just come in, in the morning, and just chat, talk, be with me. It’s very casual. I don’t have to be the big bad, you know, big bad wolf, or whatever. And, um, once everything goes, starts going, that’s the time that gets chipped away on. And that where the frustration comes from. How do I still maintain that in less time? And so, then I’m just like (sigh), I don’t know. It’s hard to keep it up. It’s hard to maintain the integrity of it I guess, right?
I: Yeah. Um, can you tell about a time when facilitation was particularly rewarding, and then a time what facilitation was particularly challenging?
P: Um, like a specific incident?
I: If you can, yeah.
P: Um, gosh. Specific incidents, I think we’ve had a couple of times when um. I kind of changed circle time from the morning to the afternoon, because that’s when my time opened up, at the end of the day. We did have a couple of sessions where we were able to solve some problems with behavior that were going on. I kind of let the kids talk about what was happening. And they kind of had this mini argument-discussion within the group. And I kind of just kept my mouth shut, and I felt like, because as uncomfortable as that was it was important that it go on. I just saw a lot of, I don’t know what the word is, they just, they gained a lot in confidence in problem solving by just being able to do that. And so, I’m not sure that the problem was solved, but it was in an environment that they could voice their issue and they could discuss it openly. Um, so for the kids that were feeling put upon, or feeling that they had been wronged, it was a good exercise. For the person that was involved in the doing, I think it was uncomfortable, but also good. They had to listen to how they made somebody else feel. Um, as far as a time that was frustrating, I would say an exact same situation where it just blew up in my face. They start naming kids. "Well so-and-so did this". "No I didn’t". And off we go, and it’s not productive. So, I think anytime um, that you delve into that behavior piece with little kids it gets tricky. So.
I: So talk about what was going on for you when it was getting to that challenge...
P: I wasn’t sure how to intervene. That was hard for me. It’s was like, how long do I let this go? Sometimes I feel like we’re not honest with kids and we don’t just let them say what they need to say. And whoever was the perpetrator, so to speak, needs to hear how they are affecting someone else. And I think we skip that piece a lot. And so, but I also, I don’t want embarrass that child and put them on the spot. So, um, I never know quite know where to intervene to make it, to continue to make it productive, versus, letting it deteriorate to something he-said, she-said. So.
I: Was there an outcome, to that kind of that meeting?
P: Um. I don’t there was an outcome at that moment, but I think, for me the outcome was, um, we can do this again. Like, its okay to do it again, if it comes up again maybe they are more likely to voice their frustration. Because, you know, the ones that are positive lends itself to doing it another time and another time. I also don’t want it to turn into a bitch-session, though, right? Like, we all know how that happens. One person says something and off they go, and it’s a big complain-fest. Um, but I think, I think just having opportunities for the kids to say those things and have nothing bad happen is always a positive for the next time. So, baby steps, right? Baby steps (laughs).

I: Okay so this is our last formal question. How do you view yourself as a facilitator?
P: Marginal (laughs). I talk too much. I know that about myself. And I want to feed the kids the answers and I want to tell them, what is this? And, what is that? You know. And I want them to be more independent in the conversation that happens, without me interjecting anything. I don’t honestly know what’s age appropriate for that kind of situation. Second grade, again, is a funny age. And I think at first grade it makes sense to do circle time and incorporate calendar and singing and all these whole-class kind of good morning songs. At second grade it’s a little bit different. They still want that, it’s easy. But, they’re not really ready for more serious topics, I guess. So, I, you know, am always looking for how do I do this better? How do I run this more successfully for this level of students?

I: Um, is there anything else you would like to share about class meetings or your facilitating of them?
P: (Laughs) I don’t know. I just can see how they can be really cool and I think, I think the best thing about a class meeting, if you get to do it on a regular basis, is just the relationship it helps you build with the kids. Um, it’s invaluable. Like, when they get to see you as a regular person as part of the group its completely different than when you are in the front of the classroom delivering information for science or math or whatever. And I just think that’s the time that we have to build our relationships with our kids. Um, so when that gets stolen or cut short, it impacts everything. So, um, I would love to have more like, you know, specific to my grade-level training. Like how do I do this in the constraints that I have, they are what they are, how can I do a better job with this piece? Because I really feel like that relationship piece is key to everything else that we do. So.

I: Well, thank you!
Interview A – Second Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: Okay, so this is, again, about class meetings. The first question I have is how did you develop or not develop confidence in leading class meetings?
P: My own confidence?
I: Mm-hm.
P: I think it wasn't until Tribes that I felt more confident leading a class meeting because it gave me a structure in order to do an actual class meeting of some kind, whereas before, I didn't know how to get it started, so having that, I guess, canned program, so to speak, really helped to give me a starting point.
I: Okay, so once you had that framework, you felt confident?
P: Yeah.
I: And what about the framework would you say is the most supportive?
P: Just ideas on how to start, what activities to do, things to say, how to build the confidence within the students so they participate because if they don't participate, then you can't develop any confidence of your own because you're like, "What am I doing wrong?" They're not-- nobody's saying anything. So I think having-- at the beginning, I think having activities that we can all do together kind of frees them up for later. You can get into-- later you can get into deeper things, and it just kind of builds on itself, so having that, just those kind of ideas to start with, for me, was helpful.
I: So a framework that has kind of prompts or ways of engaging the student and then them participating increases your confidence?
P: Yes. Yeah.
I: Okay, so how did you decide to start doing class meetings.
P: Well, again, this goes back to Tribes. I was never successful with class meetings, and at second grade, it's hard to run a traditional class meeting, so I don't feel like the kids are really mature enough to really delve into issues in the classroom and things like that, but I just-- I loved the idea of Tribes, and I wanted to try something from there, and that was one of the things that I felt like I could do successfully, so that's one of the things I made an effort to try implementing daily. And last year, I was really pretty good about it. I got it in almost every day.
I: Okay, so would you say it was like the training itself, or it was the text or modeling? Was there something that really prompted that?
P: I guess it was just the idea of the program in general and just kind of the philosophy behind it. And it made it less-- I don't want to use the word scary, but less daunting. There were simple ways to bring the kids together in a productive social environment. But I didn't have to think of them. And they were easy, and they required no materials. So you know, that's golden. At the end of my day or the beginning of my day, we can just sit and have something positive and productive and I don't have to do anything.
I: So the stakes aren't too high. The pressure wasn't too high.
P: Yeah.
I: Okay, so then what if anything motivates you to continue to implement class meetings as a strategy in your classroom?
P: I think when I do it regularly, I see a better social climate in the classroom, when I can
get to it on a consistent basis, so that's really motivating. I think giving kids the
opportunities to be social away from their desks and you know, just puzzle through things
and discuss things and share and talk. And we don't have a lot of time for that, but it
transfers like ripples in a pond kind of. It kind of transfers out. The more you do it, the
more payback you get outside of that environment.
I: So would you say that the social capabilities that your students developed motivates you
to continue to do it?

P: Yeah. It's just a climate feel. I just think it builds relationships within the classroom, and
then it helps the kids feel more relaxed and just more comfortable where they are. And it
kind of gives you a venue when there are issues that maybe they'll be more comfortable
asking or talking about them, those kinds of. And if everybody's doing it, then you have that
commonality, and I guess my hope is if everybody was doing it, we would see that grow
school-wide.

I: Okay, cool. So here's a big one. Ready? How do your beliefs about teaching and learning
affect the way you engage in class meetings?

P: Oh, gosh. Well, my philosophy about teaching and learning-- I'm a very direct instruction
kind of person, so class meetings are not natural to me. They're not something that I would
naturally start my day with. But I think what I've learned is that by doing them, I can
actually do a better job of putting my philosophy out there, so to speak, because I've taken
the time to do the class meeting portion. So that's kind of like an "Oh, crap. It really does
work," moment for me. You know? Because I want to just get right in there. Let's go. Let's
go. Let's go. And-- but I see, too, the value in those-- a different environment of being with
kids and having them see you not in that direct role, in that instructor role, but as more a
facilitator or just part of the group. You know? She's just a person, too. And so I think it-- if I
look over the course of the year, I think that I get a lot of bang for my buck by doing it
because they're just more receptive when they have to be in that learning environment.
They trust me more. You know, they understand me more. They understand each other
better. And it just makes for a better feeling all around when we have to do the learning.
I: I'm hearing you say a bit about the students, that they need those social connections to be
effective learners.

P: Well, I think that you can learn without it, but I think when you have it, it's better. When we-- if I have a better relationship with them, they're going to try harder. They're going to
do more. They're going to work harder. I get way more buy-in. They're going to trust, even
if it's hard, "Okay. I know her. She's not going to sell me a bill of goods. If she says I can do
it, maybe I can." That kind of thing. But it's not something that happens for me in a month
or two months. It's like a really-- it's a long-term thing. It's a long-term process, and it takes
a long time. You know?

I: But I hear you saying that you believe in relationships and that it's not an easy task.

P: No. We don't have a lot of time in our day to develop those, so I can get a lot out of ten
minutes of class meeting. I can get a lot of opportunity to build those connections. For the
rest of the day, we're minute by minute here. There's no time to do chatting. There's no let's
do an art project and talk. There's none of that. So that little bit of time that if I can squeeze
it in sometimes is really beneficial.
I: So it's almost like we need that structure now because there isn't room for that social-
emotional learning outside of--
P: And right now I don’t get it in every day, and I hate it. The kids get so excited. We do it at the end of the day, usually, talk about how our day went and we do appreciations or something. Whatever happens to have been going on that day. And they’re like, "Can we do it? Can we do it?" But then we’ve run out of time. And so they like it, too. They get excited by getting to do that kind of thing.

I: Okay, this is my last one. It’s kind of long, so here we go. In my first round of interviews, I discovered that teachers take on multiple roles as facilitators of class meetings, from the manager during the meetings, the person who mediates during the meetings, or even the person who creates the structure to allow students to facilitate the meetings themselves. All of these roles require some relinquishment of the teacher role during facilitation. What would need to happen for you to let go of the teacher role when leading a class meeting?

P: Um, that’s a good question. I don’t know that I have the answer to that, honestly. I’m always trying to get them to a place where I’m just facilitating, so I think just probably closing my mouth and just letting it happen. But we’re so pinched for time that I’m trying to keep things going at the same-- do you know what I mean? At the same time, I think probably the biggest factor that would help me relinquish some of that control is just to shut up for five minutes and see what happens.

I: So what impedes you in doing that?

P: Just a lot of redirecting. Kids get off track. They’re whispering over here. Somebody comes in late. All those kinds of things. My class is pretty good, though, I have to say. We’re learning how to look at the person who’s talking and not talk while they’re talking. And just because you’ve had your turn, you don’t get to visit now. Those kinds of things, so more like social manners and stuff like that. They’re just learning how to do that, so I spend a lot of time doing that. But they can run it. If I have to step away from the circle, they’re able to keep going. They’re pretty good because it’s simple. It’s not hard to keep it going.

I: So what I hear you saying is to kind of wear that facilitator hat instead of the teacher hat, you need the students to be able to have those social norms so that they can support each other in the meeting.

P: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

I: And maybe a little more room.

P: Mm-hm. Yeah. I think that this particular demographic does not come with a lot of manners, and I think we take that for granted how important those things are when you get into a social setting. And they have none. They just think it’s all about them and they get to have their say, and then it’s play time, so that’s a big piece of having a successful class meeting is just teaching those manners, those norms. We don’t-- you don’t do that. It’s not okay. So I spend a lot of time. Sometimes we have to stop and remember-- tada, tada, tada. So.

I: But that’s also what they’re learning-- that’s what they get out of it, too.

P: Right, exactly.

I: Right, the cycle of this is what they need. This is what’s impeding them. They learn it and then they can do it.

P: And I guess my hope is, you know, I never get to see what happens later. But I can imagine when they get into four grade or fifth grade or sixth grade and they’ve been doing these that maybe they would be pretty successful at problem solving or dealing with harder issues in a class meeting because they have done them before. But I don’t know.
I: But those teachers maybe are maybe more easily able to get rid of the teacher role because they have students who have those norms established.
P: Right, which I think is reasonable, as the kids get older to be able to pull away more and more and more. I think one of the things I wish is that I could just be part of the group and just to be-- sometimes during appreciations, I will start and say one, or I'll say one halfway through, just to be an equal member of the group, you know? And that's always kind of fun, but again, there's always somebody doing something they're not supposed to be doing. It's hard for me to let that go. It's distracting. So.
I: Is it distracting to the students?
P: I don't know. I don't know. It's distracting to me because I'm trying to teach them to be listening when one person's talking. And then there's these little side conversations, you know? And so I just-- if I don't nip it in the bud, then it gets worse, right? So it's one of those things that you have to--
I: That shaping behavior piece, you feel that-- that's an important task that you have to be able to have successful meetings in the future.
P: Mm-hm.
I: Cool. That's all I've got.
P: Easy.
I: Yeah.
P: Was it supposed to be that fast?
I: Yeah.
P: Okay, good.
I: That's fine.
P: [laughter] I don't really have much to say.
Interview B – First Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: The first question I have for you is: What has in been like for you as a facilitator of class meetings?
P: Um, it’s difficult because you don’t want to put yourself and your opinions out there but you want to help the children access their own feelings and that’s a fine line.
I: And, um, kind of, what, what do you do with that difficulty?
P: I try very hard to, I mean, when I can, its not always possible, I pre-think and have some questions in mind and ways I want to lead the conversation. Unfortunately, there’s times when things come up in a class meeting, or fortunately, or where there’s an incident comes up in a class meeting that you don’t have time to pre-prep. So I try to slow myself down, and you know make sure, you know, it’s okay to breathe and think about what I’m gonna say before I say it. I don’t have to respond immediately and try to make sure the way I’m framing things I’m not putting words in the kids mouths. You know, I’m asking them questions that help them access how they’re feeling. Giving them vocabulary to talk about it, but not telling them what to say. Does that make sense?
I: Yeah. That totally makes sense. And, what is that like for you, having to balance all of that?
P: It’s difficult, you know, and because there is rarely another adult in there saying, you know, “Okay I thought that was really affective but this you could do differently”. You know, it’s hard to be able to reflect and change what you do so you are more affective. And, you know, last year, you know, there was some pretty heavy-duty things that came up that needed to be addressed in class meeting and there was one incident where there was a counselor in there with me and that was really helpful because I could watch her and she could say to me “Okay, that was really good, I really liked how you did this”. And by process of elimination I could – she’s not going to say I though you did a horrible job on this, but I could see the places perhaps I overstepped or put words in their mouths instead of letting them talk.
I: That’s an interesting experience. Okay, does your training affect your experience of facilitating class meetings?
P: Mmm...Which training?
I: Any training. Is there anything that has gotten you there? Or not?
P: You know, I think because I worked so much with low-income second-language children I’m more apt to be open to where they may be going and kind of helping them to get there. So, I think that part is helpful. I think I tend to talk too much. I mean really have to make, I do make a conscious effort to stop talking and let them talk. And that’s a lot of reading and learning how to frame without telling them what to say. Because little kids, you know that age, they’re going to say, they’re going to be little parrots if I give them something, they are going to go with it. And that’s not really what class meeting is about. You want them to be able to access their own feelings and talk to each other. It’s not really about talking to me. And as the authority in the meeting it’s very easy for that to happen.
I: Yeah. So, would you say that, like, self-study what’s gotten you the most background information or training?
P: Yeah. Self-study and mentoring, because I think I’ve seen in other people things that I can tell are not effective and that makes me more cautious about doing it myself. And then also observing other people interact with kids, seeing what is affective in what they do, you know. Watching effective counselors, watching effective administrators, and how do they interact, how are they able to pull stuff out of the kids? So, formal training? You know, I’m not formally trained in any kind of counseling or anything like that. So, its, I think more informal observations, reading, yes, self study. Certainly reflection. God, isn’t everything we do about reflecting on what worked and what didn’t?
I: So would you say that your pre-service teacher training, either undergrad or masters program, did not prepare you for class meetings? Facilitation?
P: I’ve had in-servicing over the years, here and there, that touched upon it. But, no, I can’t remember anything formal to help me with that. Um, what’s the program that we started at [my previous elementary school]?
I: The Tribes?
P: Yeah. So that was probably the most formal training I’ve had. And that was more strategies than it was how to conduct class meeting. So, you know, I never really thought about it before, but as I’m talking --is that even something that exists? You know, I don’t know that. I’ve certainly never had anything that was specifically that.
I: Mmm-hmm. Okay. Who would you say has affected your experience of facilitation, and how did they affect you?
P: Hmm…That’s a lot of thinking. Um. I think I would go to individuals. So, There were people who mentored me. Um, I think of specific teachers that I’ve worked with, certainly counselors that I’ve worked with. That’s only since Oregon though. [The counselor was] one of them. Um, because other states that I worked in didn’t have strong counselors. It was more strong teachers and watching how they interacted and how they worked with students. So, um, in [another city] I had a very strong core of people at the professional development school that I worked with and it was a lot of collaborative teaching and collaborative work. And I think I learned a lot from those very strong teachers that I worked with. You know dealing with student issues and conducting, you know, creating that community within your classroom-- a lot of that comes from the some of the teachers that I worked with there. Um, that’s, I’m trying to go back. Yeah, my first teaching in downtown [urban city] there was no support, nothing there. And when I moved back not so much either. So I would say, the people that I worked within [another city], definitely. I know you don’t want names, but there’s specific people that come to mind who were very, very good with students and dealing with individual differences, and dealing with class issues, and creating that community. And then here, watching them interact with kids. Watching my current administrator interact with kids. Teachers that I respect. That, I think, has been huge for me.
I: So would you say that its mostly through modeling that you’ve observed, that you’ve learned through others…?
P: Yes.
I: ...In this capacity. Okay.
P: Yeah, I don’t think I have ever been directly instructed on any of that.
I: Mm-hmm. And you mentioned that your current administrator has done that for you. Has there been any other kind of, higher-up level folks, who have influenced your style or working with students in class meetings?
P: (Long pause.) No.

I: Okay. What feelings have you had about facilitating class meetings?
P: It’s a little stressful. It really is. I mean, I want really badly for it to be productive. And I mean, you have so little class time to begin with you know, its an investment. And often, depending upon your administrator, it’s an investment you then have to justify. Which adds to the stress. You know. Why are you spending 45 minutes, that an extended one, but why are you spending 10, why are spending 15 on this? So you need for it to be productive. But, on the same token it not something you can necessarily plan out in advance, like you would a lesson plan, and say, you know, this is my final outcome, this is my objective, so to speak. You cant do that. And also you need to be able to fly by the seat of your pants because something crazy can happen at recess and they come in and before you can do you’re carefully planned out math lesson you need to a class meeting. And that is very stressful and really, I could not do it 15 years ago. I think it is something you have to work on and experience and be able to do. Especially when your kids come in and they are upset and you need to calm everybody down, and get everybody situated and everybody wants to tell you what happened, and everyone is angry at everybody else. I mean it’s a lot to deal with and its stressful. And I think there’s many people who just opt out and I get that. I’m not being judgmental. Who are just like “Okay this, that happened outside, you should have talked to somebody outside, we have our math lesson.” And there are times when that just has to happen, that’s the reality of the situation. But, I think its very stressful, but at the same time I think it can be very satisfying when the result is positive. You know, when you are able to calm everybody down and get everybody on the same page, and your little trouble maker ends up being like “okay I blew it I’m really sorry”. You know that’s huge, you know, that this little 8 year old, 7 year old, was able to take a step back and go, “I get what you’re saying to me”. You know, however in their little 7-year-old language can come around to recognizing what they did and voluntarily just be like, “Okay I wont do that again”. You know, that’s an incredibly satisfying experience. Unfortunately, it’s not always that easy.

I: Um, when you spoke about it being stressful, that’s the feeling you get in preparation when you’re looking at the time and space and kind of the impetus for the meeting. How are feeling in the middle of that facilitation process in that meeting?
P: (Sigh) I think a variety of feelings, it depends on how it’s going. I get frustrated because, or I can get frustrated because um either no one is saying anything, so I’m not facilitating. I’m not doing my job correctly because everybody is just passing that talking stick and everybody is looking at everybody else to say something. So that’s one feeling. Um, or it can be really good, that the kids are actually getting involved. And even if its not all the kids that you have that little core group that were involved in whatever was going on or who have experience of whatever is going on, who are actually interacting with one another as opposed to interacting with you. And that’s a great feeling. So I think that the answer to that depends on how the meeting is going. And God there’s a gamut, it can be so many different ways it can go. And I also think that they just need to process. And there’s been times that I feel like okay we’re done and I need to process. You know, lets do some math and we’ll about this some more later if we want to. And kinda take the temperature, you know, after the math lesson; okay do we have more to talk about? How are you feeling? And then try to come back.
I: So with the differing outcomes of how the class meeting can happen, what do you think leads to that? What gets a class able to engage in the way you would like them to?
P: You know, I think that starts day one, in developing that sense of community and being able to have them feel comfortable. I mean, you can see it grow. You know, the kids interact day one, week one, month one, is so different from the end of the year or even the middle of the year, you know. So you need to cultivate that sense of safety and security and that they’re okay. You know, that they are not going to be judged based on what they say during a class meeting. You know, and that’s time. Time and space. You know. So I think. Am I answering the question?
I: Yeah.
P: Yeah, okay. Go ahead.
I: Well, I think I was just thinking about your comment about time being such an issue. So, how do you navigate that need for time to develop those norms and relationships?
P: I think that that piece is not necessarily a class meeting. I think that that piece is everything you do. Every piece of what you do in your classroom has to be reinforcing those ways of dealing with each other. And it can be as simple as you know; okay we are working with buddies now. What would be a good way to help your friend, or whatever. And right then, just by saying that, you introduced that you need to be respectful and that just needs to be prevalent in everything that you do. So that when it comes to something that may be anxiety provoking for a child in a meeting they have that built in. It can’t be just in class meeting that you are doing that.
I: Okay that makes sense. So, can you tell about a specific time when facilitation was particularly rewarding and a time when facilitation was particularly challenging?
P: It’s easier for me to remember the challenging ones (laughs). Um, well, challenging, I think the one that comes to mind, just because it was so big, was when one of the teachers at our school passed away and we needed to talk to the kids about that. And it was frustrating, challenging, because there was such a build up of “Okay what are we going to do?” -- and within myself to. I did a lot of reading, a lot of how do children respond to grief? And just trying to make sure I was on a page where I could help. And, the kids had nothing to say. They had nothing to say. And it was really awkward because there were people in there, other people in there, so it was awkward for me. I don’t know that it was awkward for the children. Now, let me say that it did come out. But, you know in hindsight, I don’t know that seven and eight year olds can even access that, when you present them with that information. They needed to go and draw. They needed to go on with their regular day and be able to just think and process. And it wasn’t until the next day and the day after, that we were able to have real conversations. And even then, you know, that this expectation that the grief that you’re feeling as an adult and your ability to look at it, is very different from theirs. And it was really hard not to overlay my feelings of “Oh, my gosh this is so horrible, why aren’t you more upset?” You know, onto them, which is not what you wanted to do at all. But, um, that was very frustrating, that initial meeting, because I’m like, “Okay, great, now what?” (laughs). “Moving on”. Um, rewarding.... This year I had this one little guy. I’m so in love with this kid. (Deleted statement per participant’s request). I mean he’s just one of these kids who is exceptionally smart, makes horrendous decisions. I mean, I’m just like, “What are you thinking?” You know? He’s just…and we came in from recess one day and the class was just so furious with him. There were like 5 difference incidences, that he had just gone
crazy and everybody was mad at him. And he actually was a pretty -- I mean, he fit in well in the class, he had lots of friends, he’s a very social little guy. And, originally he was just mad at everybody. And when he sat down he just kept interrupting and he could not hear anybody and he was just irate. And I said, “Okay, we’re going to stop” because it did not work initially. And I said, “Okay, remember how you talk about how you feel”. Because everybody was like, “he did this”, and “he did that”. And of course, that put him on the defensive. So, we worked on how we phrase an “I-feel statement” even if you’re mad and you know how you are not going to blame him, you are going to tell him how you feel. So after like 10 minutes of going around and everybody saying it and everybody saying what they saw, and him interrupting every 5 seconds to say he didn’t do whatever he did do. After all of that, eventually he put his head down, and you could see like a little tear coming down and he was like, “okay, okay”. And then, you know, a couple of more people said something, and then he was able to actually say, “that was a bad choice. I really didn’t mean to hurt your feelings. I really didn’t mean to knock you down. I was just...” --- You know, it was just such a rewarding feeling because this was a kid who, you know, he doesn’t do that. And the other kids were able to, because I did very little other than stopping them and saying “okay, this is not helpful to yell at him and blame him. How can we help?” Other than that, I did very little. And they were able to get him to come around. And everybody was fine! So, it was the best possible resolution, you know. Everybody, I mean fortunately, nobody got hurt because when someone gets hurt that’s kinda a little harder. But, everybody was able to say, “Okay, I will let it go now”. You know, I don’t think that anybody ever said “I forgive you” but basically that’s what happened. And we were able to go on with our day, back to what was normal. So from like eight kids yelling and screaming at each other we were able to get to that, incredibly rewarding.

I: So if I were to summarize what you saying are saying, the rewarding experience is one in which the kids are really, almost -- you are not having to do as much work, the kids are the one pushing the meeting and able to express themselves. And the less rewarding experiences are ones in which you feel like you are working really hard to not have the kids either really engage or verbalize in the meeting.

P: Uh-huh.

I: Okay.

P: I mean I think for at least me personally my goal for them is to be autonomous and for them to be able to handle situations when I’m not there and when there is an adult not present. So, you know, if I’m the one doing all the talking, and I’m like, ”okay, you say this now”, or pulling things out of them then I don’t know that I’m meeting that goal.

I: Mm-hmmm. Makes sense. So, how do you view yourself as a facilitator?

P: I don’t think it’s my strength. I mean I said that to you when I initially said “I’m happy to do it”. Um, I think, probably my heart is in the right place. But, part of it is that time issue always. Because kids don’t learn on a clock, they don’t, they just don’t. And you know, I’m constantly looking at the clock going, “Okay! Hurry up! What are you going to say? Pass that talking stick! Alright, you have something to say? No? Okay then move on.” And that’s not beneficial. You know, and even though I can take a step back and recognize that not beneficial and that many, many children need that time, um that the most difficult, I think that’s one of the most difficult parts for me. It’s giving them the time that they need. And especially when you consider no matter what language I’m doing it in, it’s somebody’s second language. You know, and so they need even more think time. Um, so there’s that
piece. And then I often feel, perfectly honestly, I often feel like I’m floundering between do I say more? Do I direct them more? Do I step back? Do I stop the meeting? Do I go around again, to see if someone has something else to say? Do I let them go off on a tangent about their dog or their goat? Or do we stop here? So, you know, I’m always questioning myself. Which I think in one way is a valuable thing because it means I reflect and change. On the other hand I don’t really think its my -- the strongest part of my classroom community, lets say.

I: Okay. Do you feel like – or what are your thoughts about your changing identity? You mentioned that it wasn’t until like 15 years ago that you were really able to get there. So how have you viewed yourself over time?

P: I don’t know, I think it took me a while. Well, there’s two sides. I think I naturally create community with kids, because I love kids. So, I think that piece has always been there. Even 30, 28, 25 years ago. But the actual forethought and understanding of how big that community is and how much I can create by forward planning and you implementing certain practices in my classroom including class meetings that was more recent. That’s been within the last 15 years.

I: And where do you think that came from? That insight?

P: Working with kids. You know, I don’t think that anybody ever said, “You know, I think this is what you should do”. I think that came later, and I was like “Oh, yeah, that’s kinda what I do”. I think its just working with kids, especially working with very, very, very low-income kids. I mean way lower than what we have now. And knowing that they needed that. They needed that community in the classroom because they didn’t necessarily have it at home. You know, they were going home to no one, or to things that children should not see. They needed to have that community and that safety net built in. And, nobody taught me that. Its pretty evident when you are working with a very, very impacted population, that you need to create some kind of safety net or you cant teach them. Because if they don’t have that safety net they are too busy thinking about what they’re going to eat next, where they’re going to go after school, what’s going to happen when they get there for them to be able to learn. And my bottom line goal is to teach. And it became evident early on that I had to create that safety net, that community within the classroom. Allow them to come to me not just as a teacher but as somebody who is going to try to help in order to teach. So I don’t think I was taught that.

I: It was through experience and time.

P: Uh-huh.

I: All right. Well, is there anything else you would like to share about class meetings or facilitation or anything on that topic?

P: You know, I’m sure its something that so many people say, is that it would be so wonderful to be fly on a wall. It would be so wonderful to have the time and opportunity to observe other people doing it, or participate in other people’s class meetings. Because, I think we learn so much about one another, and as a teacher it’s such a solitary profession. You know, its rare, I mean I’m sure [the counselor] would notice when [she] was doing counseling that I would always stay in there. Well part of the reason I stayed in there because it’s wonderful to observe [her] interacting with the children because I learn from that. So I wish, and I know its probably never going to happen, that we had situations in which we were able to observe, you know I don’t know, master or mentor people
conducting class meetings and other things like that, so that you know, you get more...you learn, basically.
I: And that kind of speaks to you learned along the way mostly through others and their modeling that you’d like that more purposeful in this context.
P: Uh-huh. Yeah, absolutely.
I: Well, unless there is anything else you would like to share, we can stop recording.
P: I think I’m good. Did you get what you needed?
I: Yeah! I did.
Interview B – Second Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: How did you develop or not develop confidence in leading class meetings?
P: I don’t know that I am confident in leading class meetings. I think it is something that I feel is important enough to do regardless of my confidence level. Um, so I don’t know that I feel confident with it. I just feel like it is something that is necessary for me to do, so I do it. Does that make sense?
I: Yeah, so the confidence hasn’t been established yet, but you still feel the need to do it.
P: Yeah, absolutely. And just like anything, the more you do the more comfortable you feel with it. And the more you get to know your students…you know I think the first ones in the beginning of the year are always more awkward and more difficult, And as you get to know your kids and they get to know you, it becomes a little more easier, I think.
I: So, what do you think is your barrier to developing that complete confidence?
P: Well, I’m a teacher. I’m not qualified…I don’t have counseling training; I don’t have a background in child psychology. You know, I know a lot just based on experience but you know, I always feel like this is not my area of expertise. So you know, I go to the old fallback of “Hmm, that’s a really good question, let me think about that”. You know, because I am not completely confident. It’s not completely in my comfort zone. Um, but I know its important.
I: Okay. So then how did you decide to start doing class meetings?
P: You I think when I started it; they weren’t even called Class Meetings. You know, neither [the other two states] where I taught prior, have counselors. You know there just isn’t that set up. Or if there was a counselor…I’m trying to think because more recently there was…it was like an every-other, very rare, let’s just put it that way. So there would be things. Life happened and stuff comes up. And you have to be able to deal with it to teach your kids. And I’ve always taught very, very low-income kids and there’s issues. I couldn’t proceed with what I was doing, which is teaching, without dealing with those issues. Or at least not proceed effectively. So, I think I just started it, you know, talking to kids. Talking to kids as a group and then it kind of evolved from there and it developed a name and other people were doing it, etcetera.
I: So it’s been an evolving process.
P: For me, yeah, absolutely.
I: So um, kind of timeline wise, did that start as your career started, kind of noticing that need? Or did that kind of take years to establish?
P: Thinking back, you know my first teaching job was [in the inner city] -- very, very impacted population. We went through [riots]. There was a lot that we needed to talk about. And we did. And it was first grade. My whole time in [that city] I only taught first grade. And, I remember times where we sat down and we talked as a group, because we had to. And, um, I don’t think I ever thought of them as class meetings. I just thought of them as we are a group, you know, we are a class community and we need to talk. And, I’ve always had that sense of community because I think you’ve got to have that in order to function. So...am I answering your question?
I: Yep, totally. So it sounds like it was something that began as your career began.
P: Absolutely
I: Based on the needs of your students.
P: Very much so.
I: Okay. So then, what, if anything, motivates you to continue to implement class meetings as a strategy in your classroom?
P: I know that the more comfortable my students feel in the classroom, the more barriers I can knock down for them, the more they are going to be able to learn. And ultimately my responsibility to them is to teach them. My kids come in with all kinds of garbage that gets in the way and community circle, class meeting, is a way for them to get through that onto the other side of learning.
I: So, your motivation is really from the lens of a teacher and learning.
P: Absolutely, yeah.
I: Okay.
P: I mean, it's not that I don't value it in and of itself, but ultimately my responsibility is to try to get these kids as far as they can and have as best of a self-image and self-esteem as they can to be successful. I mean, that's my personal goal, is to help them recognize that they can be successful. So this is a tool in the toolbox of getting them there. Does that make sense? Its like one piece of what I can do. But I think, a very importance piece. I mean I will put everything else aside to do that because I think ultimately the...what you get back is huge.
I: What you get back from students as learners?
P: Exactly. As future well-adjusted members of society. Because as a teacher it's not just the education piece its also the raising kids to be productive members of society. Whatever that may be. Not necessarily college but whatever that may be. I want them to be the best they can be. And this is a huge piece of that.
I: So this is a more complex question. How do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect the way you engage in class meetings?
P: If I am understanding you correctly, I would say that you need to teach the whole-child. That you cannot just say, okay I'm here to teach you reading, period that's it, I'm done, out. You know, you have to be able to deal with that entire child. And if you think that you're not or that's not your job you are probably not going to be as effective. Um, so if you're teaching the whole-child you're making sure that they're not hungry, making sure that they're not cold, your making sure there's not something huge in their head that's preventing them from doing everything else. So, I cant teach them to read even if I see that as my job, if they've got all this other crap going on. If they're preoccupied.
I: So it sounds like you believe it's your role to meet those basic needs before they can develop into academic-beings.
P: Yes.
I: So then, tell me about where that belief comes from or that pedagogy comes from. Is that something you walked into education having, or did that also develop?
P: I think kind of both. I mean, I fell into education. That was never really my goal. It was something I kind of fell into. Um, but I've always loved children. And I've always felt that in order for a child to reach their full potential you have to deal with that entire person. You can't...um, you know, children can't compartmentalize well. Young children, well all children, but certainly young children can't compartmentalize well. I knew that coming in. I've always worked with kids. Um, my experience with working with really, really
impacted low-income kids certainly put that into fast-forward motion. Because, when you have a kid whose parents just got taken by immigration or who um didn’t have any food because dad went and gambled away the paycheck. Or what ever the case may be. All of a sudden you recognize really, really fast that you can’t possibly teach them until you’ve dealt with those issues. So I think that certainly fast-forwarded it, but I think it was there to begin with.

I: Okay, so let me confirm then what I’m assuming is that class meetings fit into an already established belief system you had about teaching and learning.

P: Uh, huh. And I think that they developed as I developed as a teacher. So initially what I looked at as just conversations with kids developed into a way more structured kind of a meeting. With me talking less and them talking more. I think initially I probably did way more of the talking than probably they did. When I first started out, when I was like twenty-something, you know? Um, and it evolved as I grew. But, I think, yeah - fundamentally it was there to start with. Am I answering this?

I: Yeah, totally.

P: Okay.

I: Perfect. So this is actually my last formal question. It’s a long question but it doesn’t have to be a long answer. In my first round of interviews, I discovered that teachers take on multiple roles as facilitators of class meetings: from the manager during the meetings, the person who mediates during the meetings, or even the person who creates the structure to allow students to facilitate the meetings themselves. All of these roles require some relinquishment of the teacher role during facilitation. What would need to happen for you to let go of the teacher role when leading a class meeting?

P: I have no problem relinquishing the role as long as I feel like my kids are safe. So, I think if I feel like one of my other students is bullying or being antagonistic then I would step in. But, I think its a real positive...I don't have that power thing, I don't think, where I need to be in charge all the time. I see my role as almost maybe protecting those who cannot yet speak up for themselves. So I would definitely step-in in that kind of a situation. But other than that, its awesome if they can manage to facilitate and deal with things on their own. I mean some of my best memories, I think I mentioned this to you before, about class meetings are about times when the kids have taken the initiative and I’ve had very little to do with it. You know, I remember one instance where they got the child that instigated the whole thing to back down and apologize, and I had nothing...I just kind of sat there and was like "Okay kids don't all talk at once". And that was pretty much all I did. That to me is the perfect scenario. They've come far enough to where they can get it together and do it themselves.

I: So if you know that the students are like psychologically, emotionally safe, then for you to relinquish that power isn’t very difficult.

P: No. I mean I think the other thing to think about when you are dealing with younger children is, you know, the whole...everybody wanting to talk at the same time. You know, that's very normal for little kids. That idea that I have to get out what I want to say right now. So, I think as the adult in the room, if you are a teacher or not, there's going to be a certain amount of that. You know, "Hold on, remember what are norms are, what do you need to do". But, other than that, um, which I think is just facilitating them to take it; I don't have a problem with that. I seriously don't want anybody hurting anybody but other than that, no.
I: So kind of to push that question a little bit more, how do you see you yourself different as a teacher than as a facilitator?

P: As a teacher I have a plan of what I want to do. And for the most part, you know there are probably exceptions, but for the most part I’m going to adhere to that regardless of what goes on. Now, I will change my lesson plan if somebody doesn’t get it, whatever. The class meeting is open, you know. You never know what is going to come up sometimes. You’ll bring one thing up and then all of a sudden you’re onto something you had no intention of talking about. And I will let that go and go with it. You know my students would probably say that I do that academically too, to some extent (laughs). I think that it’s just way...I see myself in the facilitator position in a class meeting position, giving them a chance more picking what they need to deal with. And, when I’m teaching, this is my goal this is my learning objective. You know, I may change how I’m getting that learning objective but that’s still the objective, regardless. I don’t necessarily have a set objective in a class meeting. Sometimes. You know, I mean, thing happen. When there’s a death or whatever. Obviously the goal is to talk about that but even in that scenario, you know how it goes: "My grandma died, my dog died" and all of a sudden you’re on a whole other...so. To me that’s the big difference.

I: Great, that’s all I have. Is there anything else you wanted to share about your experiences?

P: Nope, happy to help.

I: Awesome. Thank you. I'm going to pause the recording.
Interview C– First Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: So my first question is: What has it been like for you to facilitate class meetings?
P: I think the more that I have used them the more I have learned how to kind of alter what I’m doing. And my...what was the question? What its been like is really finding balance between like facilitating the conversation and, or talking too much during the circle time and giving opportunities for students to share their input and how to navigate and facilitate that so people and students have multiple opportunities to share. Maybe not in that day but over time. So, um, yeah.
I: So how do you find that balance?
P: I think each class is different, depends on what the demographics is of the students and the personalities. So you will always have a class where students are...you have a couple of students who are vocal and want to share more, and others that are a lot more quiet. So, sometimes community circles or class meetings could be written or, so that everyone can have a chance to participate or sometimes its even - I’ve done it on Seesaw which is like a digital way of sharing information through drawings so that students are all -- maybe we are all on the carpet with their chrome books and we’re sharing something that way. And sometimes its verbal and oral where we are sitting all together having that conversation. Um, just really trying to find different ways to have students share and participate and have dialogue with each other.
I: So it sounds like the composition of the class affects some of the strategies that you use for facilitation
P: Absolutely, ’cause I don’t think...I think every class is different and they will function differently based on how they interact with each other. And I think its ultimately what your goal is as a teacher is from the class meeting. So my goal as a teacher running class meetings is to build community and relationship and to have open lines of communication with each other. So, just depends on what the goal is, I guess.
I: How does your training affect your experience of facilitating class meetings?
P: Well, I think my training is trial and error. You really just see what’s working and what isn’t working. Um, it’s a lot of um self-training. Our district doesn’t provide a lot training on class meetings or how to run those or what those would look like and so its more of me going and finding the information um, and just trying different strategies with that information.
I: So, where do you locate information for class meetings?
P: Um, well I use like Tribes as my main source of information. I ask other teachers what’s working, what isn’t working, what have you tried? Um, I’ll go and find different research things that are out there. I’ll go to the library or go online. Um, whatever, whatever people are willing to share with me. So...
I: What about your teacher training program as you’re getting your certificate or your graduate program?
P: Um, class meetings weren’t taught at all, at least to my recollection. Its been a while, but in my program everything was...Um, I learned class meetings from another teacher who was my mentor teacher and really believed in them and so then I really got to see her run a
class meeting. Um, and then, I saw that it helped and it was beneficial to her and her classroom community. And then I wanted to try it. Its really just teachers talking to teachers to figure out what works.

I: So, where do you find those teachers?
P: Um, well she happened to be my mentor teacher. But, teachers have a way of finding like-minded teachers and really just having conversations about kids. It always comes up in any PD we’re at. You know, if we’re taking a break we are always talking about students and so it will come out that way, its, "Oh I’m having difficulty with this person, or this..." you know, it naturally come up of how do you build that community or maybe what could we do make things different in our classroom.

I: OK. Who has affected your experience of facilitation and how did they affect you?
P: Oh, my students always affect my...the way that I facilitate a class meeting. Um, I learn so much from them every time we run a class meeting. Just having either a different perspective or um having the ability to self-reflect on what has just happened. Because sometimes, you know, I might say something that has maybe hit a chord with one student or something that really resonated with another student. So, being able to either see those expressions or have those conversations later have always...is what impacts me in having a class meeting. My students guide what I do and how I facilitate.

I: So, when it comes to like the biggest influence for you in class meeting are the students that you’re working with.
P: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

I: And, you spoke a little bit about what you get from them. Can you talk little bit more of what over time you’ve learned from your students? Maybe through the different grade levels?
P: Yeah. I think that one of the main things I’ve learned is that not everyone expresses opinions or ideas in the same way. So, like what I was saying earlier, you know, is there is a lot of people, a lot of kids have a lot to share and just don’t feel comfortable in that mode of sharing. And so I’ve learned a lot from them in having multiple ways to share information. Also, I’ve learned that, uh, that students just have a lot of insight. And so, to be able to have a student to have a comment that shifts my mindset or shifts my thinking um I always value. So, yeah.

I: OK. So, what feelings have you had about facilitating class meetings?
P: Well I think the feelings change. Its depends on what we’re talking about or what has been brought up by the students. Sometimes when I taught 4th grade I ran class meetings very differently than I when I run them with my pre-K students. Um, but, say for example our class meeting, when I taught 4th grade we were having the Obama, or the presidential election in which Obama was running. And so, um, having the skill to be able to navigate that conversation with kids where you’re not imposing your judgment or your thinking but having them each share their opinion. And really being strategic about what your goal of that class meeting is. Is the goal really for kids to just express a sentiment or is it for them to have dialogue about this issue and if it is then what question or what anchors do I need to have in place for them to be able to have that dialogue? Um...

I: So how did you feel in that situation?
P: I felt comfortable because I felt ready for it. I mean, I think, I also, I don’t feel scared of class meetings. They don’t, you know worry me. Or, what if a kid says something. Because, I know I can always tell a student that I don’t know. Or that I don’t always feel like I have to
have the answer. So I think just knowing that kind of puts me at ease a little bit. And, I'm okay with the uncertain. So, I don't always have to have an answer by the end of the class meeting. Or, you know. And we don't always have to agree. Because, kids don't always agree with me (laughs). Or I with them, and so... But, I've had meeting where I've felt very excited. Very -- just to hear what the kids are sharing I feel I have connected with them personally and that other classmates have connected with them, with each other. Um, sharing things that they have in common either with myself or with their classmates. Um, so I think that the feeling that I feel the most is connected with my kids.

I: So I heard you say connected. I heard you say excited. And heard you say comfortable. Do feel like that sums up your feelings of class meetings?

P: Yeah.

I: Ok. Can you tell about a time when facilitation was particularly rewarding and time when facilitation was particularly challenging?

P: Mm... Well, I can use an example that just happened a couple of days ago. We were sharing about our weekend and what the students had been doing. And I've been teaching preschool this summer. Um, and one of my students shared that he finally was able to move into his own house. He had been living with some other families for a while. And so his excitement kinda just led to conversations with all the other students and we ended up talking about like, um "Why do you feel excited? And, "What about having your own house make you feel excited?" and um, "What made you so comfortable at your other house that you maybe don't have here at your new house yet". Or whatever. And really just having all the students participate and their own feelings about that. Um, at 4 or 5 year old level, to be able to talk about what's comfortable and what's not comfortable, or change and how change it sometimes is okay and sometimes you have different feelings that come with that change. Um, that was rewarding. And, it was rewarding for the other kids to share in his excitement with him. "Oh, you have your own room? What do you have in your room?"

You know, um, he really felt excited about that and so that makes it all worth it. Um, one where it didn't go so well?

I: Just challenging in some way.

P: Oh, challenging...(long silence). I cant...I need to think a little bit. (Long silence). I think, um, I think the challenges; they can be different based on grade. And this might seem simplistic, but, in one of my pre-K class meetings, um, I cant even remember what the question was or what we were talking about... but, a student did not care about anything that we were talking about because she was really upset with her mom. She, and um, she shared a whole lot of information about how upset she was. And, it was difficult for me in the sense that I have, you know, 18 other kids there that are listening to this and I think it came to the point of, if she's comfortable sharing in front of her peers um, then I shouldn't be so like reserved about it. Like, "Oh, my gosh she's really talking bad about her mom and really its just about a pair of shoes, but she's really upset about it." And is like "My mom doesn't like me. She doesn't care about me." Um and it was at a couple moments, minutes of, okay do I stop this conversation? Do I let it continue? Um, and, your just not ever sure if you're making the right decision or not. And um that incident ended up working out. Everyone has problems with their parents. "Oh, yeah. My mom wont let me do this". Poor moms, they weren't even there to defend themselves! But, I think that can be said about any meeting you know where there is always a kid that's sometimes just having a hard day and wants to share or a great day and that's not what you're focusing on. Um, how to, but
for me it’s more of like it’s the part where you don’t know what’s going to be shared next. And not necessarily what going to be said, but if those words are going to impact the other kids the circle. Which comes down to me and my facilitation and how do I handle that subject, the content. And so, those are difficult ones.
I: So, how do you end up facilitating those situations?
P: Well, I try to validate whatever it is that they’re sharing and I also try to find common experiences. So, maybe it may not necessarily be in that exact example. But, you know, “Thank you for sharing so-and-so. Is there anyone else that’s felt frustrated with um anyone? Their mom, their dad, their little brothers? Has anyone else felt that way?” Um so you have to kind of validate what that person’s feeling but to also show kids compassion and empathy that you know we might have different experiences but we experience things as our compañeros...our friends, classmates.
I: All right. So it sounds like you are able to make connections between the students even if there is maybe a challenging or unexpected topic that comes up
P: Yeah, I’ve just found that that’s, I’ve just found that that helps students feel more safe and comfortable for continuing to share their experiences.
I: So they are demonstrating that they are safe and comfortable by continuing to share throughout the class meetings.
P: Yeah
I: Cool. So this is the last formal question. How do you view yourself as a facilitator?
P: How do I view myself? What do you mean?
I: So you can interpret that however you want. Maybe how do you see your role? What do you think your job is? What would other people see if they looked in on you? Maybe something within that...
P: Um...(silence). Like, I think that for me, in my classroom, my goal is to build relationships amongst kids and amongst teachers. And so I think that my role in class meeting is to provide students with a safe place to be able to continue to share what it is that they want to experience. In by doing that, I think that my role is to always to try and read my class, read my room, who my audience is, how are they feeling. Because, kids don’t always feel the same every single day. Um, and so I think that my, my, um I think that my role is to be able to do that but also to um not just have a class meeting to have a class meeting. But, really have a goal, and intent, and a purpose. And so to answer your question...
I: Yeah, so...how you view yourself, what’s your role. So what are your typical goals, intents, or purposes when you are introducing class meeting?
P: Well, it can change. So, it depends on what is going on in our classroom. So, um, in pre-K one of our issues, one of the things we’ve been talking a lot about is picking up after ourselves, cleaning up when we’re done. So, I can have a class meeting on when is a time you have you know, helped someone at your house put their things away? How does that make you feel? How do you think it made your brother feel? - Or whatever it is that they’re talking about. But, I have my question kind of ready. I mean some, to be able to guide, to kind of get the information shared with the class that we want to be talking about. And sometimes kids bring up their own that they want to talk about in class meeting. And then, again, sometimes we can have it right there on the spot, if I feel like that’s... and if students are like that’s something we need to do right then and there. Or, I can say, "Is that something we can put on our circle time for tomorrow?"
I: So when students bring their agenda or topic, does that change your role?
P: Yeah because they are really leading the class meeting, I'm not. Like, [a student] he was asking the questions about "And, what did you put in your new room?" You know it wasn’t me leading that conversation, so. In 4th grade I had kids...we would put class meetings in like a jar, ideas. And whosoever idea it was, they would run the meeting. You know, and so it was...in pre-K its a little different because, you know, their attention isn't as long to be able to do that and so I help them a lot more, but...
I: So by 4th grade they're able to have student facilitators. And then what do you do?
P: Yeah, I think when they get... Um, I listen. You know, I listen to see where the conversation is going. You know, I guide the reflecting questions if we have those at the end. You know, I just listen. I don't always need to be talking. I would much rather them have that conversation with each other than me doing any of that.
I: Do they walk into your class able to do that in 4th grade?
P: Uh, what do you mean, like run a circle?
I: Uh-huh
P: Um, it depends on if they've have experience doing that before. I've had classes where the teacher before me has run class meetings and they could do that. I've had classes where they come from teachers who have never done that, and so no, I mean they don't...
I: So you can tell a significant difference
P: Yeah, but kids can have conversations, you know. Kids can ask questions. And kids generally care about other kids and want to validate what they are saying or share a common experience with them. So, it's something that happens organically and naturally with them.
I: So what else would you like to share about your experience with class meetings?
P: Uh, well, there's very few times in my teaching career, very few days that I haven't had a class meeting. I think its something that is important for classroom community. And I think that it can look differently in different classrooms but I think that in my experience it seems that kids have enjoyed that space to be able to be heard or even to have the space to just listen. Um, and so, I find it a very important tool in my classroom.
I: So how do you create the structure where you consistently have time for class meetings?
P: Um, I plan it into my day. Uh and, but its also about um...I think that a class meeting is just as important as math. And I think it's just as important as writing. And it's just as important as reading. And I think that it's a long-term investment. I think that I will, my students will perform better in reading and writing and math, and science if they feel included and if they feel comfortable and they feel safe and they feel connected to their peers. So that they are able to learn in the classroom environment. And so, um, I plan 10, 15 minutes into my day. And if that cuts into something else I don't think it's a waste of time and I don't see it as cutting into something else. I see it as um; investing in what I know is good for kids.
I: Have you experienced any systemic barriers that would keep you from finding that time?
P: Um, no. And I say that because there's very few principals that I have worked with that if I say "I want to work on community and relationship with my kids", are going to tell me "no". I mean it just doesn't make sense. I think that if I go in and am questioned about it that I could be able to show and tell why I want to do this. And, I mean, no. I personally haven't had...I've heard from other teachers that its...
I: And when you speak about principals, what has been the affect of leadership with class meetings and how you facilitate them, if anything?
P: What have they done to help?
I: Potentially, or not. Has there been any involvement whatsoever from administration or leadership?
P: I think there’s been support. We’ve had, you know, in the last couple of years our principal you know believes in Tribes and thinks that’s good, and we’ve had training on that. Tribes is a whole idea not just a class meeting, but its part of that. I think that effective leadership uh, knows that teachers are professionals in their classroom and are supportive of things that they know are best-practice. And so, I guess, in that sense, there are things that my principal has done, trusting in my professionalism and knowing as an educator what works in my classroom and being able to support that. I’ve never had to defend spending 10 minutes a day on a class meeting.
I: Anything else you would like to share?
P: I don’t think so.
I: Ok well, thank you.
P: You’re welcome.
I: This is about class meetings. And so the first question is how did you develop or not develop confidence in leading class meetings.
P: I think I developed confidence in leading class meetings by just having them, so-- and being uncomfortable, being comfortable with the uncomfortable, so those silent moments when kids really don't have anything to say. Kind of settling up agreements in place where there's systems in place where if they don't have anything to say, that's okay. It's not like an awkward silence kind of ruins the flow of conversation, so adopting those community agreements from Tribes, things like that I have found have helped me become more comfortable with the class meeting because I have some sort of structure, even though it's not planned out to the T.
I: So it's those agreements, that kind of loose structure, and just doing it that created the confidence.
P: Yeah because we all are able to hold ourselves accountable to the agreement, so it either allows us the space to not participate on the space to participate fully, whatever the students are comfortable with and myself, contributing as a teacher also.
I: So you feel confident no matter that range of participation of students.
P: Yeah, I don't ever have-- my goal of the class meetings is to not force everybody to participate because I told them to but to come to their own level of comfort within our own classroom community to be willing to share, and I don't think that's on the teacher’s set time but rather what the student feels is appropriate for them and their level of participation.
I: Great. So then how did you decide to start doing class meetings?
P: I did it because my experience of working with other veteran teachers that have been doing it and teachers that I really respected had told me that you need to try this. This is hands-down the best tool that you can use as a first-year teacher. And so my mentor teacher used that in her classroom when I was a student teacher. And so I got to see her run a classroom meeting and then was able to run a classroom meeting during my student teaching experience. And so I was able to see the connections and the benefit of it. And so that was-- it really was just the advice of other veteran teachers saying, "Trust me, this works." And then I was given a Tribes book. Trust me, this works. Read this book, along with, like, love and logic, because that kind of helps guide our conversations and makes me feel a little more prepared if something out of the ordinary-- you know, something I'm not expecting comes up. And so that's really why I decided.
I: So it's like that advice as well as the opportunity to observe, and the resources to know how to do it.
P: Right.
I: So then what, if anything, motivates you to continue to implement class meetings as a strategy in your classroom?
P: I think that I am a better educator when I know my students, and I think that-- and know them both academically but also personally and outside of the classroom. And I think that
class meetings give me the space to do that, to really try and form a whole student picture when I’m addressing their educational needs or even emotional needs in the classroom.

I: So you feel more successful as a teacher when you implement class meetings?
P: Yeah, because I’m able to form a relationship with my students during class meeting. The days are so fast. And so even the time, you know, six minutes. That’s how much time I have. And I set my timer to just touch in with each student-- I feel pays dividends, pays off in the long run.

I: So it’s a little bit more complex. How do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect the way you engage in class meetings?
P: Say that again?

I: So how do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect the way you engage in class meetings?
P: So my pedagogy is grounded in the fact that relationships is one of the most important aspects of teaching. And if a student knows that you care about them as a human being, as an academic, as a mathematician, as a writer, then it’s not that they’re going to work for me, but rather this relationship where we’re going to work with each other. I think it shows them-- I believe that if my students see me making effort and working hard and being happy every single day I come to work, they’re going to do their part, too. I think that my belief system in that if my students aren’t succeeding, that isn’t just on my students. That’s on me. I’m very reflective on my teaching practices, what I need to improve on daily, hourly, minute by minute. And the class meetings allow me that time to reflect. And so even if we have a class meeting on-- right before break our question was what is the hardest thing for you in math right now. Hearing their responses really allowed me to go back and change my instruction on what’s going to meet their needs best based on how they’ve internalized themselves what they need to work on. And so I think that that’s what my belief system is grounded in, forming relationships, really getting to know students and what their needs are. And how can I alter my instruction and differentiate my instruction to meet them and their needs of where they’re at and who they, not just where they’re at, but who they are as people.

I: So kind of to ask you more-- really specifically-- do you feel like that pedagogy was present for you early in your career, and that’s why you embrace class meeting? Or do you think class meeting changed the way you thought about teaching.
P: I think that that’s what I believed before I started class meeting because-- and I think because I believed that getting to know my kids was important, I prioritize class meetings as something I should do every single day because it was a way that I could do that, an efficient way to be able to do that when you have 60 kids.

I: So your belief system is around relationships guides your teaching, and class meeting is like a tool within that?
P: Yeah.

I: Okay. This one’s kind of long. So my first round of interviews, I discovered that teachers take on multiple roles as facilitators of class meeting, from the manager during the meetings, the person who mediates during the meetings, or even the person who creates the structure to allow students to facilitate the meetings themselves. All of these roles require some relinquishment of the teacher role during facilitation. What would need to happen for you to let go of the teacher role when leading a class meeting?
P: I think students being aware of whatever system they've set in place and being—having a solid understanding of the process and what our goal is. So I think it's all about if— I have no problem having my students run the class meeting when they know that the intent of our meetings are to get to know one another, figure out what our strengths and weaknesses are, how can we help each other become better learners in our community and in our classroom? I mean, that's something that is very— I don't think that I would have an issue letting go of my control for students to run the class meetings or for me to not run them.

I: So that would be a natural relinquishment of power for you.

P: Yeah, I mean, I think with anything in teaching, I think that students learn the best when they're able to have that space for meta-cognition, where they're really thinking about what it is that they're thinking about. And you know, I think that in order for students to do that, you have to have some sort of foundation, something in place so that they have something solid to stand on to be able to get to where it is that they want to go. For math it's the same thing. I'm not going to always tell them the correct answer to a word problem. I'd much rather allow them to work through and figure it out. What do you think? It's the same, I think, in class meetings. You trust that students are here to learn, and that's why they're here. I don't think any student comes into class, like, "Well, I'm not going to learn today in my classroom." I mean, that's all. That's why they're there. And so I trust in that and I trust that they want to be there.

I: So you create the structure, but you trust your students because you've kind of put that structure in place for them. They know what the foundation is—P: Yeah, or they put that structure in place for themselves. It's really about what works best. Every class dynamic is different. And so it's about what works best for each class dynamic. I think that in some classes, there's— I've had dynamics where kids can come up with their own agreements, and I don't have to really guide them very much in the direction that they want to go. And it functions fine. I have other classes where I need to do a little more guiding to get them to a place where we could have a conversation or have a safe place to have a community meeting.

I: And do you have a sense where those dynamics come from, why it's different for classes?

P: I think that each class has a different set of student personalities. And sometimes those personalities show in different ways. You know, this year, I have some very strong personalities in my classroom. And I am strategic with how I present information or how I give information, but also, they learn more because their personality is that way if I kind of relinquish some of that control and where I would give options of projects. Like, here's three options that you can do. Pick one. For this cohort, this group of kids, that doesn't work. They feel like I'm confining them. So for them, it works better to just say, "Okay, here's the objective. You need to show me that you have an understanding of this story. You are able to write a summary, and you can present it to an audience. I don't care how you do that. Get with your group and figure out how you're going to make that happen."

And then there's other classes where if I do that, they're like, "What do you mean? What are you talking about? Where's my rubric? Where's my checklist? Where's my--?" And so you know, it's about finding a middle, getting all students to have exposure to all different things, but personalities play a huge, huge role in that dynamic. And really big personalities sometimes quiet other personality, other people, and how to— I mean, that's one of the big things about community circle is that people that really want to dominate the
conversation-- or not dominate, but they want to share more. Their story is the most important and their experience is the most important, finding that space for people that are quiet or don't really feel comfortable sharing a public way to get them to be able to feel comfortable doing that, finding a balance.
I: All right. That’s all I have. Thank you.
P: That’s it? That was easy.
Interview D – First Round

I: Interviewer  
P: Participant

I: So, my first question is: What has it been like for you to facilitate class meetings? 
P: Um, really rewarding. And I found that I’ve done them in multiple venues so when I taught second grade I did it with my homeroom class and then teaching K-4 as an ELD facilitator I’m working with groups of kids for short amounts of time. Um, I used it with one of my groups that had a particularly hard time with transitions and that sort of thing and staying on-task in group. Um, so it’s been different in each experience. Do you want more detail on either one of those? 
I: Yeah. 
P: Ok, so...when I did it in second grade I was able to do regular class meetings, I would do once a week, and we would do some problem solving, and we had ground rules, Tribe-style agreements. And I co-facilitated [edited for confidentiality] with our special education facilitator at the time. And she kind of led me through it because I hadn’t been familiar with it before that. And it really helped us work through just everything that the kids were feeling needed to be worked through. And, so that just varied depending on the time. This year when I did with -- um as an ELD facilitator, it took me a really long time to figure out that’s what they needed and that I should make time and space for that. Um, so by the end of the year I was just struggling with group trying to get academics in and I...one day they got in huge trouble with the substitute and I sat them down and we did a circle and we had our agreements and the rest of the class period was so much more productive than I’d had the rest of the year. And so with certain groups of kids like that it really worth it to start every day with a class meeting. 
I: So, how did you discover with that specific group, that class meeting was needed? 
P: Um, well I’d tried all my normal tricks, they didn’t work. And then we had been Tribes trained in our building and it had been about a year since we had been Tribes-trained and I just thought I have to try something different. And so, I was pulling things out of my Tribes book and decided we are just going to do this in a circle and try to problem-solve that specific thing. And when I saw the result of how problem solving that thing with the substitute went, I found that it was great, for it was open, which was what they needed. 
I: Ok. Thank you. So, how does your training affect your experience of facilitating class meeting? 
P: My training in terms of class meeting specifically? Or just anything? 
I: Anything or how you want to conceptualize it 
P: Um, how does it affect it, is that what you said? 
I: Uh-huh. 
P: Okay. Um, so we’re really lucky that we’re Tribes trained, first of all, I think. Um, because that was a really positive way to get some really good ideas of how to run a class meeting and other things within your classroom and other things, not just class meeting. Um, but also I had [the special education facilitator] helping me and she taught me about class meetings earlier on. And I found that they were really effective. Um, so that training was nice. I really liked having specific -- um, the Tribes has the four agreements, I really liked having that specific structure. Especially when I was first starting class meetings and you
don't really know-- you Google whatever. So just having a structure to follow in the beginning and then you can kind of tweak it to the students’ needs after that.

I: So it sounds like there was both like a philosophy that helped support you, you know, through your training of class meetings as well as a specific person who potentially modeled that for you?

P: Yeah. And [the special education facilitator] had been Tribes trained, so.

I: So it came from that same background.

P: Yeah.

I: And what about your teacher prep experience prior to maybe becoming a teacher - was there anything specific that lead to that?

P: Nope. Um so, I got my teaching degree in [an East-coast state] which has nothing to do with training but their program looks slightly different that what I’ve seen student teachers in [in this state] go through. Um, and there was nothing on classroom management, period. Um, there was some conversations about it but there was no structure specific to that. Um, and then I got my master’s degree here in [in this state] and so still there’s really...there were some big theories and things, but nothing specific. Which was -- my first year teaching was a disaster because of that. So, um and it takes a long time to figure out your personality and kids' personalities and everyone else’s ideas and then figure out what works. So it took me a good two or three years to get a classroom management style that really fit my personality. So...

I: And so when in that process did you get that modeling?

P: Probably like five or six years into my career. When [the special education facilitator] and I did that. Maybe even further...wait let me do the math...yeah, probably six years in. I: OK. All right, thank you. Um, so who has affected your experience of facilitation and how did they affect you?

P: Um, [the special education facilitator] was the first person who introduced me to this specific structure of classroom meetings. Um, I do take that back. I had, um, a morning meeting book and we did morning meetings when I was student teaching. I forgot about that. And there were some specific structures that are sort of similar to that, but I didn’t use it as often. It wasn’t as, um; it wasn’t as specific, specific as Tribes can be. Um, now I forgot your question because I went on a tangent.

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I: And so when in that process did you get that modeling?

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quiet and this nice little format from when you’re student teaching to when you really need it.

I: The reality.
P: Yeah, and they needed it too, it’s just different.

I: Um, what feelings have you had about facilitating class meetings?
P: Um, when I first started it would make me really nervous because I didn’t feel um, I didn’t think I was doing it the right way, um but I didn’t know what the right way necessarily was or if there was a right way. Um, and I wanted to make sure that the kids were getting something out of it and I wasn’t always sure if they were getting something out of it in the beginning. That was hard in the beginning um over time that has improved as I’ve gotten more comfortable and confident in it and also just learned to read the kids’ body language and not all kids are going to be like, "That was awesome". Um, so...

I: So I heard you talk about feeling kind of nervous at the beginning and you’ve felt rewarded more recently in your career.

I: Um, can you tell about a time when facilitation was particularly rewarding and time when facilitation was particularly challenging?
P: Um, it was challenging in the beginning just because, like I said I didn’t really know what I was doing. Rewarding, however, was again this year. I did an activity with that group, um...(deleted), where, this is a Tribes-type activity that I found online, that I can’t quote because I don’t remember because I didn’t write it down, but it was Tribes-type activity. Um, where we had worked some through some problems going on in our class and one day I just wanted the kids to um talk about themselves in a different way. And I had some slips of paper that personality traits listed on them and I put them on chairs ahead of time with a piece of tape and I had the kids come in and pick the word that described them and then when they sat down and started to talk about it, um, I learned all sorts of stuff about these kids that I kinda had an idea about but I never thought they would ever verbalize to me and it was incredibly, incredibly rewarding. And I think they felt good being able to talk about it.

I: So talk about rewarding a little bit. What does that mean?
P: Um, I guess – um, by rewarding I guess for me it means I felt good about it but I could also see the impact that it had on the kids and I could feel that impact. And I could feel it during um the meetings but also during class time. And there is level of trust that increases over time with those kinds of meetings where because they’re able to express themselves more. Um they learn to trust me more, and trust themselves more and then a side effect of that is that there academics improve and get more quality time out of it.

I: So you experience that rewarding component both in the meeting and kind of as a result of the meeting.
P: Yeah. I would say with that group, yeah both, it was both, it was both. I was almost going to say more academically. At the beginning I felt it more academically because academics
had been so hard for a while. And so when I was able to get more academics out of them for like the 20 minutes that followed than I had been for half-hour it was a relief, honestly. It was extremely like great.

I: And, I guess, what about the class meeting really facilitated the academic piece improving?

P: Um, a couple of things. One, starting with a predictable structure every day, um, was really important for this particular group and most kids I think that’s true for. But also, a chance for them to be able to just talk about things they’re feeling and get it off their chest and um or even silly icebreaker games to get the silliness out of the way, the rest of the time period was so much better if they could just like get all that out first. And so it just depended. On some days we did class meetings with serious content and sometimes we just did like icebreaker, just fun, like, community-building stuff.

I: And, you mentioned that kind of in the beginning of your career you had more challenging class meetings. Can you recall a specific example?

P: Um, they were challenging in that...they weren’t challenging to run necessarily. I just wasn’t sure I was getting the bang for my buck, I guess. I wasn’t sure if spending a half hour once a week I was getting enough out of them in the beginning. So that’s where that structure and some training make sense. Um, it worked for some problem solving between kids. Like specifically, in the beginning, it worked with like recess issues. But then the challenge was I wasn’t always know what to say or how much to say and how much to just let them work it out. So that was another thing, how do you figure out that balance? But I don’t have like one particular meeting that was just super challenging necessarily. They all had pros and cons.

I: So have you come to a place now where you feel like you understand that balance between student participation and teacher facilitation?

P: Um, depends on the group. It really does. It depend on the kid, depends on the group. Sometime I feel like I’ve done a great job with it and other times I’m like "gosh, I don’t know". I don’t know if I’ve stepped in enough, I mean same thing with my own children at home. I never know if I’ve stepping too much or not enough. I don’t know if I will ever have that figured out.

I: Can you figure out what characteristics of that group make it more clear or facilitation more, kid of...

P: With the group I had this year?

I: Well, just like, is there anything about the student dynamics that make facilitation a more simple process for you?

P: Um, that’s a good question. I think with the group this year that made it really clear was after I’d done it, and the result. During the meetings, it depended on the day. Um, some days were rough. Um, kids would goof off so they could get kicked out of group. That’s never a permanent thing; they get kicked out temporarily and can ask to come back. Its one of the things I learned from [the special education facilitator].

I: Okay. This is the last real formal question: How do you view yourself as a facilitator?

P: Well, that’s a broad question. I think that I’m always going to be growing and changing and tweaking as I go. But, now that I’ve done it long enough I feel like the tweaks are easier and smaller tweaks that I can do and its easier to adapt depending on the group now that I’ve done class meetings more. Like, and I’ve done it with several groups of kids, so I kind of know what kind of things I need to do to change it, sometimes.
I: But, in general, you would say that you view yourself as a more adaptive facilitator.
P: Yeah.
I: Okay. And where do you think that comes from: learning to adapt?
P: Um, experience...and tools. Like with Tribes they have all these activities that you can do. So like being able to go into that book and flip through it and say, "Okay, today I think my group is going to need this like fun activity". The next day they need something a little more serious and I can go through and find things that are not just in my head. So having those tools is really huge.
I: So being a blank-slate with no background is what was a challenge but having experience and tools can help with that facilitation.
P: Yep. And support. Other people who would do class meetings.
I: Talk about that support a little bit.
P: So, um, when I first started doing class meetings there were only a couple of us who did them. [Another teacher] was there and the time and he did them effectively, and [the special education facilitator]. And then I don’t think anyone else did at the time that I can think of. But, having them to talk to was really huge. And then now, almost everybody in our building does some sort of class meeting. And we all do it differently, so it’s really nice to have conversations and toss ideas around. "Hey, I did it this way and it wasn’t very effective. What would you do differently?" Um, so being able to have that as a support.
I: So it is really that teaming and collaboration that helped support you.
P: Yeah, yep. I’ve got to talk things out, that’s my personality.
I: So is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with class meetings?
P: Um, they’re hugely important, I think. In terms of a lot of things: building community, but also, um with our --well, I think its true for all kids, all kids have things they need to get off their chests and talk about and they need a safe place to do that. So, um, I think that class meetings really help facilitate that.
I: Okay, thank you.
P: You’re welcome!
Interview D - Second Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: So again we’re talking about class meetings. So how did you develop or not develop confidence in leading class meetings?
P: I would say that practicing class meetings with kids beyond the theory of it. Actually being in it is the biggest key because every time I do one I tweak something or we do something different depending on what the kids need and I think that and just having time to process and somebody else and say hey, this is what I tried in class meeting today is helpful.
I: And consulting is key.
P: Yeah consulting and then just the practice of it is a big thing.
I: Okay. So then how did you decide to start doing class meetings?
P: I decided-- well I’ve done them for years, but I initially decided because there were behavioral problems and I needed a different way to address it and I feel like the first time I did, the behavioral problems were not happening within my classroom. They were happening in other areas of the school and I was trying to minimize that because when they came back from like recess and unstructured areas they’d come back with all of that and not be able to connect academically. That started with behavior and then I went from there more to multiple uses. Sometimes I use it for behavior, sometimes I use it problem solving, sometimes I use it just for building community.
I: Okay. So when you first started it was really responsive and an incident would happen to deal with.
P: Yeah, yeah.
I: And so how did you know to use that as a strategy?
P: I got the idea from [the special education facilitator] who was here at the time (inaudible) to consult her.
I: So then had you observed them first?
P: No, but she went over them with me.
I: Okay.
P: So we would get together it was then there was an open classroom, which used to be our magic room. I think it might have been before it was the magic room. It was just open and so we used that space and she led them in the beginning and then we co-led them and then we eventually taught the kids to be the facilitators.
I: Okay. So then what if anything motivates you to continue to implement class meetings as a strategy in your classroom?
P: They work. So for problem solving it’s just what the kids need to have a structured and safe environment where they can work things out to problem solve class issues or like individual issues. When I first started out it might be like some kid pushed another kid on the playground and they needed to figure out how to resolve that. And then more recently I’ve had bigger class groups who had struggled with behavior as a cohort and so just being able to sit and find a time to gather, have a calm moment, build community and also do some problem solving about how our day was going to go and with both of those if I spend
the time doing those things then they focus on their academics because the other stuff was taken care of.
I: So it was actually like the outcomes motivated you to continue to do it?
P: Yeah, yeah.
I: And would you say really the outcome of them on the academics is what motivates you?
P: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.
I: So then how do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect the way you engage in class meetings?
P: Can you repeat that one?
I: So how do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect the way you engage in class meetings?
P: That’s a really bad question. I’m trying to think of how to narrow that down into one response. While I believe that kids have more going on in their heads than just soaking up academics and our goal is to get our kids to be successful academically but if they can’t focus on that then we need to address that. So I don’t know if that answers that question totally but if I want this outcome of having my kids be successful in academics but they can’t focus on it then it makes sense to take 5 minutes or 10 minutes to do a community circle before class starts. Does that answer? I don’t know if that answers that question.
I: So then let me ask a little deeper into that. So then is it your belief that it’s your role to process kids’ inside personal experiences?
P: Yeah, I think it’s every teacher’s role.
I: Has that always been your (inaudible)?
P: Yeah, yeah. I think it’s always in my life but I think as I become more confident I feel like I can take a stand more. Like I feel like I can talk to our principal or superintendent and say hey for example, we had a big election we had a lot of feelings about it. And I said one day soon I’m going to do community circle and we’re going to sit and talk about that. And I feel like I can do that and get the permission without getting in trouble whereas starting off I probably would have been more hesitant to spend more time on something other than just academics.
I: Okay so that makes me think of like the hierarchy and needs. I don’t know if you’ve learned kind of about that -- but the need to feel safe before they can learn? [Inaudible] Like if the kids needs something like basic things before they can use them and it is your role and responsibility to provide that.
P: And I think all kids need that. I think kids exhibit it in different ways and so I like doing community circle. Like I think that it has started with behavior things but then it’s benefited the group as a whole even the kids who might not really speak up in the same way or react in the same way so outwardly. It helps internalizers too.
I: So this is long. Ready?
P: Okay.
I: So in my first round of interviews I discovered that teachers take on multiple roles as facilitators of class meetings from the manager during the meeting, the person who mediates during the meeting or even the person who creates the structure to facilitate the meetings themselves. All of these roles require some relinquishment of a teacher role during facilitation. What would need to happen for you to let go of the teacher role when leading a class meeting?
P: Well I really appreciate that I got to co-lead with [the special education facilitator] because she taught me how to do that your know first. It’s just like I do, we do, you do that we learned in other academic areas. So far we lead the class completely and we structure it and then little by little we can let go of our responsibilities and then the kids eventually can basically run it and it depends on (inaudible) that can really handle that whether it’s a student facilitator and we’ve had multiple roles like a timekeeper and that sort of thing or it could be a little bit less structured-- could be but it just depends on the cohort.

I: So you need to know that the students can hold their responsibility with their new role in the class meetings?

P: Yeah.

I: Before you can hand it over.

P: Let go. Yeah. (Inaudible) just try it and see if it works. After enough modeling after I know they understand the structure of the class meeting well enough to know the process. The next step is, once they have that internalized, I guess -- then we can just give it a go and see if they’re ready for it and if they’re not then I take the power back for a little bit and then we can try again with a different kid or you know it’s just kind of like a you got to test it out.

I: Has there ever been a situation that you’ve had with a group that you’ve never been able to really assume the facilitator role?

P: I have a group right now. I would like -- so this is a group I had last year -- so I talked about it in my last interview. I have them again this year and we’ve had a very similar structure and it’s like baby steps. For a year and a third now we’re like getting better and better and better but its slow going. I think they might now be at the point where there are kids who could lead it I think. I don’t know.

I: And you learn that by trying it?

P: Yeah.

I: And how do you feel when you relinquish that?

P: I actually think we they can run it and it’s empowering for them if they can handle it.

I: So then tell me do you think is related to personality, group dynamics -- like what would be getting in the way of students being able to handle it?

P: Um, well it depends on the situation. As I’m talking about it I’m actually thinking -- I’m wondering at this point because I’ve had these kids for so long and it’s been such a struggle, I wonder if some of it is me being worried about letting go of my control because I’m afraid that chaos is going to ensue. That’s part of it but I do have some personalities in this particular group that can just throw everybody else off.

I: So it’s individual.

P: Which could be both. Yeah not like our cohort as much I guess. There are like a few individuals who could do it or could throw it.

I: You won’t know until you try.

P: I know.

I: All right that’s all I have.

P: Yeah.

I: Thank you.
Interview E – First Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: So my first question is, what has it been like for you to facilitate class meetings?
P: I think it’s been interesting um, trying to get a response out of children because some don’t want to talk, some are very eager to talk. Um, I think it’s been helpful, as far as dealing with you know, behavior in the classroom, or certain things that pull the character traits to kind of get a common topic. Um, and we’ve even done them related to academics. But, yet maybe a little uncomfortable because they are still sort of new to me so it’s about me trying to figure out what the best way of running them is.
I: So what is it like for you when some kids want to talk and some kids who don’t want to so much?
P: Um, well I did the Tribes, you know, with the right to pass. I find a lot of children who don’t want to talk are ELL students. Um, and I find too when we do the “you can take the right to pass” and then we ask again at the end, I usually get one or two more who decide to participate. I mean I would like 100 percent participation but I have also found that children at the beginning are usually pretty quiet but by the end of the year most of them are willing to participate.
I: So how do you, what do you attribute to that? How does that happen?
P: I think they understand what a class meetings is about. And I think they are comfortable in the classroom and they’ve...like if they’re shy they’ve gotten comfortable with me they’ve gotten comfortable in their classroom. If they are an ELL student, they’ve had a whole year of kind of practicing and listening to English. So, I think it’s just a comfort level.
I: So how does your training affect your experience of facilitating class meetings?
P: I think it’s helped. Honestly, I never did class meetings until I came to [this state]. I taught for ten years in [another state] and didn’t do them. And then it was [the special education facilitator] who led some class meeting to deal with some situations with special ed students in my classroom. And I thought it was so neat. But, I still really didn’t know how to do them and, I um --I feel Tribes training was really helpful to get that up and running for me. Um, I’m sorry what was the...
I: How was your training...?
P: Oh, how was my training. So I think Tribes was great. Before that it was like I didn’t do them or I just sort of saw what someone else did and I talked with somebody else who did it and kind of tried to gather information that way, but. So, I liked the different strategies and Tribes had a lot of different activities so it’s not just the same type of way to have a class meeting all the time. You could do different activities.
I: So its kind of like hands-on practical experiences that you liked about Tribes.
P: Right. And, the fact that we had training which was really great and we got to practice the strategies as well, it wasn’t just like, here’s a way to do it. It was that we actually did it.
I: And teachers did it together.
P: Right, right.
I: So my next question is who has affected your experience of facilitation and how did they affect you?
P: Well, I would say [omitted name] a special ed facilitator at my school. Um, I think Tribes training, so [omitted name] our trainer. Um, and I think ultimately, my students helped because I wanted to do something to build community and help deal with classroom issues and behavior problems without, you know, just standing up there lecturing them. I wanted them to take responsibility for some of the things that I saw as a challenge we needed to work with.

I: So, talk a little bit about how um, [the special education facilitator] affected you specifically.

P: Well, I, as I said, had never seen a class meeting before and so she did um, I think its called a circle of friendship, and she just told a story with circles and friends and how some people were kind of outside of the circle and didn’t have friends. And then I had a few special ed students that year who she was basically doing this class meeting for. And, so then we went around in a circle and the children talked about their feelings on friendship and maybe why they um you know didn’t want to associate with certain children because of certain behaviors. Um, and I just saw that as such an amazing opportunity to get the children to talk about feelings and to acknowledge ways that they are different and ways that they are the same. And, it just felt, it just felt good to kind of come together as a group and work towards a common goal. Um, and that was just the first time I saw it and I though "this is amazing, I need to do this more and figure out how to make it work".

I: And how about [the trainer], how did [the trainer] affect your training?

P: Well, she had just all the Tribes training and I just loved her vision of building community and having everyone working together. Um, and I just liked the communication that Tribes wants to get out of students. Um, and she was just kind of a free-spirit hippy-chick. I just kind of think she had a good way to talk about leading community. And so yeah, I’m just inspired by her and the Tribes’ mantra or ideals.

I: Cool. Um, what feelings have you had about facilitating class meetings?

P: Um, I think a whole range. I think, excitement. Trying something new. Um, eagerness of seeing what the students will come up with. Um, a little bit of stress because it is newish trying to come up with different ways to make it engaging and exciting for the students. You know, like having to look up in the Tribes’ book, I don’t want it to get stale. Um, I think in doing them there have been really warm feelings of kind of love and encouragement with the things they’ve said. Um, so yeah, I think its kind of a big mix of good and little bit of stress at times (laughs).

I: Yeah. So what are some of the kinds of things that are warm and encouraging that they might say?

P: Like I’ve done things about what have you learned in school and what have you likes about school so far. And, of course there’s like the sweet kiddos like, "I love my teacher" which is always like sweet. You know but will say things like, "I like the friends I’ve made" or "I like the teachers at my school" not just me but like teachers in general. And I think some of them says the points I want to get out without me having to say it, but it comes from them and so, I’m not sure of like exact wording at this moment. But, if there is like a behavior issue I want to address, its like someone happens to basically address it. And I’m like, "Oh! I couldn’t have said that better myself!" (Laughs).

I: So can you tell about a time when facilitation was particularly rewarding and a time when facilitation was particularly challenging?
P: I would say a particularly rewarding one was um; it is kind of funny because it wasn't like a deep conversation but it was "fork and spoon", but we were doing it with shapes and math. So the children were constantly repeating the shapes. And its sort of complicated because its two sides, lots of talking, not just one person talking. And they just did a great job and we were kind of laughing and having fun because it was a great, it was just great. It went really well. It was our first time doing it and they had a good time with it and they were repeating the mathematical concepts over and over. When it came to um, the person in the middle who had to go, you know, both ways, it was just so --like everybody was like watching and waiting and like encouraging. It was just great. I mean again not like deep, but it went well. Um, and I don't know if its frustrating. But its like, I just did one the other day, and you know it was like on the 7th day of school, and so it was just hard because it was what I talked about earlier, children were quiet. They don't want to talk in front of the class, and so...it just doesn't go as well because I have maybe like a third of the class participating. So, it goes quick and we don't get to hear everyone's voice. So...
I: So, how do you deal with that as a facilitator?
P: Well, I was doing a name game, so I wanted them to say their name and something they liked and then we were trying to figure out similarities and differences. So it was like, "Who likes pizza, just like me?" And then we'd raise our hand. I had like the sentence prompt up on the board. We tried to see what they had in common with their friends. Um, and so if they didn't want to participate I said their name just that we would all start learning their name. And so, you know they still had to hold the ball and we had to acknowledge them. So they sort of participated but without talking
I: So they learned the norms and the process but they didn't engage at the same level as other kids...
P: Right.
I: Um, so this is my last formal question. Um, how do you view yourself as a facilitator?
P: Oh...well (laughs). Uh, sometimes I feel like a do a really good job as a facilitator and sometimes I think I do a mediocre job. I think it depends on how well I've planned for the activity. But, sometimes, you know, and activity or a class meeting presented itself because of a particular behavior so we had to address it right away. And sometimes I feel like those go pretty well because, I don't know, it just kind of happens maybe more naturally than one I tried to plan for. So I don't know, I guess I do see that as my role as facilitator, but I try to make sure that I do use the talking stick like thing. I have like a bath squeegee. So I do try to make sure though that everybody has a chance to hold it and speak if they want. Um, I try to make sure it's equitable for all. So they all do join our circle and um adhere to the agreements and participate if they want. And, yeah, I mean I want it to be engaging for them. So, I guess sometimes it depends on the topic and the particular way we are doing the discussion.
I: So you feel more on the mediocre side when it's less engaging and potentially they are less involved.
P: Maybe. I mean I feel that I still have more to learn about class meetings, so I am by no means an expert with it. Um, so I do think that I am a learner like them, um. But, I do think they are more interesting when more students are engaged and talking. It is sort of like "well, okay lets wrap it up" when they are not all talking. Again, they've all had an opportunity to talk if they wanted. So, yeah I think that I am a learner. I am a student like them, they don't know it but...
I: So how do you learn that then, what strategies do you have?
P: I think practicing. And, just trying to find time to look up more ideas in the Tribes’ book. Uh, and then talking to other teachers which I haven’t had time to do yet this year, but talking to other teachers who have more experience with class meetings and have done them longer than I have.
I: That mentoring piece.
P: Right.
I: Ok, cool. Well, is there anything else you would like to share about your experience of facilitating class meetings?
P: Um, I’m not sure...I like them. And I think ultimately the children like them. I think sometimes its cute because I think its different for them and so I can see them like, they’re excited and they’re a little uncomfortable, um but some of them really get into it. You know some of them are still like spinning and not really like aware that we are doing it (laughs) -- but, um, I think it’s a great community building and I think um, it’s a good way to have a conversation with your class. That really allows all of them to have a solo voice. And ideally, everyone is listening attentively and listening to what their classmates have to say. Ideally.
I: So can ask just one more little...I’ve noticed in some of the other interviews people speak to the developmental level of their students. How do you think that affects your experience...having kindergarteners.
P: Well, I think that’s part of it that for many kindergarten students this is their first time doing something like this. I think this can also be why some of the class meetings are...they go a little faster, they might be quick because they’re not sure of what this is about and they’re like looking at their friends. Figuring out what they’re saying. So yeah, I think, each -- as the progress throughout the grades I think that class meetings probably get a little bit deeper and longer, um. And so we are doing some of the basic training and initial starting for them. But, I think its a good avenue for five and six year olds to practice um, you know, being as a team and taking turns and hearing what their friends have to say.
I: All right... well, thank you...
Interview E –Second Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: Okay, so I’ll warn you, these questions are a little more complex than the first ones, but they’re all about class meetings. The first one is how did you develop or not develop confidence in leading class meetings?
P: That’s a good question. I feel more confident in leading them now, but I still don’t know that I’m fully confident in leading them, and I think it was just talking to people that have done them, seeing someone lead them, and then all the Tribes training kind of helped me feel more comfortable in trying, but you know, I think each time you do them, you kind of just feel a little more confident and comfortable with it. So I think I’m still learning the confidence. But I’m – I feel better with them than two years ago when I barely even attempted them.
I: So your confidence comes from just practice as well as that learning through others?
P: Yes. Yeah. And I think with Tribes, having different strategies and activities to do a class meeting and sort of prompts as well, different things to try with them.
I: How did you decide to start doing class meetings?
P: I wanted to develop community in my class, and I also wanted to help behaviors and kind of have children see that we’re all together and we need to get along, and how can we, you know, show respect toward each other and show kindness. And it just seemed like an important piece that was missing from my class, sharing how other people used class meetings and how it affected their class, stuff that sounded like something I wanted to do.
I: Okay, so you knew about them based on what other people were doing?
P: Yes.
I: And then decided they would be useful for meeting the goals you had around managing behavior and community?
P: Right.
I: Okay.
P: And I saw them, like [inaudible] when I was in third and fourth grade, she led some in my class, and I just had such a good feeling from them. It was such a nice experience, I thought, for the students and teachers.
I: Okay, so it was after you observed them that you considered them as an option for yourself?
P: Right.
I: Okay.
P: Be careful, there (talking to child).
I: What, if anything, motivates you to continue to implement class meetings as a strategy in your classroom?
P: Well, I think-- you know, just what we talked about, having that sense of community. I want to have a safe space in my room where they can share good things or hard things. I want to give everybody a voice and have an opportunity to express themselves if they wish. They have the right to pass, so they may not.
I: So do you see that class meetings do those things, then, for your students? Giving them a voice, and--?
P: I think mostly. I think some of them do like to share and I think it also teaches them that they need to listen to other people. I have a little shower sponge. And so I think it also teaches turn taking, that they all have something to say if they want, and we can all take turns saying things, but even if they might not share, I still think it’s good for them to have the opportunity if they want to. And I think they get more confident as the year goes on, too, that a lot of children who are a little more quiet at the beginning start to talk more by the end of the year.

I: So would you say that some of the outcomes that drive you to continue are their learned skills of listening and turn-taking as well as confidence building?

P: Yeah. I would say that [laughter].

I: Okay. A little summary action, there.

P: Yeah.

I: Okay, so then, here’s a more complex one. How do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect the way you engage in class meetings?

P: That’s a good question. I don’t know. I guess I want children to be engaged, and so as a teacher, I want-- not that learning is always exciting every moment, but I want to keep their attention, and so I want to make a class meeting interesting for them and have it be something that they look forward to and have it be an opportunity to do something in the classroom that’s sort of different. So yeah. I don’t know.

I: Let me ask you kind of an accompanying question. Like, how does class meeting fit into your role as a teacher?

P: I think it fits having a group of students who feel connected to each other, feel connected to me, feel invested in a room, and things we need to learn, ways that we need to treat each other. And so I think it just kind of helps make some of those things flow easily in kind of a safe space for them.

I: So some of those components, like how we treat each other, fit within social-emotional learning. So would you say you believe it’s your role to develop your students socially and emotionally?

P: I think that’s potentially part of it. You know, we want our children to kind of be whole learners, not just an academic piece, but also knowing how to treat others kindly and be a good friend and maybe speak out if needed or share a story that’s maybe, you know, hard to hear. But at the same time, as a classroom teacher, we don’t have a ton of time to invest in that piece, so I think class meetings allows for the, you know, social-emotional part to come out and kind of be at the forefront and be able to play a little role in that.

I: Mm-hm. And you mentioned the child as a whole learner, so you have a belief around children as learning more than academics in school.

P: Right. Right.

I: Okay, so this is a little bit long. In my first round of interviews, I discovered that teachers take on multiple roles as facilitators of class meetings. From the manager during the meetings, the person who mediates during the meetings, or even the person who creates the structure to allow students to facilitate the meetings themselves. All of these roles require some relinquishment of the teacher role during facilitation. What would need to happen for you to let go of the teacher role when leading a class meeting?

P: That’s tricky because I feel like even though the students have the speaking ball and are answering questions and are engaged, I still feel like I am facilitating quietly on the side. I don’t know. I guess I never considered leaving the role as teacher.
I: So then would you say that facilitator role is different than your teaching role, or do you think they're the same?
P: I think for me they feel sort of the same, and yet, it's a different role in the way that I am leading a conversation or asking questions that I want them to answer. But I'm not, you know, feeding them answers or doing it on the smart board. But I still sort of feel like in charge, I don't know.
I: So what would need to happen where you don't have the need to feel in charge?
P: [laughter] I don't know. I've really never thought about it. I guess maybe I could have the students come up with a question or the topic and have someone just kind of (inaudible). Maybe I should try that and see how that goes. Or maybe if something happens in class. Maybe-- no one's done this-- but I can see them saying, "We need a class meeting," to talk about it. But there's definitely students who are capable of kind of keeping the class meeting conversation going. You know?
I: So to let go of that teacher role, you would need confidence that there's students in there that could kind of lead the group.
P: Right. And are you meaning that I'm-- I'm maybe not in the circle, or I'm just maybe not discussing, or I'm not guiding them--?
I: No, I think that-- I'm not meaning anything except like how-- what would happen for you to conceptualize your role as a facilitator as different than your role as a teacher?
P: I see.
I: And maybe they're not. Maybe they're the same.
P: Yeah, I guess it would have to be a really strong student or students, but I don't know. With kindergarten, I've never felt the urge to sort of not facilitate.
I: Because of the developmental stage that they're in?
P: Yeah, I think they seem to need some guidance with it.
I: Mm-hm. All right. Well, that's all I have. Thank you.
P: What have other people said about that?
Interview F– First Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: So um, can you start with just what it’s been like to facilitate class meetings?
P: Um, because I teach multiple subjects it is often times where we’ll call a class meeting. Like if there is an issue that needs to be addressed. So there is not a set time that I do class meetings. I know of other teachers that probably do them once a week on a Friday. We do it at the beginning of the week; we kind of have a meeting, but its kind of a chat and intro into the week. Um, so as far as class meetings go they’re impromptu --um, for the most part to address an issue or to engage all students in a Socratic format.

I: Ok. And what kind of issues would you be responding to in a class meeting?
P: Um, well I can say what our last one was. Let see, at the beginning of the school year um, I put up to Google classroom, I submitted a test to the kids and sent it out, and I have a class set of Chromebooks this year and so its really awesome. But, on Chromebooks compared to PCs and Macs um, you’re unable to lock the screen, meaning kids can open a document, share it with each other during the test, talk to each other about answers, and none of its visible to me. And so, um, I left the comment line open with the first two tests that I gave. And um, the first one was a (inaudible) test on chapters one through four and there were 59 comments in the 45 minutes of the test. And so I left it open, I didn’t tell them what I wanted to use it for because I didn’t want them to jump to another document, I kinda wanted to see what they were doing. And so, when I, when I took a look and there were 59 comments, none of them had to do with cheating or really with the test. They were just chatting. And they were three kids that didn’t finish the test in period and one of them had like 19 comments of the 59 and wanted more time for the test. And I said, "No, I’m sorry you weren’t focused on your test." "What do you mean?" "Well, there’s 19 comments posted by you into the comments file, attached to this test." And another girl got up and said, "Don’t write anything in the next test’s comments bar." So, I’m afraid they probably jumped into another document. But, um, we had a talk about academic integrity; about if I don’t know where they are academically or where their holes are, I cant help take them to their next level. And so we had a class discussion about, you know, what you could post there, what you couldn’t and just kind of, you know, having academic integrity because we are going to be using these Chromebooks all year. So it was facilitated by me, and I brought up the question. And I said "no". One of the students said "I’m hungry" and another said kid said, "Do you have anything in your backpack you can have at recess?" and another kid said, "Talking of food, that test was a piece of cake". And so, I said, you know, I’m glad you guys feel comfortable chatting with each other but this shouldn’t happen during a test. And so we need to make an agreement, this is going to be a classroom agreement, that we are going to, um, be honest and she me what you know yourself, not what you collectively know. And so we had that conversation about how I’m there to support them. At the beginning of the year...actually at the beginning of the year we have a class meeting at the very beginning of the year where they hold a key. It’s like a Hagrid key. It’s a cast iron key; it’s huge. And they say "Only I hold the key to my success". And we pass it around the room. And it’s the last thing we do at the end of the year too. After promotion, we come back to the room, the curtains are pulled, you know, the levers are down. The door’s
closed. The parents are outside. And we go around and pass the key again. And so, "Only I hold the key to my success". 'Cause 6th grade is the year to build responsibility, where they need to own their own learning and they need to drive it. Parents will contact me and say, "What’s going on about this, you know, test?" and its like, "You know, you need to have your child contact me and you need to have your child tell you, and if you would like to have a meeting, the three of us, I would be glad to sit down and facilitate it for the student to lead that meeting." So our meetings so far have been around building responsibility and academic integrity, so far.

I: And what do you feel is the outcomes of those meetings?
P: Um, kind of a group consensus -- that we are in agreement of how we will proceed from here. And so I’m not always, I mean I’m the facilitator as far as I’m looking, you know I was looking for that consensus by the end of the meeting. And I wanted everyone to understand why I felt it was important for them to have more buy-in to it. And so I like it when someone else brings up an issue and then I can jump in and help direct it because then I don’t own it and they don’t feel like it’s the teacher telling them. They are coming up with it on their own. Then they are supporting each other that way. Socratic seminar, I’m sorry I’m coming off topic here...

I: Yeah but that’s kind of the point of having that system in place
P: So regarding Socratic seminar, they will turn their knees to the center of the room. There is a posting, we review the rules of Socratic seminar: one person talks at a time, two people talk at the same time someone relinquishes the floor, um you can respectfully disagree, there’s no -you know, emotional response, you take a breath and you need to be as neutral as possible when you say something. And if you disagree you can, "you know what, I respectfully disagree with Sammy, but I think that ..." you know and then tell us what you think. And we have a scribe they record you during group brainstorm they record everything. Whether it is something we are going to use or not, it can be ridiculous, as long as its topic related you know.

I: So that the model that you use is the Socratic seminar.
P: Half the time.
I: Okay, got it. Awesome. So how does your training affect your experience of facilitating class meetings?
P: My facilitator training or teacher training?
I: Whatever training has kind of gotten you there or not. Like was there anything...
P: I think that was there earlier because I’ve been president of a couple of clubs and I facilitated you know meetings from a board standpoint. Um, part of different communities, and part of different, you know PTA and scouts and GATE: Gifted and Talented parent advisory committee, and technology advisory committee for the district. And you know I’m the chair right now for the national advisory board for the national science teachers. And so you know, just communicating...um. So depending on the type of meeting: whether you publish your agenda 72 hours in advance, um whether you gather input to put the agenda together, you just call it "other items" on the bottom, um or if its an impromptu there’s nothing distributed like that but I still have note-taking regardless of the kids of meeting that it is. I think my training; my master’s program in educational leadership had a facilitation class. Um, what was it called? Teacher Education 677. It was called Facilitation. So I had a quarter of facilitation. Um, and how to coach, how to lead, how to put together a program. We came back together...we went out and tried it and then came back and talked
about our successes and where we get support. And you know, did that over the course of a quarter. So, I thought the training was excellent. I didn’t get a training like that in my first masters which was in cross-cultural teaching. Um, but I think the cross-cultural teaching itself was very helpful. My class, um, this year I have a European student. I have an Afghan student, a Burmese student, um two Chinese students, 15 Indian students, one from Vietnam, two from the Filippians, one from Europe, and one from Mexico. So it’s a really broad mix. And so my first training with cross-cultural teaching was extremely helpful in that um it helped me understand the way that American teachers perceive in trying to teach students is we’ll read a story and then break it up and then continue on the story. But the rest of the world wants the big picture. And so they read the story and go back and they revisit the parts. And so, through that lese - the multicultural lens, I think that has influenced my facilitation because I am pretty transparent in my teaching. If there’s at all a way I can tell my students what going on and why I made the choices that I do I tell them. Because we are team and we are working together to advance their academics, and social, you know the whole child.

I: So would you feel like class meeting and/or Socratic seminar are a culturally responsive practices?
P: It could be. I don’t think it necessarily is. Like, we do like Cornell Notes and other AVID activities that we participate in to help build success. Some of my students come in not reading at grade level, not writing to grade level or below, and I have students who are probably writing at the 10th grade level. So I have a really diverse ability group. And so facilitating that is always...its constantly changing I guess I should say.

I: Its dynamic.
P: Yes, very fluid and very dynamic. So I have my kids sit at table groups. There’s two desks that face each other and next to them are two more desks that face each other and then one that faces in. They are days of the week, that’s what we call them. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday faces forward. Thursday is across from Tuesday. Friday is across from Monday. Struggling students I usually place at a Monday and a Friday. My independent learners or GATE students usually sit at Tuesday and Thursday. And then whoever is in between sits at the Wednesday spot. And what that allows me to do is mixed groups and flexible grouping on the fly. So, ”Mondays and Fridays you work together today”, you know ” Tuesdays and Thursdays you work together and Wednesdays you come down and we’ll do a little mini-lesson”, or something. And then I can put my Monday with my Tuesday and then I’ve got a peer mentor there. You know, I want to mix it up. I don’t want them to have that job all the time. I like it when they can help coach, you know, someone who’s struggling. And then, so I its very dynamic, I guess I would say.

I: Yeah, Ok. It sounds like your students have lots of opportunities to develop community and to develop connections and to work with each other.
P: We develop...classroom community is like my number one priority when we start school. To help them believe in themselves and help them understand that communicating with me, you know, is not a scary thing. If you’re not learning something, or not telling your parents something, I’m coming over to your house and we’re visiting. And you are not in trouble, we just need to figure out how to improve the communication. And so I am pretty clear about that and say it as such.

I: Awesome, that’s cool.
P: I live in the neighborhood that I teach in.
I: Yeah and that makes a difference too.
P: I am five blocks from school. This year I only have one student on my block that's in my room. And last year I only had one but the year before I think I had three. So out of the 44 homes in my neighborhood there's quite a few of my students there.
I: Yeah, that's cool. Um, so who would you say has affected your experience of facilitating class meetings and how did they affect you?
P: Um, my previous principal...we had a new principal last year, so nine years prior, and then I was at a previous school a year before that...um, was actually great at growing capacity and I really, I think that was major influence, not just the principal but other teachers that I have and I see work with my children as volunteers in their classrooms and how they grow capacity in students. So, I, we do a lot of group projects and a lot of group challenges and I like to share that leadership around with the kids and help coach them in being successful. But, I don't step in when there's something that's going wrong unless it is dangerous and then I pull them to the side later on and I will talk to them about what happened and ask what they think, and get them coaching on the side and then get them back -- employ whatever we decided needs to be done. So I think growing capacity is really important at 6th grade.
I: So, would you say, as far as the people who have influenced you in your facilitation it's been your principal, your co-teachers, and potentially even the students themselves?
P: Yes. You know I learn something everyday that's true...my students themselves. But, I'd say, from the facilitation class that I've had, from being part of being a part of different groups throughout the year, from my principal, from teachers I've volunteered in the classroom. I don't know that I get any facilitation -- I don't know that I've learned anything from my colleagues. Um, we have a professional learning community, and we meet once a week for 26 weeks am, this year. Um, my team is 5-teacher, and we all come with different strengths. Two of us have facilitation strengths.
I: So you're not necessarily getting that level of kind of camaraderie in that area from every teacher because everyone brings something different.
P: Yep.
I: Okay, got it.
P: But, definitely I watch my students and take a look at what's going on with them at the different groups and I coach them along and through their challenges. So they will come to me as a group if someone goes to the leader...I usually have a leader and a co-leader in a team of four or five students per group -- or five or six, depending on what we are doing. We just finished a podcast on an early-man presentation. And they were five-, six-person groups. And during those times there were people who weren't pulling their weight and um, so the leader would come to me a say, "What do I need to do?". I would say, "Well, have you talked to your group?" and I would send them back to class with their group first. It comes to an agreement there in how to address the issue and how to get the party engaged and all consult with the group. So, not a whole class meetings, but a small group meeting.
I: Yeah, that makes sense. Um, so then what feelings have you had about facilitating class meetings?
P: I have no anxiety about facilitating class meetings. Um, I enjoy leading class meetings. Often times it's on contemporary issues or something that's in the news that kids up on a Monday and we'll discuss, you know. Probably this next Monday we will discuss about the hurricane and they'll come with all kinds of information I've never heard, you know, and
share it. And students will share, you know, "I saw that thing"; you know "that article". And they will go off more about it and the whole class comes a nice understand for I guess not leveling the playing field but the background experiences are shared so you can have a common starting point to start launching into content. And I usually do more inquiry than content, um, at the beginning, because I want to do that hook. I use a 5-E lesson plan and I've been using it for eight, 10 years.

I: So, as far as the feelings are concerned do you feel confident and really confident in that role as a facilitator?

P: I do.

I: Do you feel like that has developed over time?

P: It's definitely developed over time, but I have never shied away from it. Even as youth. I think that has to do with being the oldest child. Um, my parents were divorced when I was eight and my mom went to school full-time and worked full-time. (Interrupting) But, I've always been, you know...my parents divorced when I was eight, my dad remarried when I was ten. I lived with my mom. We were very poor. Um, and so I've always thought of myself as being my siblings' other mother because I raised them for four years. When my mom was done going to school full time and working full-time, she came back home and she'd say, "[J] eat your peas." And she'd say, "[T], do I have to?" "[B], its time to go to bed its time to turn off the TV." "[T] said I could watch the rest of this program." It was a real conflict when I was in my youth. But I think I facilitated back when I was ten, you know, my family.

I: Right, so maybe your life experiences have primed you to really feel comfortable in this role of facilitator with larger groups of students.

P: I agree.

I: Okay. Okay that makes sense. So, can you tell about a time when facilitation was particularly rewarding and a time when facilitation was particularly challenging?

P: Its always rewarding...I'm trying to think...give me a second to think about a particular instance.

I: Okay

P: What comes to mind right now, and it's probably because the debate is getting ready to start, um, in regards to voting. I have my class vote the ballot. And so I create a mock ballot and um staring on Monday we will discuss a measure every day for the next 13 days. And discuss the general non-pro, non-con, just generic statement of the measure and then the pros and cons and who is presenting the pros and cons. Um, so we did this four years ago and my students had a 95% correlation to the outcome of the election.

I: Wow!

P: It was really amazing.

I: That is amazing.

P: And so I think that was a huge success because it was a conversation that I kind of started with them and they became so interested they started doing research outside and it wasn’t anything I asked them to do. But, because others weren't knowledgeable about the election, they jumped into that. I don’t know...research and came to the table with research and articles, you know bibliographies. You know, it was cool. Um, and, you know, put it together as a class to analyze issues. And it is really, really cool. Um, so I facilitated that discussion. And again, it was one of those things that just came about that I thought was extremely successful. Another one was, lets see, nine years ago. We had a guy on the death
penalty, death row in [my state]. And there was this huge um, public editorial um, huge public comments about whether he should be put to death or remain in prison. And my students came to the table and said "Hey we want to talk about the death penalty and we want to talk about [the state's] stance and what's going to happen"...I don't want to say his name, yeah it was Morales, I can't remember his first name, but that just came to mind. Um, "Want to talk about it." So I had to seek permission to make sure it was something I could discuss within the class and I am very careful as a facilitator not to take a stance and to explore all possibilities. I think that usually how a good facilitator, especially if you are working with you know an issue that has two sides. I'm sometimes, as an adult, it adults groups, I'm a facilitator-participant. But usually working with students I am a facilitator. I'm non-participant facilitator. But, there really wasn't eloquence in that statement... I: No, but I think that provide some insight into your role. And it also demonstrates how you support student autonomy, potentially, through this forum where they can bring topics to the forefront and you allow for that -- Um, because you have somewhat of a neutral stance.
P: Another one that I thought was extremely successful was, we talked about the story of stuff and about the cost of things being manufactured or picked in another country and then put on a truck and then brought up here on a train, and then being packaged, you know everything that foods or products go through. And so, they decided to have...someone said, " I think..." Well, the discussion was should we support global competitive advantage and buy products from around the world so that our products stay low because we have a competitive advantage, we are working on a competitive advantage. Or should we be a local-vore, buy local, buy American, and how does that affect our participation in the global economy? So we looked both ways. They divided themselves 15 and 15. I was shocked because I was thinking that I would have put you know colored papers in a hat, and if you pulled red you are on one side and if you pulled green you were on the other. Um, I didn't have to do that. They split themselves naturally, 15, 15. And um, my son [name ommitted] and his buddy they were seniors that year, um came in a judged the final debate. I showed them a PowerPoint of what a debate looks like. We looked at a couple of debates that students had done. We talked about the process and protocols. We talk a lot about protocols in my class. We talked about the protocol where you give your argument, the other side takes notes, or you take notes too and share them with your team. And they come up with rebuttals and we have rebuttals. So, its been quite rewarding to introduce the students to um argumentation and true class discussion and the like.
I: And it sounds like there is an actual structure that facilitates that so that you can always rely on what structure is...
P: Right. And we have quite a few protocols. That's what we do at the beginning of the year. By the 6th week of school, all the other four teachers on my team are probably about two weeks ahead of me curricularly. However, by the time we hit the second week of January I am about three weeks ahead in everything else, in everything. Being that I have laid down those protocols and we have worked them out as a group, we've made group agreements, and you know everyone knows their role even though it changes based on what activity we are up to. But they know what their roles are, the definition has been established early on. When we have that classroom community that can support each other and the kids can support each other with things like "what am I supposed to do?"
"This is what you're supposed to do." You know, so I don’t have to get involved in that and students support each other.

I: Yeah that’s nice.
P: I love having science camp at the beginning of the year because it really coalesces that community and when we come back we are a team.
I: And that seems like such a priority for you.
P: It is.
I: Okay, I can tell. So, this is my last formal question. Um, how do you view yourself as a facilitator?
P: My role as a facilitator?
I: If that’s how you want to take it
P: How do I view myself as a facilitator? Um, like I said, depending on the issue, I either introduce an issue or the students will introduce an issue. I’m usually a non-participant, with the exception of probably introducing it up front and talking about different views before the students take on different views. Um, I think to clarify and help the process of conversation proceed. At the beginning of the year I hand out, um basically sentence starters, to help them and support pro or con, what someone else has said, and how to enter the floor with a new idea. Um, so I think its pretty well structured. While it’s flexible, it’s pretty well structured. Um, and if we aren’t done with a conversation, usually Socratic, I will say you know, "We are supposed to move into math now. Do you have a problem finishing up this conversation and think it might take another 10 minutes and we’ll pick up 10 more minutes of math tomorrow?" And since I am a multiple-subjects teacher I am allowed to do that, so that really works well with my class.
P: And I think you continuously make that a priority. So you always find that time because it’s necessary for your class.
I: The learning that happens in that time is not something I could plan on just teaching. I love my students working together in groups and during workshop and supporting each other, and the ideas they share with each other. Um, we are getting ready to do 3-D printed bobble heads. My students just cannot wait to get started. Um, I don’t know. We are going to scan them using a Knect from an Xbox. And there is software called Finesse that you can run on Mac. And you can capture the head and you can get the head and above the hair and then we are going to make bobble-heads that boing on their desk and they can sand them down and paint them the color of their hair and skin and eyes and whatever they want. I can’t wait. The kids are very excited about things...I guess I am forward-pushng technology wise. I think that I also love the blogs and the communication there. I get on the blog will leave the blog up and pose an initial question, but I will provide feedback, ongoing feedback on the blog throughout the threaded discussion that my students will have. So, multiple formats for discussion then.
I: Yeah, its seems like it. Very cool.
P: And they have shared groups online. They have shared documents for their different groups and different teams. Um, and so five people will share a document that I am a part of, I mean I will view; I don’t participate in it, just of what’s going on. And then the kids, if they are working in a small group they give each other grades. So if there are five I give them 500 points to distribute them. And if they tell me everybody gets 100 points I tell them something’s wrong with the picture, because I don’t think that’s kind of the truth. So we have to subtract by 10 and add by 10. So, if John didn’t do all his work I took 20 points
off and take 10 to him and 10 to her, you know. And so they tell me why they wrote what they wrote. It basically gives me insight into the group and what’s going on since I can’t be there facilitating all the small groups at the same time.

I: Great. Well, before we end is there anything you want to share about class meetings or building that community?

P: I think classroom community is my number one priority in the beginning of the students. And students finding their voice, finding their place in society, determining what their passion is so that they can move forward in it and develop experience in their passion so when they hit 11th grade and have to write those essays, they have experience in it. So, we talk about what they want to be, early in the year. They develop SMART goals in support of that which came out of high tech: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. And they write me a letter. And when we sit down at conference time in November, they will be a student led conference and talk about how they did in meeting their goals and from that we’ll set future goals. So, I like students to lead.

I: Yeah, yeah, they have a lot of autonomy in your class. Well, awesome.
Interview F - Second Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: So, my first question for you is how did you develop, or not develop, confidence in leading class meetings?
P: Um, I think the first year that I started teaching (inaudible) that if I didn’t develop management of classroom community that first year of teaching, I probably wasn’t going to enjoy teaching. And so I asked around, you know, talked to other teacher about how they developed classroom community and that’s probably how it came about. And that first year I mastered classroom management and built classroom community not as well, of course, as I built up in subsequent years. But, that’s my start off the year – build classroom community (inaudible). So that’s the beginning of the year and then (inaudible) October. And that also helps to building that respect that then the kids can communicate at a deeper level in the classroom with each other.
I: So would you say that your ability to manage the classroom effectively and develop community also increases your confidence in leading class meetings?
P: Absolutely.
I: Okay. So then how did you decide to start doing class meetings?
P: That a good question... (inaudible) built class community and some used Tribes and some used talking sticks. And so we talked about all different kinds of options. And then it kind of developed into a more Socratic format, I guess. Did I answer your question?
I: I think so... so, um, you decided to do them because of those external support systems that were using something similar?
P: Um, I decided that first year I needed to manage class – get classroom management and I don’t do passive approval so if somebody said something to someone else and I caught it, um, I’d have them apologize immediately. Just kind of build respect and say, “You know what, you don’t say shut-up, you know, that’s just not something that you say in 6th grade”. I know they do it at 7th and 8th grade and on and I know some of the teachers swear too, you know, and it’s just not acceptable in school. But, I know that happens. I think, in developing a respect for each other and realizing, you know, what’s socially acceptable, that it kind of is just born out of that, that the students develop not just classroom community but the ability to have a class meeting that is respectful. And that one person talks at a time. And you know, someone yields the floor to someone else. It all kind of came together like that.
I: But, it sounded like you really started implementing even in your first year of teaching.
P: (Inaudible). It’s important. Because without that mutual respect within the classroom, where they have that classroom community, the classroom management could be a bear.
I: So then what, if anything, motivates you to continue to implement class meetings as a strategy in your classroom?
P: Because they are so effective in building that community. And the kids – you know, seeing the kids support each other, over time, you know, as they develop. Kids that (inaudible)... I have one student (inaudible) and he is starting to enjoy school, he’s probably one of the first five picked in the last three things we’ve done. And just by building that,
and helping each kid shine in their strength allows others – you know, the academic ones to appreciate the athletic kids, or...
I: So the outcome you see in your class culture is what really motivates you.
P: Excellent, yep.
I: Okay so this one is a little more complex. So, how do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect they way you engage in class meetings?
P: I’m not a traditional teacher (inaudible) where you stand up front. I think the kids (inaudible) everyday. Where the kids work together in small groups. And I’d say I am more of a coaching facilitator and that’s kind of my teaching philosophy.
I: So you see yourself as a coach or a facilitator both in the teaching role and in the facilitator role as you are leading class meetings.
P: Yep. Well, I don’t know if I really facilitate. I did in the beginning and now the meetings actually hold themselves. So I seek to clarify their...(inaudible), or monitor them (inaudible)...except as a participant, not as a teacher. So more like a participant.
I: Okay. So this is my last question. It is kind of long. So here we go...
P: I’m sorry; I have a headache because I’ve just been doing liquids today. So thanks for straightening me out when I don’t answer the question.
I: So, that’s okay. I know the feeling, it’s terrible. Okay so in my first round of interviews, I discovered that teachers take on multiple roles as facilitators of class meetings: from the manager during the meetings, the person who mediates during the meetings, or even he person who creates the structure to allow students to facilitate the meetings themselves. All of these roles require some relinquishment of the teacher role during facilitation. What would you need to happen for you to let go of the teacher role when leading class meetings?
P: Okay, so I have. Um, what needs to happen? Well, at the beginning of the year there are structures (inaudible). And usually by the end of the first trimester I’m talking to everyone in comments about now its time for you to step into the leadership role; because I want to hear their voice. So there needs to be a structure before I actually – I don’t know, I guess I lead the meeting at the beginning and then in the first two-and-a-half to three weeks, I start to relinquish – I just kind of monitor. And now, I am just a participant. Id, say probably that about (inaudible)...I jump in when something is -- you know, to direct. (Inaudible.) So does that answer...?
I: Yeah, so then the structures you put in early in the year really allow you to let go of the teacher role and allow the students to facilitate themselves.
P: Yes.
I: Well, those are all my formal questions. Did you have any other thoughts about class meetings or input you wanted to have documented?
P: No. I’m happy with what we’ve talked about thus far.
I: All right, great. Well, thank you.
Interview G– First Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: So my first question is what has it been like to facilitate class meetings?
P: I've really enjoyed having class meetings. It gives me the opportunity to talk about concerns that I've seen arise at recess, in the classroom, maybe at the school. And I am able to address them through a book or sometimes I use iBoss YouTube and facilitate a movie about that and we a conversation about how they felt, what they could do when they felt that way and in a positive and in a negative way.
I: So do you feel like they are usually responsive to an issue that’s...
P: I feel like when we first start class meetings it takes them sometime to build that trust as a class so its really important to do some things that are easy to talk about, like, "What’s your favorite food?" to get them comfortable to start sharing and maybe not a difficult topic at hand. But as the school year continues and I start it right from the second week of school. Shall I say we start a class meeting the first week of school but they are very general and things come of those topics that may start to come up as concerns or things that I don’t want to get our of hand I bring up the second week of school. And we have the four agreements with the Tribes that we use and they have the right to pass. And I feel that as they pass and then they come back and they hear their classmates share, that more of them will share not the same answer but something that has affected them in some way, or how they can relate to it. And then I also feel like, because I do the Fabulous Four at the end of the day, they are used to saying apologies and appreciations so they become more comfortable speaking in the class and addressing it in that manner. So that really helps.
I: Okay, cool. So does your training affect your experience of facilitating class meetings?
P: I feel like in the past I might just have had those conversations without building some, I never did the appreciations and Fabulous Four at the end of the day, I feel like that has helped ease them and feel more comfortable about speaking um, with these concerns with the class. I also feel that um, the students I have noticed, kindergarten must have used some of those class meetings because it has really shown this year how they're used to working in collaborative groups, they're used to sharing, taking turns, going around the circle, calling names, they just, its just a calmer group, it seem that they an understanding, a basic understanding from kindergarten, so that really helped. Um, I feel that my training has helped me because I may have just jumped into the conversation before, where now I am providing a weekly lesson on our character traits. So I feel that they are getting more training on what kindness looks like and how can I be kind to someone. Its through actions and conversation and just like somebody dropped something and picking that up, that considered...so not something that’s really difficult but I think the kids get a better understanding because I am also teaching lessons, than just addressing the things at hand.
I: So it’s more comprehensive because there’s components that are part of your class and use the class meeting to support hat.
P: Correct.
I: So like in your teacher training program, did you leave your teacher program using strategies like meetings?
P: So, from the teacher training program, absolutely. I came right away and starting instilling those in the classroom and trying them out. I would say that I have done a better job as our school -- as our school has adopted the character traits and given us that block of time. On Wednesdays we get 45 minutes every Wednesday, this year its thirty minutes, sorry...
I: But, its protected time.
P: Its protected time. And with us um, doing the walk to read model and a lot of transitions for kids with ELD and that, that protected time makes a world of difference.
I: Okay. Who would you say has affected your experience of facilitation and how did they affect you?
P: A student or a colleague?
I: Who ever you want.
P: Well I would say that it's been great that [my team teacher] and I went through the training together, and then adopting those together, talking about it. [Team teacher 1], [team teacher 2] and I team and now we know what we did last year and we kind of "oh this is the idea we had, lets expand upon this", and taking some of their ideas. Also I would say even, you would be happy to know, we took more of [the counselor's] bucket fillers that [she] used as a counselor here at [the elementary school] and um we did the bucket filler book this year with respect and um each of the kids have their own little bucket in their cubby. And we give them time at the end of the day as they are cleaning up to fill it if their bucket got filled for then day. And then at the end of the day part of our Fabulous Four is they have to share who filled their bucket and why they got their bucket filled. And that person that filled the bucket gets to put their name on the big bucket in the classroom. So really instilling some of that. So totally taking ideas from our colleagues. I also have a used a ton of ideas from Pinterest and Teachers Pay Teachers. And, um using some of those models. But, using books, resources that they have out there and ideas. But really trying to make a visual to make the kids related. We use a bulletin board back here so they can see the character trait for the month and then we continuously build on that in our class meetings, with what our conversations are. And I think just having that colleague that has the same value and is taking that same amount of time in their classroom to engage the children in the class meeting helped.
I: Yeah. I keep hearing you say things like strategies that seem to be very developmentally appropriate. How do you think the students' development has affected how you facilitate class meetings?
P: I truly believe that the kids this year, for instance, I feel like now that they have been exposed to it in kindergarten, that same kind of vocabulary or strategies at hand. Whether it's the Kelso's wheel or talking about bucket filling. They are so, I mean, I walk outside to pick them up in the morning and they're like. "Oh Ms. [teacher], I love your hair, Oh, Ms. [teacher]". They are so good at giving compliments. Which I haven't found that with this group of...community of students, in the past. And they to really have understood those concepts that we are planting, those seeds that we're planting with them and I'm practicing that vocabulary and strategies...they're practicing it, and the three classrooms that collaborate together and shares kids are all practicing the same, so it makes a huge difference.
I: So that consistency in experience for them has really supported their development...
P: Absolutely.
I: Okay, cool. Um, what feelings have you had about facilitating class meetings?
P: Feelings. Sometimes there are topics that, I have gone to the school counselor before with like, "I want to talk about this topic, I think its very important, but what's the best way to approach this cause I don't want to single out one student". Other times I think its okay to single out a student not with their name, but to talk about that issue at hand. And addressing that concern and then maybe they can relate to it more a really begin to understand how the other students are feeling about that situation. Um, for instance, like if I feel like there was some bullying going on I would talk about bullying in general but then I might talk about the incidences, without using students names, but this particular child that I know may be bullying was using so that they could understand that is considered bullying. And I think that is very impactful when that child is being...the one that is bullying hears the other students talk about how they feel and they don't like it and I think they relate to it so much more than just a one-on-one conversation about how that isn't appropriate and its considered bullying but I don't know that they fully understand the deep, impact that bullying has, and when they hear their friends talk about how they don't like it and how it makes them feel I think it touches them a lot more and they get a deeper understanding that its not okay.
I: Yeah...um, so you talked about how some topics are a bit touchier maybe than others...does that change how you feel about facilitating?
P: No, but it changes how I may prepare for it. I might do a little more research or approach how I'm going to run it by different colleagues that I trust that have the same values or their teaching philosophies are very similar to mine. I would run that by them and see what they're thinking and how they felt about it. But, it doesn't necessarily make me avoid that topic it just makes me prepare for it a little more.
I: Okay. Can you tell about a time when facilitation was particularly rewarding and a time when facilitation was particularly challenging?
P: So, I'm try to think of the exact...I just erased the video from my phone...Um, I had a student last year that was very difficult and it affected the whole class in many ways -- um, mostly in a negative way. Had outbursts and things like that. And I did try to touch upon that in class meetings at times. And for the most part I always sat next to that child and I would tell -- I wouldn't really prepare the child that we were going to talk about that, and I would make sure to talk about other things, but I would include that in part of that class meeting. And it was interesting because most generally she always apologized for her behavior when it came to her turn to share. And sometimes she would say why she would do it and it to me that was pretty powerful because she was recognizing that it was her that I was including in that conversation. And she recognized that she was doing inappropriate things which she may not always have control of at the time and at the moment. So that was pretty rewarding. And on the same note, sorry I’m trying to rack my brain on what this video was, it um, was interesting, I had seen...we filled a jar full or water, I think it was, and the kids got to drop in a rock for everything they wanted to say kind about that student and when that student left for a short period of time in the middle of the year, the kids didn't get to say goodbye to that child because it happened right before a long break and kind of immediate, all of a sudden circumstances changed. And, so we did this little lesson and it was so amazing to me how much compassion they all had for that child and even thinking about it brings tears to my eyes to think that -- I mean, as much as that child struggled and affected the learning in the classroom, they all cared about her and I really think they cared
about her through understanding that...through understanding through our classroom meetings, that she didn’t always have control of it and she really was a genuine good person, she didn’t intend to hurt anyone but that was just out of her control. And that was difficult and I wasn’t really sure how it was going to go. So, I was kind of nervous about doing it, but I had seen that lesson done and it was amazing because it was overflowing, the water was falling into the pan and we really talked about how that would be filling her bucket, we shared those things. So, it was kind of neat because when she came back we shared it with her because I actually had the video because I wasn’t sure how it was going to go, so those things I was recording to keep in my memory bank and store for future years. Not that I do the same lesson all the time because it always depends on the concerns at hand and that class.

I: Okay. So those sound like two pretty successful experiences. Is there anything that has been a challenge or you got stuck...?

P: Well, I guess I would have considered the challenge too where talking about her and her disruptive behavior and things that affected the class were challenges because I really danced on my toes. But, I thought it was important to address so that the other classmates saw that I was addressing the situation, I wasn’t letting it go. But there were times where she would blow up and leave. And, most of the time she would apologize and stay in the class but it took time.

I: So how did you feel when you knew this could be a potential trigger or it could be really positive. How did you feel in that facilitation role then?

P: Nervous, definitely nervous. But, um, I really thought it was highly important to do it for the other kids as much as her really. And the first time she apologized I thought, "Okay, as much as I’m nervous for this and know that there might be a blowout it is important to do because it is just as important for her to realize her behaviors aren’t liked by others and it gives her the comfortable floor to apologize and she’s not -- it wasn’t all attention on her, we’re talking about other things. But, she’d take that in stride and apologize, so again, it was kind of a success but I knew there would be blow outs and um I just kind of prepared myself for what that might look like and there were time that I would say, "Okay, now class, you have to remember (if she had that blow out) that this has made her upset but I think that its important that she realized that non of you care for these behaviors." So again, not ignoring her behaviors for blowing up or getting upset, but also stressing that it is important that we all acknowledge that we don’t like when she gets upset like that but we have to respect that sometimes some of us don’t know how to control our actions. So talking about some of those things. Talking about with them strategies to take deep breaths when this happens. Again, sometimes she’d be at the door and she’d hear it and she’d turn around and come back in...so.

I: So with the challenges come the successes.

P: Most definitely. And, not every lesson went perfect but I was okay with that because I learn from it just as much -- but saw the affect it had on all the kids. And sometimes, even though I had that 45 or 35 minutes planned for the lesson, and then we’d go out for recess and then we’d switch for literacy I’d have to come back to it after lunch because I felt like maybe another problem arose, you know. Or maybe I needed to deal with it in a different way, so. Um, I guess I would say also, one other challenge I’m thinking about, total unfortunate but, there was a situation where that particular child and another child um...the child that had the most difficult behaviors always seemed to isolate another child
in the classroom and I felt like it was really becoming a negative, almost vicious, cycle, and there were more things that come up with it, but that then was when we addressed it and decided the best thing was to move that child um from the room. So I guess in that sense it was a challenge that came up and having to take a larger step with it and saying oh this is something I don’t know I would have been necessarily been aware of if I wasn’t doing class meetings, right? Some of it just would have been shuffled because just some recess aids see it and then sometimes it cycles around. But, this was something that I was hearing in class meetings, so it made me more aware and documenting, and more aware of what was happening at recess, and sharing my concerns with...

I: So you got some insight
P: I did, really.

I: Another useful component of...Alright, so this is the last formal question. How do you view yourself as facilitator?
P: That’s a bad...ugh. I would probably say average but when I think of the staff amongst our building I would say maybe slightly above average because I know not everyone does them on a weekly basis. And when I first started doing them I only did them when I heard a problem come up. And then I would drop everything that I had planned after that problem and deal with it. And I think quite often, unfortunately, when we don’t have that time set aside that’s how we structure classroom meetings. And, now for the last two years doing it every morning I just see the benefits of it. I feel I’ve grown through talking with colleagues, talking with mentors, like [the counselor] and [the principal] who have been through a deeper cycle of the training. I feel like I have more of um, the lessons and activities under my belt and can modify them toward different lessons. So, um I guess I would say more average, but compared to the colleagues here at our I school, I use them more purposefully, I feel, because I am doing them as teaching lessons and having that class meeting to talk about...

I: And it sounds like you are using them somewhat preventatively instead of responsively...
P: Absolutely.

I: Okay. Is there anything else you want to say about class meetings or your facilitation of them?
P: I really enjoy doing them. I definitely talk about them with other colleagues. It one of the things that I talk positively about and pride myself in, because I think its really made a difference in the community of our school, the community of our classroom.
I: Cool, well thank you.
Interview G – Second Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: So again we’re talking about class meetings. So the first question I have is how did you develop or not develop confidence in leading class meetings?
P: Really setting those four agreements at the beginning of the school year and letting them know that they have the right to pass but what is shared in this circle is part of our community and they need to respect what their friends might share and not take that to the playground and if they have a concern that they can come to me and talk about it but letting them know that it’s a safe place to share these concerns.
I: So do you feel like structure with having the agreements kind of scaffold at your own experience so that you feel comfortable leading them the meetings?
P: Yes, I would definitely say that. I feel comfortable. There are times where things come up and then I may have had to take it to the school counselor if something comes up and/or talk to the child after class or something to make sure that they might not need to share more information if there is something that has come out that might be red flagged.
I: So you use like one-on-one time to make sure that you’re connecting with the kids.
P: Most definitely.
I: How did you decide to start doing class meetings?
P: I would probably say the first time I started class meetings was a little bit from [name omitted], our old special ed facilitator and [an expert teacher] was using them as well and initially it just came up where incidents were occurring during the school days and I felt it was important enough to discuss as a whole group instead of just talking to those one or two children that it may have applied towards -- thinking this could be a great learning experience for all of us to understand it’s not okay to react in that matter. If it was, you know, a pushing thing or excluding a child on the playground or something -- that in talking about what words they could say that wouldn’t hurt that person and so I first started it I’m going to say probably 5 or 6 years ago. It was the year I had two autistic children in the room and I also thought it was important to discuss differences with those children and how they may react and they react differently and so we really talked a lot about that. It wasn’t necessarily about the kids sharing and it was more me talking and giving scenarios and then the kids might share about how they could handle it or what they could do to help that child through that situation and then with the Tribes training that’s when I really started making them weekly meetings.
I: Okay so did you observe meetings before you started doing them yourself?
P: I did observe a couple from [the special education facilitator] and [an expert teacher] however, we the three of us had done a presentation here at a parent club meeting and we really just sat down the three of us and started talking about what we should include and how we should handle the private conversations that might come out and when it is appropriate to have them and when you would want to handle that situation separately and I did some research on it just online and I read a book I think it was called Class Meetings or Class Community that [the special education facilitator] had and got information there about different ways that you could set it up and building -- that but Tribes really influenced me to have them more on a weekly basis.
I: Okay so it was developmental like you started trying them after you saw them being used but they became a more comprehensive meeting once you had more training?
P: Definitely and I would say that at first there was a problem that happened and I would address that problem and then talk about strategies that we could do.
I: Like responsive.
P: Responsive behaviors and now it’s more proactive like teaching them the character traits and why it’s important to instill those character traits in us and what we can do to make them stronger.
I: So has that reduced your need for responsive meetings?
P: Most definitely.
I: Okay cool. So what if anything motivates you to continue to implement class meetings of the strategy in your classroom?
P: The kids feel more of a part of the classroom. I feel that they love Wednesday mornings when we do it. They know, they get right into the circle, they know that routine, they like that there’s usually an activity or a story so it’s different from every other day but I think that they truly feel like they have a part of the classroom and in ownership and they get to help make decisions.
I: So you see that they appreciate or enjoy the decision making process that comes through that and the actual process of being a part of that circle?
P: Yes.
I: So you would say that the students motivate you to continue (inaudible)
P: Definitely.
I: How do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect the way you engage in class meetings?
P: Wait can you repeat that?
I: How do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect how you engage in class meetings?
P: Again I’m still -- we’re working on kindness this month. I really tried to look at my class and what they needed to develop as kindness acts and it’s interesting because I often I think it’s typical but you see that they display those behaviors you’re trying to instill in them in your classroom but now I’m trying to get it as the broader picture and it carrying throughout on the playground and in the lunchroom and in the LD class and their other literacy classes -- so I think as a teacher I am definitely more aware of each individual kid and their behaviors and their struggles and I’ve even kind of witnessed-- like observed through the glass windows on the other side of the building to see some of the behaviors on the playground that we might to deal with, and talking to them about even situations or stories that I have personal connections with -- whether it’s my own children or myself as a child in trying to get them to relate it to them. So I feel like I’m much more aware of each of my children in the room and their needs and I’m also looking at different activities to meet those needs. It might not be the same as what last year’s needs were but this group of students and in particular some of the individuals as well.
I: So as far as teaching and learning is concerned it sounds like you believe in like differentiation.
P: Absolutely.
I: About meeting individual student needs about learning through experiences maybe and also connecting personally maybe through story or examples or the history of the student’s kind of thing?
P: Yes most definitely. Like I think that personal connection is huge because I try to let them know like my children aren’t perfect or even my myself growing up and some of the mistakes that I may have made and getting them to understand how I overcame that or my children and I have worked through it and making those connections and I think they see me more as a person instead of just their teacher. And so, I think they are definitely able to connect and they’re not afraid to make that big step of thinking okay, this is okay for me to act this way even though my parents may not, right? And so really instilling those good manners and character traits and really getting them to understand this is a good person not just in the classroom but in society for you to instill these behaviors.
I: So, but I’m also hearing you talk about social-emotional learning and if that’s one of your jobs as a teacher is to teach that besides the content?
P: Correct and to me I feel like if I can teach that and have a good handle in connections of that they are going to learn that much more in the content area.
I: So, going separate from this question. Where did that come from? Why do you feel like it’s your responsibility to teach them that social emotional component?
P: I feel like that is one thing a lot of the students at [this school] are missing. That connection and I want them to understand that they’re going to go far in life no matter where they come from. They just have to have that drive to want to do that and try to teach them some of those skills of it’s okay to have these feelings or to be sad or to react this way but now I need to accept that I need to apologize or I need to own-up and make this better - - and so I think that it is my job to teach the kids that we all make mistakes and sometimes they’re big mistakes and sometimes they’re small mistakes but the best thing out of that mistake is for us to recognize it and to accept it and make it better whether it is apologizing to someone or improving my scores or working harder or asking to stay in at recess and have the teacher help. That’s all good things and you have to want that and then instilling that in them.
I: So I’m going to ask another question. Would you say that your beliefs around that it’s your responsibility to teach that social emotional component primed you to implementing class meetings? Like because you already had that belief system there?
P: It definitely has helped. I think just because I’ve always believed that my students are going to be more successful if I make those connections and get them to believe in themselves and that’s part of it a huge part of it. And I think that since I’ve always had that passion to work with that and instill that with kids it definitely just becomes so natural and comfortable for me to run those class meetings.
I: All right so this is a denser one. During my first round of interviews I discovered that teachers take on multiple roles as facilitators of class meetings from the manager during the meetings, the person who mediates during the meetings, or even the person who creates the structure to allow students to facilitate the meetings themselves. All of these roles require some relinquishment of the teacher role during facilitation. What would need to happen for you to let go of the teacher role when leading class meetings?
P: I have to say with first graders that it’s extremely hard. Because they’re still developing that competence to share and that comfortableness and so often you give them the right to pass and they’ll go around the circle and then they’ll want to share the same thing their
friend did or things like that. So I try to do that and give that opportunity for those kids to share one more time if they choose to speak up. I think it kind of happens the second year so I guess there's a couple of answers to that question. I notice a difference this year because these kids have done class meetings in previous years. I know the second grade teachers talk highly about it -- like they see the impact that the students that the first grade teachers had last year that are in second grade now are better at working in groups cooperatively. They understand what the word class meeting means and they get in the circle and they're used to being respectful and having mutual respect in having the students share and take their turns. They're not speaking out over someone or saying I did that or you know those things that happen so I think as [this school] continues to embrace class meetings and hopefully more and more teachers use them I think that will help me as a teacher kind of step back a little bit and also not every year do you have a student that wants to be a leader and somewhat you have to have not necessarily one student but students that buy into wanting to make that work and this year it's totally working that way. Most all of them want to participate. I do have some shy ones that are still a little reluctant at times but I'm almost confident by the end of the year it could happen this year. It's definitely that group but I can't say that that would happen every year but I think again it is me stepping back a little bit as a teacher each time we do it and biting my tongue sometimes and not saying what I want to say but also it's hard for me because a lot of time those learning moments pop up and I can turn it into a story and make all of the children understand and benefit instead of just those one or two. So I always want to take that opportunity when it presents itself but I think as we continue to do the classroom meetings and it's probably the third point is the class size is so much smaller this year and so everybody gets an opportunity to share and it allows for me to have that time for it to kind of work itself out.

I: So it sounds like for you to feel comfortable letting go of the teacher role you would need to know that they understand their roles.

P: Correct.

I: And they do that through experience?

P: They do that through experience and modeling.

I: And the time they put into it.

P: Correct.

I: And it's really imperative.

P: And the structures that are in place. I mean it's definitely interesting as teacher to teacher. You have the same structures and beliefs and you run it the same so then when those kids come over here they know how it works and for us as first grade teachers, kindergarten is so hard to get those kids to talk so I don't know if we'll ever fully see that in the first grade but hopefully first will see into second and then second continues we'll see them upstairs.

I: You can really envision these cohorts going through being able to engage in a class meeting where there are student leaders and much less teacher talk because of their experiences they had going through. All right that's what I've got. Thank you.

P: You're welcome.
Interview H– First Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: So the first question I have is what has it been like for you to facilitate class meetings?
P: Um, so when, as far as facilitating then and like getting over kind of the control to the student. I think it’s liberating. I think when it gets to that point, when it gets to that point of just facilitating. But other than, when we have class meetings um, or like a circle, like a circle time kind of thing I think that it has um, I think its validating of the students, you know. I think it’s validating of them, of them as individuals -- um, their humanity. But I think that’s how I would sum up kind of these pieces. I: Okay
P: I think maybe more specific, um, I’m trying to...its also, its very good for I think instruction. At the forth grade level, and I would say other levels, I would sat carpet time in general or meetings are also good for like a transition. Good for class management, because you do have that meeting place. If you are up here to teacher, you know and the kids are their desks and we just need to talk about some things, I just say, ”let’s go to carpe and um, talk about it” -- but also instructionally too. If um - I have a white board back there and everyone is kind of you know, everyone is in the circle or facing forward, I don’t know...they are kind of...their attention is more where it needs to be, I guess. Um, and in a very natural way, I guess. So...
I: Awesome. Um, how do you feel like your training has affected your experience of facilitating class meetings?
P: Um, so my teacher prep program?
I: Potentially...or professional development as well if you have ever received that.
P: So that one thing that I’ve talked to other people about and that is professional development particularly. Um, we never really get anything on classroom management -- um, or circle times or classroom meetings. I guess we did have Tribes. But, I think everyone kind of had their own spin on how they address the classroom. Um, and I don’t think, yeah, I don’t thinks there’s very much that um has helped me as far as facilitating the class meeting. I was very fortunate to have an instructor in my teacher prep program. The one class out of all of the -- that helped with classroom management. And he actually did talk about classroom meetings. So I think he definitely did help and I think that me and a couple other people that had the same kind of philosophy that I do use kind of an egalitarianism (inaudible) just kind um just kind of very understanding of students and um using classroom meetings. I think that the democracy and honoring humanity. To me its very important I come to feel that education is more about students and kind of their human experience and validating that - as tricky as it can be with 30-something students.
I: So it sounds like class meetings are aligned with the pedagogical framework you kind of adhere to.
P: Yeah, yeah, definitely. Yes, definitely.
I: Um, this is kind of off the topic but, do you feel like there is anything about your experience or personality that lends itself to you really you wanting to do or feeling competent in that.
Experience, yes. I think that after...I think that my first couple years my teaching was about me, it was about me looking for a pat on the back and um you know I was just going to be the best teacher everyone was going to admire and the kids were going to like me kind of idea. Um, and I guess just listening to inspiring stories, you know and just thinking about whatever everyone has considered to be a good teacher I kind of focused on that. You know, just after teaching a few years and getting to know that or getting to understand that education is not black and white it can take a course at any moment, at any time and you have to be sensitive to that for the learning, um so I think that’s um... I think I’ve come to the point where I think I care more about them...I think I’m going to keep repeating it...and I’m going to...but who they are in their humanity and their experience um as human beings and not as robots. And I mean as much as lofty it seems that I think that it sounds its um it is challenging because you are dealing with 33 students but I think that’s what it is, um. So without having prepared more-- on to be able to explain experiences, exact experiences led to that, it was just a combination. One thing that I got used to seeing is um like all the initiatives and the pressure that we have to do something or to teach a certain way or to um, certain strategies. I think they are all um great and they are researched-based and they are important. I feel like I know enough about them to teach with them. But it gets...it can be overwhelming to try to um to teach...to use them all and so I have to come to a point where I have to make my judgment using if the best I can using structures and using systems because I do believe in them. I am kind of a linear person in that sense. But um, being able to, when it comes down to it, making the right decisions for the students to interject a positive atmosphere. And, and I think I can sum-up, and I don’t know if this is deviating, but I think that I can sum-up that my teaching philosophy or what I believe um by kind of deviating to um...have you seen The Beautiful Life; the movie about the dad and the boy that go to a concentration camp? And um, the dad, the whole time tries to put on a show for the son, for boy during the concentration camp and um he pretends it’s a game show to shield his son from what’s really going on. And I feel like that’s kind of become my role in a sense. Um, like here -- there is a lot going on politically, there is a lot going on you know, in education. How do I come to the classroom and kind of still interject the joy, still keep the positive atmosphere and almost like not let the negativity in education and politics affect my teaching and affect the students in the classroom. Um, so, class meetings, yeah they have definitely been a part...as far as facilitating um, my experience has also been every class has been um, comes with its own...every group, every cohort comes with its own dynamics, so you know. I have to see how we’re doing, how much responsibility I can give them, with kind of the goals to be to make them independent. And a lot of the stuff in here that we do, I kind of shoot for that. Like I don’t really walk my class in a line to um, to their, to specials or anything. It’s a student walking the rest of the class, kind of. And so again, the class meeting is the same thing. I eventually have somebody kind of leading it, just feeling out the class um talking about what the class wants to talk about, voting, or whatever, so... It’s hard, I think, at first, because sometimes you question um, am I doing this for them? Or to, um, am I giving in? You know, like your pride, you know. Am I like...but um, I don’t...I think it is about them. So for me it’s about pride and giving up control and stuff. I think ultimately as the adult you are in control, you are keeping them safe, you are responsible, that kind of stuff. But, um, I mean ultimately they have their word...its your word against theirs. I don’t know, I don’t know if I am rambling, but. It does remind me of another thing. The other kind of conclusion that I’ve come to in education...a
lot like um, kind of the anecdote that somebody...I heard somebody share one time that, you know like you could tell the child to you know sit in their chair and um they might defy you or they might not do it, and then you can actually at some point sit them down in their chair - I mean I would never grab a student - but the idea is put a student in their chair and then um the student can still like respond like, I’m sitting down, like but in my mind I’m still standing. It’s like the ideas that they have their own will and um, so I think that’s...you definitely have to keep that in mind. They are not peers, but they are...you can develop a positive relationship with them.

I: It sounds like you develop their autonomy. Like, you honor their autonomy.

P: Exactly. And they have a right to that. And they have um...yeah...

I: Yeah, thanks. That’s great. So, um, I’m more interested in kind of the people. So, who has affected your experience of facilitating class meetings?

P: Um, so that instructor at [a university]. I remember, I just remember the um, you know the positive atmosphere. And I remember he, he did treat the classroom...I mean you still have to have high expectations, and you still, you know, you have rules and expectations, but, but its not so much about that. Its, um, you know you have your systems, and you kind of develop a positive atmosphere. But I remember that and I also remember um, that everything he did was kind of like a show that he kind of put on a show. Not like he was two-faced, or like two people. But he was, um, his classroom environment was much...you know everything that he did was just, um, I don’t know, I would have to figure out how to explain it better but, um, me and another colleague, who I worked with also impacted my teaching. We kind of came to that um conclusion, or kind of that idea that you’re the teacher you are making it fun. I mean you have days when, you know we are human too, we have days that you’re out of energy. But I think you start there, you start at a positive place. And, um, so I remember this instructor [name omitted] that um, he kind of taught, and he kind of pretended that we were the students. He just had that attitude about him. And, um, it was very difficult to try to implement things when you are a student teacher in a program. But, um, so, after you know I went through his class I didn’t have much of a chance to practice it. I did um, you know teach my first two years and like I said it was really about me. And um, I was really crazy about the data, crunching the data, and see growth, and I think ultimately I wanted them to learn, everybody wants their students to learn, but I realized the more like we focus in that um area um you know I felt like that’s when a lot of the misbehavior kind of, because I wasn’t spending any time thinking about them even though I told myself I cared about them when I was doing everything because I cared about their education and there was no, there wasn’t really anything there. Um, then I had a chance to work with one of the most amazing teachers that I’ve worked with [name omitted], and um it was, it was pretty, it kind of brought back the perspective of what I had learned with [the instructor] and probably made me proactive. It was a lot of letting go of a lot of things. And um, still to this day, you know, letting go of some things, and you still kind of feel this guilt but you have to kind of decide if you need to call a class meeting during math because no one is learning. Or, something’s coming up in the classroom. And um, and yeah it makes a big difference. So, yeah [the instructor] and [the teacher] have impacted...and the other thing as far as data. I realize when you are addressing things through class meetings, um and again everybody I think, we try our best to validate everyone and so I think no one says I feel safe, but I feel like there’s kind of this harmony. Not every day, not every moment, but um you feel it and its a really cool feeling. And I
think that’s one of the, you talk about the affective filter, that when I started to realize that’s what they mean about the affective filter. Everybody is really happy everybody wants to learn, like everybody wants to do what you want to teach. And it’s not perfect, but it’s huge what you are able to when the classroom has that you know feeling. Um, and that’s when I realized that’s when the affective filter’s low. I focus on data. If I focus on you know all these different goals, which are important, which really actually try to...but when I focus on just that, I’ve found that the affective filter kind of stays high and um the classroom, the atmosphere its just um its not a good thing, place to learn and I don’t think that really anybody learns as well. So, that’s when it all kind of came together, you know um after a few years. Um, and I think, I mean there is still a lot of work to do, but so those two people [the teacher] and [the instructor].

I: Thank you. So what feelings have you had about facilitating class meetings?

P: Um, so, um, so I think early on, I that I was, yeah, I was kind of um apprehensive, I didn’t give up the um, or I kind of felt like my students wouldn’t be able to do it. Um, and so, um, you know, I thought students would, you know, become irresponsible with that task, and so I didn’t want to. And I think too, I think I wanted to be the one that was saying the really important things. Um, but, um, so, um, but now I think at the beginning of the year I look forward to it and really want to start it, you know, early on. Um, but again I just I have to, for me anyway, it takes a while to develop the routines to where there are in a place where I can start to let go. Um, but yeah, as far as feelings I look forward to it and you know I look forward to seeing the students, usually the students that are most misbehaved are usually...usually end up being class leaders, that’s almost natural for them. They are not perfect and um, but it, you know, I look forward...and again that’s laying down a lot of pride because you kind of take a lot from those misbehaved, sorry, the challenging students, um, you know, from the class, you know a lot of conversations with them and the class. But, they end up usually being the best leaders. They can kind of demand the attention from the class. They do better at holding the class’s attention, but, um, so. So you know, um, so kind of proud of them in that sense. Start to feel good about...kind of...its still a lot of work, its not perfect, but we make to the end of the year.

I: And it sound like you, you shift that role or you create the environment where that role can shift for that student. Where they have always been the leader but are we like are we facilitating that leadership in a like and beneficial way. And it seems like the class meetings and the structures of a safe classroom allow that for those students.

P: Right, yeah, and its, uh, it is really cool. I mean sometimes we are walking down the hall and other you know staff may see that particular student has a leadership role, and sometimes I wonder, am I rewarding? -- you know but it works out pretty well. And again they are not perfect. There are so many resources, so many skills within the classroom and a lot of times that is one of their big skills. I clearly remember, it was only last year, this one student, just a very challenging life that he had, very challenging throughout K through third grade, and even here he was challenging. But he was such a cool kid and he was funny, he could make the class laugh, and it was, for me it was a matter of just like giving him the leadership roles and just kind of talking to him like, "Hey, you are awesome, you just need to use you know (inaudible) your classmates like you a lot." And so when he would like you know take it too far I would say, "Hey we need to take a break from this because what happened is not okay and (inaudible)". And you know, that kind of thing. I had a lot of conversations with students. I’m sorry I feel like I’m rambling.
I: No, the purpose of this is to be somewhat free flowing. So this guides my questioning but what generated through conversation is kind of what I am looking for. Um, so that kind of leads into the next question of like when...can you tell about a time of facilitation that was really challenging and a time it was really rewarding?
P: So um facilitation challenging...I think, um, you know I think with that particular student last year it was um, challenging, um. So, I don’t know... I think I can answer it two different ways. One way is like, I don’t think like it’s ever been a challenge because I always have to feel out when they are ready. So if I feel like if they are not or if I feel like I’ve given them opportunities then um, like I sais, the teach is in control, I think they know that, I think they expect...the students expect the adult in the room be able to have the control, um if you say, "Line up its time to go to lunch" they line up and go to lunch. Um, so like if its getting like out of control or too much or cant handle it, we kind of just stop; I take over, I finish up. It’s never really been a challenge in that sense. But as far as trying to you know prepare a kid, a student. Like the one last year, it just took a lot of conversations, a lot of giving second chances. Um, but also having high expectations and developing a friendship. I’m thinking about a student right now in this class who I’m trying to do the same thing with and he is very um he can’t sit still for very long. Um, it’s just a lot of stuff that the cant help. And I’ve tried giving him the leadership opportunities, um, but there’s still a lot of things we need to work on. So I’m constantly...between like we kinda need to back up, take a break, um lets talk about it, what went wrong? But he wants it really bad. And, um, students again they do, they listen to him. Um, but they just have to continue to...this particular student doesn’t really have the awareness of like how loud he is or how physically...he may just try to like...where we may just like kind of do a pat on you know direct somebody, like if I say tap on your neighbor’s...you know just tap him on the shoulder, he would probably shake their shoulder kind of thing. Um, so that’s been challenging I guess, because um, because I see the potential but its um you know just getting to that point where you can do the responsibility like be a line leader or facilitate classroom...he has a good voice, a strong voice, but can also sound bossy and um you know kind of make other students feel bad. And it is hard um because a lot of times you have to wonder...we’ve had conversations about its not fair for the rest of the class to be affected, through disruptions, things like that, that’s very serious. We’ve had conversations with parents and the principal and I think he’s had some medical attention. Um, and to take meds, but um made it to difficult for the class because of the disruptions. Everyone is affected, but um, we have to um, yeah-just kind of figure out what to do. There are times because we are very inclusive, and I believe in him, but it also affects -- like 34 educations are affected. But, um, we just kind of keep trying...so I guess what I’m trying to get at is the students are aware and um, and I do have to kind of have conversations with them about you know everyone learning differently and so if they see that like um he has different, if like, somebody else says the exact same thing it might look differently um for everyone because we are different and we learn different and so. I just kind of want them to know that I am aware and I’m not being taken advantage of or I’m not caring about them. So it’s tricky but um I think...they still have an amazing potential.
I: So maybe the challenge is really specific to what the student brings and adapting to the student needs.
P: Yeah, definitely.
I: Um, so what would you identify as a real success that you’ve had with class meetings?
P: Um, so there, I guess there are several like, so one is the students have ownership of the classroom or what happens or even their learning. Um, also its like, it frees me up a lot to um to do a lot of things. To maybe you know have one-on-one conversations or a conference with them up. It frees me up to just observe the classroom, um it um and it allows them...So I mean, they can facilitate for each other. Now I'm thinking about independent work and that kind of thing. There's that kind of culture. It frees me up: they know what to do, they know how to work independently or in their groups and I can just go around and kind of check in that kind of thing. Um, so successes -- you know, um, I think, I definitely think, so class meetings, facilitating them, so um, oh yeah, yeah...so, um empathy is really big. And so when we do, I have this kind of system so if you are feeling something, something happened at recess, you threw a ball and it hit them in the head kind of thing, like you feel bad, you want to apologize, that kind of helps us to learn. And um, so you know they start apologizing..."hey I'm sorry at PE I like yelled at you, and do um you forgive me?" "Yeah." And so we have this system on how to do that. Facilitating that also create kind of that atmosphere. And they truly do believe, I tell them, and it's kind of scripted for me by now, that you learn better, but I truly believe, they can clear a lot of stuff. There have been a lot of students that are crying, um like "I'm sorry that I called you or I made fun of you". Wow...you know, no one expected them, and they had a moment to be able to do that, you know, and so, um...so yeah, at some point students will kind of facilitate that. And, um, the empathy they kind of learn to have in the classroom. I don't think that...you know the classroom isn't perfect but I think it has reduced a lot of the behavior-type of things, issues. Um, because we also address them right away, if something happened at recess we address it right away rather than it becoming you pretty bad, and they know that it can be addressed and that it will come up. And um, and so they take that and will actually do it at recess. Or appreciations is another one. And so we'll have these meetings you know like teach them appreciate something real specific um and they'll do that at recess or they'll do that at home. And so um, I also have them you know just to change them up, and I tell them there are students in this class who you don't talk to very much and um you know I'd like you to find somebody new, not necessarily someone your best friends, somebody you haven't...tell them why you think they are great or awesome or whatever. So they do that. And so, just facilitating that, just seeing them, and they'll come up to you. Me and [and my team teacher] at one point actually had them do that during their recess and finding the younger kids and tell them how cool they are or something like that or you know the staff. But um, so that a huge success and that something that's not really part of the common core standards but its part of the human experience. Um...so...um, that's been huge and I think again going back to the atmosphere that it will create.
I: Its sounds like some of the successes are that atmosphere, um that empathy that you see building through the year, and their ability to generalize that - those skills, outside of the meeting and outside of the classroom. That's what I heard. Does that seem accurate?
P: Yeah
I: Okay. Um so this is my last formal question. How do you view yourself as a facilitator?
P: Um, I think it depends on the time of the day. So, I think that I have to always be aware of whether I am facilitating or kind of the teacher I guess. If it's a new concept, then I am the teacher. I am the more knowledgeable other. So, in that sense I am the adult being responsible for their schedules, communicating with their parents, giving them homework, well in some sense I can facilitate that. Um, I think that um I try to be -- try to facilitate as
much as I can if they are concepts that they already know um we have a lot of routines a lot of fluency practice, math fluency or reading fluency practice. Um, you know during reading time we have kind of a daily 5, um system, just teaching them how to that and letting them do that on their own and um then the classroom meetings, um I think that's something also I try to facilitate as much as I can. I'm trying to think where I was going...but um, yeah I definitely need to work on it as much as I can. Work on being a facilitator and technology is something I wanted to bring up. Technology has made it much easier to be a facilitator; it's made it much easier. There's some things that technology can't do but it's definitely helped with that. It kind of...there's assessments that it grades. Um, then you can kind or, they can work independently or in groups and you can just kind of monitor their progress and again just roam the room, or pull smaller groups and let everybody work together or develop leaders is something that we do. And, I don't follow a formula or a script of how I want to run the classroom at the beginning of each year. I think I used to and I said this is how it's going to be and how it's going to go and I think its good, I mean we do need to know what we want to do. But, I have found that um, different groups bring in something different, it just doesn't work, so just seeing how um, how it goes and then kind of just go from there. I know it may sound more reactive, but it's not. At this point I kind of know the main structure of teaching (this) grade...sorry I...

I: No...So you kind of monitor yourself on if you are teaching or facilitating, so you try to balance those roles and adhere to what is relevant for that time and space. And monitor the differences of the cohorts that come through and not just adhere to one set of standards or scripts, but really adjust to the specific needs of the group.

P Yeah, definitely, yeah.

I: Yeah, okay. Is there anything else that you’d like to share about class meetings or how you facilitate them, or experiences?

P: Um no I think the thoughts that I did have on my mind kind of came up with your questions.

I: Well, thank you.

P: Yeah.
Interview H- Second Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: All right. So my first question is how did you develop or not develop confidence in leading class meetings?
P: So as the teacher, developing confidence in leading class meetings-- so I think-- okay, so I'm thinking for a second here. I'm still working on how to even get the kids to pay attention kind of thing. But I think that the students do expect the adults to have control of the class, not in a negative sense, but they do expect for there to be order, and I think I have to, like, just-- I think I have to be confident or I have to know that. When I understood that, I was able to, I think, know that I could set some ground rules or some, like, framework or rules for the meetings, so I think-- you know, I think with the experience and then, you know, they also-- they can change a little bit, depending on the students or throughout the year, too. And I think that something that probably [inaudible]. I'm trying to stick to answering the question. It's really about actually confidence. Without preparing, or without any further reflection when how did I become confident. I definitely think that the experience and just knowing that the students kind of expect for the adult or the teacher to kind of have that role. Sorry, I don't--
I: No, it's okay. So would you say your confidence came from understanding what the students needed or when you actually had the order in place?
P: Definitely understanding what the students needed and understanding the dynamics between teacher and student or the relationship between teacher and student. But understanding, yes, their needs. And then the order, I think, that I think maybe I saw it modeled a couple times, or I got some ideas on how to run it, but it also-- it let the students were able to give me ideas on how to better [inaudible].
I: Hmm-mm.
P: Okay, she's-- [inaudible].
I: Oh, okay.
P: Um, yeah. So I think-- yeah. Yeah, understanding what the students need, I think.
I: Where do you think that came from? Where do you think that insight came from?
P: Experience also working with-- also working with the teachers with experience, I guess, that kind of-- I guess I understood the students in that way. I think I shared maybe a little bit before in the first interview, but coming out of, you know, the prep programs, the teacher prep programs, I, like, you know, I kind of-- I took what the book was telling me to do, you know, as far as just a-- just more the numbers, the data, and which is not bad, but I think that I wanted-- I was thinking about myself and how I wanted to be-- like, get good results from students. And it was more about me. And then after, like, working with-- with, you know, a teacher that kind of helped me understand that about students and just kind of bringing back, I guess, the humanity, the students. That helped. But also the paired literacy program also helped me. It gave me that perspective as well, actually, now that I think of it. Again, it's more asset-based, and it's not so much looking at the decisions and focused on that and focused on-- so I don't know. I don't know. It's just a fine balance because I find that, you know, when I'm just-- the numbers are very important. I mean, getting them to succeed is so important. But I think that we can focus on that so much and not treat
students well at the expense of getting them to be able to-- where we want them to be, which I don't believe that always helps because again, it'll raise-- if you're upset or if you're-- you create an atmosphere. And like, [inaudible] to filter it. And I just don't see, you know, them wanting to-- being as excited to be in school to begin with, I guess. I'm not in it to be liked at all. I think the students know that. But at the same time, I don't-- I just [inaudible]. And you know, I think that really takes a couple years to really figure that out.

I: So that insight comes from experience, and maybe some mentorship.

P: Yeah, definitely. And I think that-- I think mentorship, you know, from the right people. I-- so my first two years, I worked at [another school]. And this is my first year teaching. But it was also a year where I think more than half the staff was also new. And they weren't just new to the school. They were new teachers, a lot of first-year teachers in that school. And not only that, there was a new principal who was also a first-year principal. And so yeah -- it was kind of a-- I don't know. I guess maybe there wasn't very much to learn from, now as I reflect. And I think that's probably [inaudible] of that, like new energy from teachers, but also somebody who could kind of lead and nurture. Yeah, it was-- I don't know. I don't know what kind of culture that-- I mean, I know how it felt. But, um, yeah. Just a lot of first-year teachers. Probably [inaudible].

I: Sounds hard.

P: Yeah, it is. And that's a challenging school, actually, so.

I: Okay, so, um, then how did you decide to start doing class meetings?

P: So, um, so I think, um, when I first started, I realized that-- I realized that students-- we listened to each other and wanted to see each other speak more than they do the teacher. I think the only problem is that sometimes-- well, all the times, students need to kind of be prepared, or they need to just be structured, or they need to be taught, I guess. So I noticed that, you know, like-- I don't know if it was like they gave-- you know, I would give them the opportunity to give an answer or something like that, but I remember actually when I was teaching in second grade, I would run morning meetings and I noticed-- I realized that they could-- this has become so routine that they could probably do it on their own. And so I think I started just kind of-- just writing down some sentence frames, like to help them. I think it was like-- there was a calendar-knot-type thing, and they would just-- you know, they would go through whatever pattern we were working on, or counting by whatever. But it was kind of-- it was kind of scripted. But they loved it, and they were much more engaged from speaking-- or from listening to their peers speak. So just-- I think that's one of the pieces, like whenever I can get them to show the same work or the same, even, lesson, mini-lesson or whatever, that I wanted to-- it would be much more powerful from their point of view. It just is if you ever see, if you ever step into a classroom. [Inaudible].

So-- and then the other-- so then later on, when I came here and I taught the older groups, I think-- I think it was just seeing that, just the power of coming together and talking about community and talking about how we're feeling about the classroom. Everybody kind of wanted to give their opinion about what we should do or even like planning a party, or kind of like a mini democracy, which you know, very much is in some ways because the teachers are still the adult in the classroom.

I: So it was the level of engagement that you observed when students were able to, like, interact with each other that kind of prompted you to push that even further.

P: Yes, exactly. Definitely.
I: So then what, if anything, motivates you to continue to implement class meetings as a strategy in your classroom?

P: So I think just that it's kind of a-- it's a powerful-- everything to like a powerful teaching tool. It's-- I think it's to community creating tool. Um, yeah. I think continues to give a sense of belonging for the students. I do notice that when our agenda for the day, for the week, is just kind of-- we have a lot going on, a lot of tests and writing samples and grades-- that we don't do it as much, and you know, I guess I kind of sense it. And, you know, I think the behaviors start to kind of surface. I don't have any actual data or anything like that, but there are moments when I feel like we really need to talk about this or whatever, and we go and we have a meeting. And the students, you know, when they know something is up, they don't see it as punishment. They know we need to talk about it, or they have the opportunity to apologize and to-- or appreciations. And so I think it's definitely just a powerful tool for education, for building community, empathy. I think one of them was-- she was sick last week, and I think she came down with a pretty bad cold, and so I was like, you know, we're going to have our counseling. I'm going to use this time. So we went over-- we brought back like the filling the bucket or whatever, and we talked about it, and I don't get the chance, really, to say, you know, I'm going to do that. So anyways, but yeah. I guess the same-- it's huge, kind of like a family. Yeah.

I: So you see the outcome of that community that's built, that support kind of that educational focus that you have because the kids are connected with each other, potentially with you.

P: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I: Okay, so then this one's a little more complex. How do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect the way you engage in class meetings?

P: Yeah, I don't-- you know, I think it has everything to do with, you know, I have a huge-- so, like, I want to teach, um-- I want students to succeed, but I also-- I guess I have a-- like a lens on social justice at the same time, particularly for our community, our demographics, our population of students. And so, like, for their needs, you know, and so you know, as far as how I see it, how I kind of, again, the piece that comes to my mind is, you know, just remembering that they are-- you know, human beings, and how do I want them to grow up and just be good citizens, feel good about themselves and treat others with respect. I think that is-- and again, I guess when I talk about social justice, like, you know, topics-- it does lend itself very well because topics come up about racism or, you know-- I know we're talking very much about the elections, but just-- or you know, politics, but just how students are feeling and it does actually lend itself to that. Yeah, I think-- you know, when you're teaching for social justice, I think that it's kind of like a humanitarian job. I don't know, especially in impoverished schools, and so I think that's a big piece. So everything else, as far as, you know, pedagogy and how to develop a lesson and that kind of stuff, maybe not so much because that might not get-- I might not-- I don't know. I might not measure. I might not give them a quiz on how well they're behaving. Maybe I should. So just trying to stick to the-- as far as my beliefs on teaching. You know, I also think that-- I think education, I've kind of learned that it's organic, definitely, and you have to just be aware of what the students are kind of-- what they need and just, you know, you need to have your plans. And you need to have expectations. But just be ready, you know, to you know, to go in the direction that you might get the most learning out of. And so I definitely kind of see that in the community time or the class meetings in how I run them and how we run them.
I: So then, can I ask your kind of beliefs around education being organic? You talk a lot about the whole child. Do you think that's-- those beliefs kind of made it easier for you to adopt class meetings as a strategy, or do you think class meetings kind of lent itself toward thinking of kids that way?

P: That's a good-- I think that's a good question because it can go both ways, and I think that-- I think it's the first one. I think that they lend themselves to the way that I will be-- just trying to gather my thoughts. I'm sorry.

I: No, that's okay.

P: If that's possible. But yeah. Do you want to ask me more about that?

I: No, I was just kind of curious where you-- where it kind of fit. Do you feel like your kind of philosophy around teaching and learning kind of ended up matching the class meetings-- and so you're more receptive to that than maybe you would have been if you didn't already have that lens?

P: Right, yes. And you know, I think-- I think there's a struggle kind of with, you know, our schedules. It is their time. And so for me, like I said, just somebody asked me, "Doesn't it get to your conscience when you're doing such and such?" The only thing that I can think of is that I've spent a lot of days with a lot of stuff getting to my conscience with teaching. There's just so much to do. And at some point, I think that you need to-- you need to do what you believe is right. I mean, yes, stick to, you know, what we're supposed to be doing, but even-- for me, my experiences, even when I was following that to a T, my conscience always-- I'd never felt like I was doing enough. I never felt like-- and but at the same time, I think the environment was also suffering because I was just more concerned with that. But I still did not feel, you know, like I was doing good enough. My conscience was bothering me even then. I was still worried about what if the principal comes in and sees that what we're doing is not the right thing or the right way or you know, if we're making a loud transition or something like that. And there are awesome days, and we get really good. And the kids get really good at doing everything that they need to, but you know, I'm at a point where if I feel like we need to talk about something, I'm not going to do it in the middle of a test, you know, or obviously if we have a really quick pace. But if, you know, if there's something that we need to talk about, we need to have a meeting. Then I'm okay if the principal comes in during reading or during math and, you know, sees that, that we're taking care of something. And I've actually-- I remember at the beginning, I did say something like that. Like, you know, I just want to feel like if need to talk to my class about something or have a meeting, that it's fine. And she was-- she totally understood. I think-- and I think a lot of-- I mean, I think a lot of teachers think about that. What if-- because this year, we don't have a class meeting time. Last year, I think we had it at the beginning of the day, like 15 minutes or something like that. And it doesn't have to be every day. You know, we go through days without it, so I don't know. Does that--?

I: Mm-hm.

P: Okay.

I: Okay, so this one's kind of long. It's my last question. In my first round of interviews, I discovered that teachers take on multiple roles as facilitators of class meetings, from the manager during the meetings, the person who mediates during the meetings, or even the person who creates the structure to allow students to facilitate the meetings themselves. All of these roles require some relinquishment of the teacher role during facilitation. What needs to happen for you to let go of the teacher role when leading a class meeting?
P: I would say you can scaffold, kind of like what I said earlier. You could start with a script. And that’s really powerful. And the other piece is, you know, like, an education here about gradual release of responsibility, so you know; just kind of take the baby steps or whatever until they’re independent. You know, you can start by using students, also, that you know are-- have a strong voice, that will be able to model it correctly. They’re responsible. So, yeah. But definitely, definitely scaffolding it until it becomes-- so the teacher can step back. And literally, the teacher should be able to step back, just have a seat, you know, at the back of the meeting or just hang out, be part of the meeting, or if you need to walk to your desk, the meeting should be able to kind of continue. Those are concrete ways that I think could definitely work, probably work or help.

I: Is there something that you look for in the kids to know that they’re ready for that, for that independence?

P: You know, I think-- I think maybe a responsible student-- it doesn’t always work because a responsible student can be kind of shy, you know? -- That kind of thing. But-- and also, like, just keep thinking about a student with a strong voice because the other thing that you need to continually teach them is to use a strong voice, especially the students, because it’s strange if, like, if a student wants to talk and they don’t talk loud enough, for some reason, it triggers, like, the rest of them, like, to kind of check out or something. And so-- and yet it’s possible to train most students to be able to use a strong voice and to be able to run the meeting. But definitely, I think, and you know, it could be just trial and error. If one student didn’t do so well, then you can just switch them out or try a student that might do a better job. Yeah.

I: Great. Well, that’s what I needed.

P: Cool. All right.
Interview I– First Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: What has it been like for you to facilitate class meetings?
P: Sure, um as a teacher of 5th grade I that the most important thing for me at the beginning of the year is to establish classroom culture and really take control of that and be intentional about the classroom culture. So for me it was about creating an environment of high academic expectation and then collaborative respect between the students and myself and I found through experience that if I do not intentionally set that tone, the tone will get set for me by someone else -- um, and a positive way, generally. So, I feel that a lot of class meetings were about our expectations for one another and a lot of team building and um, I had objective within that which I can go into more detail about later if you want me to. But, um, yeah that was the big idea, I want to get in front of things so I am the one that creates the weather in classroom and I am the one that helps create the relationships among students. And then we start to form a group identity around that, and class meetings are a way to do that.

I: Ok, um how do you feel like your training has affecting your experience of facilitating class meetings.

P: I have not had a lot of formal training about it although um, I definitely had a couple of mentor teachers that I looked up in terms of how they did things so that was sort of an informal training opportunity. But my first teaching experience was I was a teacher for Teach for America so we had a lot of um training that was about creating a high expectation environment. They didn’t focus on class meetings, per say, but they focused on the messaging you had for your students and that and how to create, you know, create an environment within your own classroom. Their kind of operating theory is there’s not...because they place teachers in just whatever school they can place them in, you don’t always have control of the school environment necessarily, but you are in control of what happens in your own classroom, so what are you going to do about that. And um so they had some materials and documents that they use in their training program about how to be explicit about your expectations, create positive rewards, how to communicate with students effectively, how to communicate with their parents, and so that was kind of my baseline. But, as time went on um, I went to teacher third grade with Teach for America to becoming much more of a middle school teacher and middle school is just a different environment. And so third graders anything I would do, I hung on...third graders just (inaudible) a lot, middle school was not so much the case so I needed to figure out ways to create buy-in and ways to create that identity formation of "we are leaders of this school" in a positive ways. And so for many years I was a 5th through 8th grade teacher in various different jobs and so that kind of...the training I received there um again, I would always have that lens of like I’ve got to create the culture - I’ve got to create the dominant narrative here. And I have few formal training or books or things that I used, but its not like I went through a master's program or something that that was the main focus, its always me seeking out a mentor, me seeking out a workshop, me seeking out a book, something like that.

I: Okay. And you mentioned mentors; can you speak to that a little bit more?
P: Sure, Um, so I’ve just been very fortunate. I think that any school environment I’ve worked in I’ve found more experienced individuals who did help me navigate whatever the local culture is. I’ve switched schools a few times and then you just have to learn all over again from scratch like what’s the priority in this community, what’s the um, what the thing that makes everybody tick and what do I need to do to um lead in that situation or be a part of that community. So like right now I have one person on staff here who’s hat’s just full from 30 years. Well she’s seen a lot come and go and she is just a wise person and is really willing to talk about the nuances of the challenges we have in this specific community. Uh, when I’ve been at [another city] teaching at [a private school] there was a neighbor teacher of mine who really understood how the parents work and um when I would I would be really confused about why a parent was upset she would create more context for me as to you know this is where you got off track. To give you an example, there was a program that we put on every year where we would take everybody to [to a town down south] it was a big production, and I got tired of doing it because it was really hard and it was like a 24-hour trip. And so I changed it one year so that the actors came to us - there was a program where the actors can come to you - and I thought that was so much more convenient for the kids to not have to go on the bus for 4 hours. And this was the worst decision ever, there’s an angry mob of people. So I went to [the neighbor teacher] and I said you know, "how did I get this wrong? I thought what we liked was the Shakespeare stuff, the acting stuff." She said, "Well, they also liked the trip, you know” And for whatever reason I had misinterpreted what the priority was. So she able to help me message through to that group of students and to that group of parents - This is a better deal for everyone, its better idea to have them come here instead of go there. But, you know, I didn’t have necessarily the cache to do that myself at that point, being a fairly new person in that environment. So having that person to create the picture for you. To create the context and figure out what the hot spots are going to be is really key.

I: Um-hm. So it sounds like your mentor teachers helped you navigate the nuances of the specific school sites...

P: Yeah, the nuances of the culture. That you know, as the newcomer you don’t get, you don’t understand why...its not to dismiss why something’s important, but you just walked in off the street, you wanted know that family would be upset about it because this is their third kid in this school and the other two kids got to do this and you know, you have no sense of the tradition or the...you know, how long something has been in place, so.

I: Ok. Um, so we started taking about the who’s. So who has affected your experience of facilitation and how have they affected you?

P: Um, I mean I don’t know, looking for examples of when classroom culture has been built really intentionally. I cant...its just something I look for. If I am visiting a school, I’m on the lookout for the messages, those reinforces, the...I don’t know there’s just this thing about it, you know it when you see it, you know when there’s been some thought put into it. And then kind of emulate that. So part of it, on a very superficial level, part of it is marketing because what you’re talking about is being...it is marketing in a nutshell. Getting the message down to a concise set of words or images or ideas and then having being able to have 30 people, 100 people recite that. That we can all recite what the McDonald’s ad is, and how is it that we are able to do that? It’s not necessarily a positive thing, if we are going to critique it. But it is positive in the since that somebody put some thought into do we have an idea of what McDonalds is as a source of food or whatever and that was
intentionally created. So I think that at the classroom level you can intentionally create that about an identity of a group. And so right now with our fifth graders, this is our fourth year of doing this, all of our fifth graders earn a t-shirt at the beginning of the year - and we are the Dragons, so we call it "Earn Your Wings" because dragons have wings. So the idea is that this is their winning year, this is when they’re going to take flight. And that they earn that t-shirt, and just last Friday they come in during the special assembly and every single kid has that t-shirt on. And they get to stand at the front of the school, and they get to do the special game. And then the principal gives a speech about how important our 5th graders are to us. And the idea behind that is like; we are trying to encapsulate this pretty big idea of 5th grade of being role models, being leaders. But, we need to give it in a 5th grade-friendly message. And so, if you walked up to 4th graders they would just say, "Oh there these green t-shirts, they are so cool, I can’t wait to get my green t-shirt". But, that’s symbolic of this idea that 5th grade is the step up; we want you to take leadership. And then we have...I’m looking out the window right now...that 5th graders also run our cafeteria, gym supervision in the morning. We have kids that are waiting, if they are not going to eat breakfast, in the gym. And they are on this supervision duty and it’s a really important job. That’s different from five years ago when 5th graders would be hanging around out in front causing trouble, skate boarding off of the benches and you know setting that tone that like 5th graders get to intimidate everybody before they get to school. Now flip to 5th graders get to set up the gym, greet everybody as they come in in the morning, come in quietly, keep track of the little kids. There is an adult in there too, but its just leverage, like it’s an important responsibility. And so, to answer your question about the models for that, I’ve found a lot of models for that -- Where I would be in schools, and you’d see banners in the hallway, you’d see some kind of...the t-shirt thing is just some kind of shamelessly stolen thing from somebody else, kind of idea. And just what I was taking for that was there are ways to do this in a very explicit, visible way. And, yeah when I get back to my school I’m going to do it according to how I want to because its the big picture, its got to be straight forward, its got to have some kind of zing to it. I’m trying to market this idea but to an ordinary fifth grader it can be an unpopular idea, so to layer on some persuasion there. There attention is a scare resource, why do I want you to pay attention to this? Why is it compelling to you?

I: All right, so um, kind of a shift...what feelings have you had about facilitating class meetings, specifically?

P: Well, the whole gamete, you know. The feeling is really positive when I’m thinking about trying to create something new and I’m excited to unveil it. And I want to have a meeting about it and deal with it um, you know and sort of it’s sort of the cheerleading meeting or the get fired-up meeting. But, then there’s the ones that are more anxiety producing where we’ve had conflict in the classroom and we’ve had to call a meeting about it and I don’t know how the conversation is going to go, at its going to be challenging and emotional and it can be hard too. But, I think if I started with the idea that class meetings can be a productive time, they are an interesting time, then the harder meetings are easier to get through.

P: Okay. So, that anxiety is also affected by how you set up the meetings at the beginning of the year.

I: Yeah. I think if you put in place class meetings only when there is a problem then why are kids going to care about that, why...oh we are going to have a class meeting because we are...
going to get lectured about something and I don’t like when [the teacher] is upset about something. But if class meetings are a mix of things; sometimes they’re a celebration, sometimes they’re a...um you know "she’s going to tell us something interesting about what we are going to do", or "we’ve got a new challenge to work on", or "we’ve got a team builder exercise. And then once in a while, of course there is going to be problems. So, you’re going to...it’s just the nature of working with a group of people.

P: So how do you personally mitigate the anxiety when it kind of a conflict resolution meeting?

I: Um, I don think there is really any way to do that. I think that I feel really confident in my ability to manage most situations that come up between students. There’s only been two or three times where I felt like it’s over my head and I’ve needed extra support. Um, but yeah, you know, like. I think the worst part for me is when I feel disappointed in something, how something’s going and I have that conversation with my students that they are not meeting the expectations. Like, you know, a field trip that’s gone poorly. We had one meeting, for example, we took a field trip to [a university], I don’t know about [other universities], but we have a lot of international students at [the local university] right now, and in particular a really large population of students from Saudi Arabia. And I did not think this through before we went to [the university], I totally...I’ve interacted a lot with Saudi Arabian students, I should have just had the lens, a lot of Saudi Arabian have the full burka on. Its kind of startling and our kids don’t tend to go places and get out a lot. And so this boy in the class jumped in front of this woman who was walking and mind her own business, she’s walking down a path and he said, "Oh, you’re a ninja". And it was a really socially unacceptable thing for him to say. And he didn’t really know that [inaudible] and culturally uncouth. And, um, I was really disappointed because she looked really startled and it happened so fast that I wasn’t able to you know, track her down and say, "I’m really sorry, we’re not...American students aren’t generally this disrespectful and you know out of hand". I was really embarrassed and really frustrated. And when we came back we had a meeting about it and um I acknowledged that I hadn’t adequately prepared them and um, but that we needed address that when somebody is dressed differently, or comes from a different place, or speaks with an accent, or appears different, it just is not something that we need to point out, that is not something that we do. So that was difficult because I was kind of calling out that student but I was also trying to keep it within the context of giving them the benefit of the doubt that they hadn’t been adequately prepared for that. Down the line if this ever happens again, now you know what to do, now you didn’t know before, now you know what to do.

I: So that really leads into my next question. As so you certainly don’t need to answer it again. But, um I would like to know about a time when facilitation was particularly rewarding and then a time when facilitation was particularly challenging.

P: Ok, um. Yeah, let me tell you about a rewarding one. Let me close my office door ’cause it getting a little loud. So one thing that I do at the beginning of each year is that I have a class manifesto that we put together. And each kid writes about roughly a sentence of it and I can send you some copies of them from prior years if you are interested. But I have, because of that setting, high expectations -- I am setting out expectations of the 5th graders that they are leaders of the school and I have this Olympic theme, so I play the Olympic theme song and they walk into the classroom and just like very stirring and exciting. And then a talk to them about like, so its the first day of school so I excited for them to be here
its like Christmas morning to me and I can't wait for it to start. And I tell them I've been waiting all summer for us to get going and I mean I lay it out really think and like half of it is sort of like... I mean I haven't been waiting all summer...its kind of this brain washing process you know like... and honestly they believe it, they think like (my teacher) must just sit in her classroom all summer long, because they refer back to it some times. And then so we write this class manifesto, which is kind of like a constitution. And so everybody gets contribute one line to it and it comes out very inspirational like, you know more inspirational than I could write myself, and you know they are very earnest, the are 5th graders so there is some irony in this by this point. And so its all about giving our one-hundred percent, trying our best, pushing ourselves, supporting each other, um. Then I arrange it that night, so I take all the sentences that kids wrote and I try to make it sort of more poetic by arranging it in a certain way. And then I have it printed on this enormous poster. And then the next day everybody comes in and signs it. And then it's kind of our constitution kind of idea. And then so that really rewarding because its something that I hang up right away on the bulletin board and stays there the whole year and what I notice is when we have visitors come in every kid wants to show the visitor this thing. They are like so proud of it and they are so interested in it. They really believe in it. And so I have something in my office right now that like one of the kids wrote to her class at the end of the year...um and its says, "to my dear classmates" and then she lists all 25 classmates. "Thanks for getting me to where I am now. I am much smarter at math, reading, writing. We are 5th grade champions." And so she wrote this at the end of the year. So they believe, they buy in to it. So that's kind of neat to see how the seed of that one activity has just blossomed into something else throughout the year. Um, so that group identity and that personal identity of people who put in a lot of effort and they try hard. Its a particularly potent time to do that, it that window of time where I get to set that tone and they are ready to listen and they are ready to do it. And then, I think if waiting for six week or something so that the tone maybe having to persuade you guys to do this activity, "come on, you know, its cool, isn't it?" And no, on the first day everybody is putty in my hands. That's the time to do it.

I: So it seems like the success of this meeting and this activity is both in the moment as well as the entire school year and it really sets the class up for that culture that you talk about. P: Yes, it's absolutely foundational. And that's why I do it, it just means that we get to refer back to that so that when the going gets tough we go back to that, we go back to the things we said and the beginning of the year and we go back to the manifesto and examine it and when conflict happens or when we haven't done our best or we were hitting some challenges, um, that if say, "well we really expected this and we're going to...we are the kind of people who try again, we are the kind of people who support each other." I think I have last year's on my computer right now I can probably pull it up. Yeah so last year's group of students really got it, they really liked it...they would just refer back to it themselves, and they...Yeah I do have last year's...So it says, "Learn. Improve your life. Be a good friend. Try your best. Follow your dreams; your dreams will come true. Make every minute worth it. Be successful, be kid, be magnificent. Accept everyone. Share. Do what you think is right. Don't ever give up. Push yourself to the limit. Be a winner." I like this one, "Look like a champion, doing what champions do." So it's very 5th-grade, it's really cute. But they really are invested in it and they want to live up to that. I: So it was really meaningful for that class, for each class it's different.
P: Yeah, and they get to see the prior years' ones. I hang them up on that day, the ones from the past... its getting to the point now there's kids that have had a 5th grade brother or sister so they know about it, they know about the t-shirts, they know about constitution, so they can't wait to do it. And it kind of has a life of its own.
I: So as far as a challenging time, would you feel like that example you had...
P: Yes definitely, that example for sure.
I: Okay. So last formal question is how do you view yourself as a class meeting facilitator?
P: How do I view myself? Um, well I think a couple different ways. I mean I feel like I have room for improvement. I don't always feel like for me its an easy split between me and the kids because again I'm telling you how is it a class meeting when I do the scripted activities, that's more like a lesson, that could be considered that its not really a meeting. I don't think I have strength in having like a ton of patience for an open-ended conversation with like thirty kids in a circle for 30 minutes. I think for me personally it hasn't worked well. Um, and so that, I'd love to see people do that well. For me it's like whenever I have tried to do that, time has just like slowed down to a slog and it just doesn't work. So I've done much more meeting type things, where this is community meeting time and were are going to have a quick 10 minutes and then we are going to break out to the team builder I have set up or the scenario, or I've done stories where we have done a story and then a discussion. And so I think that um, that's my home base that I keep it moving. But, there's probably plenty of literature about class meeting being much more student facilitated or student led, I just again, since I'm trying to create the dominant narrative of this improvement, I have found that um because middle school is just such a socially tough time that there is another narrative going on in the classroom and its typically one that's not in alignment with what I am trying to layer on. For example, with your thing a difficult time, there was a really bad situation with kids texting each other, gossip and feelings were hurt, I am not going to let that kid run my meeting. And that's me kind of arm wrestling there, but no. The kid's already running a pretty negative meeting on his phone, so I need to counter that and I need to be the adult here and so that I would probably say I have a little bit more of the benevolent dictatorship model going on and probably the deep literature on class meetings is a little bit left of center of that. So I am sensitive to that and sensitive to making some intentional choices about who is in charge more not authoritarian but authoritative in the classroom. But that also comes from experiences that I want to create a positive culture and I'm not always sure that adolescents are that into the positive culture by default. So, just the nature of social interaction at that age can go a lot of different ways. So um, that kind of my view and I certainly have gotten critiqued about it, I've had thoughtful conversations about it, I've found that like I'm trying to create where we value a strong work ethic we value respect, and that does mean that I am going to keep playing that note over and over again. Because it's not always a positive message, though I am trying to push people that way...so.
P: Well thanks for sharing that. So before we finish is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with class meetings
I: No, no, I am super...I guess now I have this curiosity about how you are doing this study and what brought you to this topic.
P: Yeah, let me stop the recording and look at you again...
Interview I – Second Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: So again, we’re talking about class meetings, and my first question is how did you develop or not develop confidence in leading class meetings?
P: I developed confidence about leading class meetings with the guidance of a mentor teacher, so somebody that I had been one of the trainers in my teacher training program who was really big on it. And so I saw the benefit there and then just-- it’s a classic thing. As a teacher, you’re imitating before you’ve mastered something, and then you find a little something and develop your own style. But I remember that she had some concrete suggestions. And there was another trainer that I worked with who wasn’t really a mentor teacher, but the way that my teacher training program worked is that I was trained for one summer, and then I had continuing education for about two years, so once a week, I had a class in the evening with one teacher trainer. And also had her spin on classroom meetings. So very early on in my career, I feel like I had these models of people that are pretty explicit about how to do a class meeting, why they do it.
I: So with those models and that support system in place, you felt that confidence when it was your turn to run them.
P: Yeah, and confidence is a relative thing. I think I don’t feel like I was really confident as a teacher to begin with. It’s a really overwhelming job right up front. So I probably seemed confident, but on the inside, I don’t think I felt that way until maybe three or four years into my career. But I think you’re right. I think having them modeled and having specific guidance for me, just about the why. I don’t want to do something in my classroom unless I know the compelling deep reason for it.
I: Okay, so that was kind of that extra layer that you talked about of just time and experience, too, so it takes you a couple years to feel confident as a teacher, and I’m assuming with class meetings, as well.
P: Yeah. I think it does take some time.
I: Okay, so then how did you decide to start doing class meetings?
P: The interesting thing is that I’ve taught a number of different grade levels for different chunks of time. And I don’t feel that I had-- it depended on my teaching assignment. For two years, I was a third-grade teacher, and because I was a self-contained teacher, I did the meetings pretty frequently, and I got to run my own show, so I wasn’t trying to fit into anybody else’s schedule, per se. And then for a number years, I was a middle school teacher teaching sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. But I had a homeroom, and I would occasionally sort of that type of meeting thing again. And then I would go back to being a fifth-grade teacher and would work those into my own schedule as well to build culture. So it just depended on my teaching assignment.
I: Okay, so the first time that you really implemented class meetings, what was the impetus? What got you there to do it?
P: I think it’s that idea that you’re investing on a daily basis in your classroom culture, and you’re iterating as you go, as issues arise or as things come up that need addressing. There are tons of things that need celebrating. That meeting schedule is a really terrific template
for that. And if you don't make time for that, then it's going to go away. It doesn't show up someplace else.
I: So it was a desire for community that kind of got you there.
P: Yeah, the desire for community. I was creating community among the students, creating in a positive environment and constructing that in an intentional way, not just waiting and hoping that it would happen that way.
I: Okay, so then what, if anything, motivates you to continue to implement class meetings as a strategy?
P: Well, I think at the risk of repeating myself, I think it does have to do with the idea of culture. If you're not willing to define a culture yourself and as a leader prioritize certain traits or certain qualities, then you will be, I think confining yourself to mediocrity in some ways because things change, and the kids are different every year. The circumstances of the school are different every year, and if you don't have a clear vision for how something's going to go, then you're having circumstances visited upon you instead of clearly setting a direction, rising to challenges, addressing difficulties. You're just sort of adrift. And I think it does make a huge difference. I noticed it makes a big difference in terms of the way that other people perceive my class. I like them to have a positive self-concept, and I like that there's positive rumors going around the school about what an amazing fifth grade we have, or what a well-organized team we are. So just crashing that and keeping that in the forefront because the days get busy and long, and if you don't make time for that, then that just-- it will drift.
I: So there's an outcome that you're seeing when you utilize class meetings. It sounds like that community piece and maybe some behavior. Is that true?
P: I think you're going to see more positive behavior in general because it is not a cure-all for every single bad behavior in the classroom, especially not for-- I don't know if in [your district] if you use PBIS very much, but I think that it doesn't necessarily work for two or three students, for those students in PBIS that we categorize as tier three, they need systematic interventions. So simply having a meeting in class, they're not invested in the social outcomes at that point if they have that level of behavior. However, that-- I still have a responsibility to the other 95% of my students to as much as possible uphold high standards for respect and community and kindness, and the best way to do that is to set aside a small amount of time every day to talk about those things or discuss the nuances of how difficult it can be sometimes to work in a group or to celebrate people who have been going above and beyond, that kind of thing.
I: Okay, thanks. So this is kind of a complicated question. How do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect the way you engage in class meetings?
P: Yeah, that is a complicated question. So it's like in 50 words or less [laughter]. Yeah. How do my beliefs-- well, I guess the most transparent way I've had to deal with this is when I have a student teacher. When you have a student teacher, you're kind of having to tell them-- they're your co-pilot, but they're very inexperienced. And so you're having to hand over the controls to somebody and say, "This is the way this thing works and this is why it works this way." And at that point in time, that's when I have reflected on, oh, there is something pretty profound to the class meeting. It could be done very poorly and have no impact on teaching and learning. It could just be another chunk of the day that you just walk through. But if you're constantly thinking about what kind of positive habits do you want your students to have? What do you want them to remember five years from now, 10
years from now? If you're constantly in that mindset, then it makes you really walk your talk. And you can't be hypocritical. Fifth graders will put you on a pretty tight leash if you're hypocritical about something. If you've just been getting after them for picking up after yourself and your own desk at the front of the room as a teacher is a mess, they're going to call you out on that. But again, the idea that we're building our own small little society in here, and we need to think of was to interact in a productive and positive manner. That is the essence of teaching and learning. If there weren't the need for human interaction for teaching and learning, then we would just have Wikipedia, and we would be all by ourselves in rooms, and there would be no purpose to it. So there's something to that social interaction, that being explicit about the ways in which we interact with one another and modeling that and reinforcing that, and then also discussing when it gets difficult because it does get difficult. So that structure, I think, helps to keep it a priority and also it happens at different parts of the day, too. I've had it when some kind of conflict comes up in the middle of math, and I can either address it or not address it. If I'm just going to be on math mode, then I'm just going to ignore it. But if I'm going to be in learning-meeting mode, then I'm going to be in culture mode. Then I do need to address it because it shows the kids that I mean it all the time. I don't just mean it from 8:30 to 8:45.

I: All right, so with this belief that you have about teaching and about learning, was that something that—like, as far as the chicken and the egg kind of thing, do you think you utilize class meetings because of that? Or do you think class meeting has helped you develop that kind of theory?

P: Yeah, I don't really know. I've had difficult groups of students I've worked with, and I've had easier groups of students I worked with. And I've been consistent about doing meetings no matter what kind of group I've been given. So it is, in some ways, I think probably what leads a lot of people to it is something has gone very sideways. And they think, "How do I do this? How do I get folks to be kind to one another, follow the rules, care about somebody besides just themselves, those very negative drivers? But it could also be you've got a good thing going, and even in a classroom where you've got a good thing going, there's still going to be hurt feelings occasionally. There's still going to be opportunities for discussion. So I don't really know. And I think I've gotten to this point where it's odd. It's like past 10 years, it has for me to figure out to really have a good memory year by year of that. But I think for me, it's probably just going back to those mentors, those mentors that were more experienced thing. You know, you're going to have some ups. You're going to have some downs. This is a good practice. Why don't you give this a try?" And they think that that was a good use of my time.

I: Great. Here's the last one. It's kind of long, so here we go. In my first round of interviews, I discovered that teachers take on multiple roles as facilitators of class meetings, from the manager during the meetings, the person who mediates during the meetings or even the person who creates the structure to allow students to facilitate the meetings themselves. All of these roles require some relinquishment of the teacher role during facilitation. What would need to happen for you to let go of the teacher role when leading a class meeting?

P: What would need to happen for me to let go of the teacher role?

I: Mm-hm.

P: Um, that's a good question. I think that I would need to feel really confident that we had been explicit about what the expectations are for somebody else taking that role. So you know, a student who has a clear outcome, clear vision of what they want to discuss. It's big
shoes to fill, having to keep everybody focused, so it can be [inaudible]-- and probably some other support role that was explicitly laid out. Like, am I co-facilitating with them? Am I sort of the enforcer in terms of keeping everybody’s attention in the same spot? -- That kind of thing.
I: And having a student lead isn’t the only way to let go of the teacher role. So I’m wondering what-- how you conceptualize facilitating versus teaching?
P: I think it’s a little bit-- it’s kind of like taking off the teacher hat and trying to get people to engage in discussion a little bit more, which is still kind of like a bit of a hierarchical thing going on. It has a lot to do with the age group. Fifth graders are not, in my experience, going to really suddenly take to discussing things right out of the gate. I mean, a couple of will, but you’re trying to draw out a lot of people. And I have also-- I don’t know if this is helpful for this type of question, but I have done a lot of activities for the morning meetings. So you know, role-plays or icebreakers or team builders, things like that. And in that role, I’m not teaching. I am leading the activity and then debriefing the activity later or participating sometimes. And again, I think it has to do with having a vision for what do we want people to get out of this 20 minutes? And so you know, I have seen the morning meetings go poorly because people just sort of think, oh, it’s 20 minutes. We’re going to sit down. We’re going to do this. And it’s, like, super boring. And the kids check out. And then it just becomes this awful routine that they have to go through every day. So keeping it fresh is important, keeping it relevant. If it’s not going to be relevant, then doing something else. There are plenty of other things that we need to work on. But in terms of my role, I feel like my role shifts from time to time, depending on the situation.
I: And it sounds like it can more easily shift if there is a vision and a way for you to-- like, you know what your tasks are and what you want the students to be able to do.
P: Yeah, I have-- I mean I have a real clear vision for I want them to have certain beliefs about malleable intelligence. I want them to have a certain set of beliefs about effort. I want them to have a certain set of beliefs about their own character, about the way that-- you know, when I’m getting through to kids about cleaning up after themselves, it’s not about cleaning up after yourself. It’s about the idea that the way that you leave this classroom at the end of the day tells me something about your character. It tells me whether you respect the custodian. Do you think that the custodian’s job is just to clean up after you? Or is the custodian’s job to keep our school safe and clean? -- And the way that our action is character. Our actions are-- it doesn’t matter what it is that we say. It’s our actions that define us. In class with 180 school days, how do you get that message through to kids? And sometimes it’s through telling them. Sometimes it’s through discussion of a book. Sometimes it’s through an activity. Yeah. It’s a lot of different things.
I: Great, so thank you. That was good information. I liked your feedback and your thoughts. I’m going to pause the recording now.
Interview J– First Round

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: So, my first question for you is what has it been like for you to facilitate class meetings?
P: Um... I think a couple of things. One, eye opening to learn, I think you learn more about your students when you do them -- And then frustrating in trying to find a time to fit them in. And three, the just the management of it and really just getting the kids to buy in that this a listening time, getting all those pieces in place.
I: And what is that management piece like for you?
P: Um, sometimes it's fine, like when we are in the circle and we've tried. So, the whole four agreements thing when its not Halloween week (laughs) would be like when we aren't amped up, I can feel myself getting frustrated when we are not all being respectful. Does that make sense?
I: Yeah, your priority is that respectful component and that when it gets...
P: ...And that you are all listening to each other.
I: Um, so how does your training affect your experience of facilitating class meetings?
P: Training, like for Tribes training?...
I: Potentially or any kind of teacher training you received.
P: You know, Tribes has been the best training, I think. I also, like early in my career I had a book called.... I don't know if it was called Positive Discipline in the Classroom, or -- It's all about class meetings and that was a really good book and helpful but other professional development I don't think has touched upon it.
I: Was that book - The Positive Discipline - was that part of a class or was that something that you pursued on your own.
P: No, [another teacher], who I think I contacted her and haven’t heard anything back.... um, she is the one that recommended it. It was like my first year of teaching and, "I don't know what I'm doing" and she kept saying "class meetings, class meetings". And so I just bought it on my own.
I: So it was kind of a self-study.
P: Uh-hm.
I: Okay. Who would you say affected your experience of facilitation and how did they affect you?
P: Well, who I just said, so a colleague. Um, just encouraging me to try it and her whole take was the kids take ownership of decisions that are made and really big on giving appreciations and compliments and that sort of thing and being specific about them, not "they're my friends" -- But, "When we were in math so and so was really struggling and they kept trying", kind of a thing. And then again I think the Tribes training that we had - and I can't remember the name of the teacher that came out and helped us, but she was really good. And then just the reminders that we have like during our Wednesday meetings sometimes we’ll have little Tribes reminders. And so I think its like stuff you know but its like "oh yeah, that's right, I've got to try this again", or...
I: So is that generated from the principal? Those reminders?
P: The counselor does it, but the principal does the what we will be doing each week.
I: Okay. And so, with the colleague, we she like someone you partnered with, or...
P: We were in the same grade, teaching the same grade. And so it wasn’t like a mentor teacher but we just, you know..."What am I doing?", you know...
I: Like a support teacher, someone you collaborate with.
P: Right, right
I: So the people who have really influenced you have been that kind of that team teacher, the trainer of Tribes, and then that system that reminds you to implement the components.
P: Right, which would be [the counselor] typically does the reminder type things.
I: Cool. So what feelings have you had about facilitating class meetings?
P: I’m not sure how to answer that. Um, I think, like I said before, and tell me if this is what you’re asking. Like just getting to know your students. One year stands out in particular where it was it was really - it was my hardest year, ever. And the only year that I thought, "oh my goodness, do I really want to do this?" This was a career change for me, and so when I finally became a teacher I was so grateful. And when things got tough I still loved it and glad I was here. And that was the first year I was like "I cant do it", you know. And um, for a whole multitude of reasons I wont go into, but we had a class meeting one day and the whole school was focusing on being kind, because there was a bunch of unkind behavior running rampant throughout the school. And, um, so I did this whole schpeel on kindness, and how parents were calling because they were worried and dududu.... And I cant remember how it came out, but one student wanted to share something and - I wish I could remember the turn of events - but anyway, come to find out it wasn’t about kindness, that night he had seen his dad arrested. Well then it turned into "Oh," I said "Oh, I have someone in my family who has gone to jail and I know it was really hard and this is what I did. Does anyone else have some advice for him?" And then it turned into,"This person in my family went to jail" and "this person in my family went to jail" and then "My dad was deported and I will never see him again" and "I saw my uncle get killed" and...you know. So, all these things come pouring out. So that’s when I thought, "Oh my gosh, I need to do this regularly, and we need to know each other, and care for each other".
I: Yeah, and so in that situation, like what would you say your feelings about it were? Put feeling words to it.
P: Um, sadness, that my kids were going through this. But, also incredible, what the word I’m looking for? I was just in awe of how resilient they were, because they were so happy a lot of the time. So I felt - I don’t know, I don’t know... sad and glad that I had done it, so happy I had experienced it and taken the time.
I: So is that kind of feeling glad, a common, like routine feeling you have around class meetings?
P: When I do class meetings?
I: Um-hmm
P: Yeah, I think it is, because normally stuff will like not be that dramatic, that was the most dramatic one I’ve had. But, for example, one of the things we often do are "I feel blank, because" -- you know and so, I like to get that insight, I think it helps me understand where they are coming from. So I feel like it helps me be a better teacher. I don’t know what feeling I would put to that though.
I: That’s okay. You’re glad your doing it. You feel insightful, knowledgeable.
P: And then there’s the frustration piece of the time. Like I wish I had more time for this but I only teach math and I only teach literacy and I don’t have...you know, like when I
taught, when I had science as well and sometimes we had a 20 minutes where I felt I could do something else, I feel like I don’t have that now at all. I don’t slosh room...
I: so things like class meeting go to the wayside. That’s where the frustration comes in.
P: So, never mind.
I: No, go ahead.
P: Its not pertinent to this but may be pertinent to the study. So like for me, the Tribes, I don’t feel like I’ve gone in as deep as I could into the academic piece and I know that’s huge in Tribes. And, I think part of it is time and being able to sit down and be able to look into this Tribes and think this is a good thing to do during math and you know. And the way I plan, I get so into my...it’s easy to forget that you’ve got that resource there.
I: That tool.
P: Um-hmm.
I: Yeah. Um. So maybe you’ve already spoke to this. So if you feel you already have, that’s fine. But can you speak about a time when facilitation was particularly rewarding and a time when facilitation was particularly challenging? Maybe a specific event.
P: I’m trying to think, because I haven’t done a ton. Um, I think the rewarding is what I already talked about. The one moment, that crazy one, when it was a difficult year. And you know I also think that was a turning point for me that year, when I kind of changed my mindset a little a decided to let some certain things go. Um, so that, and then like I said really being able to hear students and have students hear what’s going on. Um, and, you said the challenging?
I: Yeah, was there a specific challenge?
P: Its probably at the beginning of the year, or if we haven’t done them in a while and we are not into remembering our four agreements. When we are just kind of silly. You know.
I: And then you are feeling more frustrated.
P: Right, right.
I: Okay. That makes sense. So this is the last formal question. How do you view yourself as a facilitator?
P: Um, I’m probably more of a control-freak than I should be. And um, so like I said there is that idea of what I think it should look like and then what I really do. So my ideal is when there is conflict or there’s issues we are able to talk about it and problem solve together as a class instead of me coming up with an answer. What I really do is more directive, I am more directed. You know. And, like I said, I don’t feel like I go it deep
I: Because of the directedness?
P: Well, it's more because of the time factor. Its like, "You know what, we don’t have PE or music today, I'm going to take 15 minutes out of math and we are going to do 'I feel blank because" or "Math is interesting to me because" -- You know, that kind of a thing. And, oh dear it’s late; tell me the question again...
I: Tell me how you view yourself as a facilitator.
P: Oh, so I how I view myself, like what I see myself doing?
I: Potentially, yeah.
P: Is directing it more, not going as deep as I would like. Does that make sense?
I: What do you think then is getting in your way of...
P: I think feeling torn with the time and, um and then the time to really wrap my brain around really how to do this better.
I: And then you mentioned you are a control-freak, do you think there is also a personality component to that?
P: Probably
I: So, that seems like its part of it?
P: Um, well...but I do feel like I am pretty free flowing with...I don’t know, I don’t know.
I: Okay. So that’s my formal questions. Is there anything else you would like to speak to about facilitating class meetings?
P: Um, no other than, I was just telling [my principal] this morning you we are doing the ‘Gomez and Gomez’ and one of the things, the differences between our schools and where they’ve done it, they have a longer school day, they have smaller class sizes, you know, not that I necessarily want a longer school day but there is not enough time to do...
I: The time is feeling like a really significant barrier.
P: Yeah, and you know. We are talking about PE and doing more PE which I think is super important and going to be really awesome, but I’m also a little worried about, okay we don’t have enough time and they don’t understand place value...
I: Where are we going to squeeze this all in? Yeah.
P: And then the reality is if you are doing class meetings really, really well and efficiently I think it’s going to help everything else. And I know that in my head, but I don’t always take the time in practice.
I: All right, well thank you. That’s all I needed.
Interview J – Second Round

I: Interviewer  
P: Participant

I: All right, my first question for this round his how did you develop or not develop confidence in leading class meetings?
P: For me as the leader, confidence? You know, I think it is having a guidebook for me. So-- and I wish. I think I couldn't remember the name of the book last time. I think it's called-- I can't remember. But anyway, [another teacher] had given it to me, this amazing book. And it's all about class meetings and building community. So that was my first exposure, and I think that book helped. And the Tribes, I like having that reference to be able to go to. So I think that's probably it.
I: Okay, so your confidence mostly comes from that research and training.
P: Mm-hm, yeah.
I: Okay, so then how did you decide to start doing class meetings?
P: My first year, whaa! My kids are crazy and I don't know what I'm doing wrong. And so again, that was my friend [name omitted]. We both taught third grade together. She said, "[Name omitted], class meetings, class meetings, class meetings," and building that community and getting them to buy in. So that was--
I: So it was both there was a need and then advice from a team teacher?
P: Right.
I: So would you say it was like a behavioral need in a classroom?
P: Mm-hm.
I: Okay. And as far as the other teacher, would you consider her a team teacher or some type of a mentor?
P: Team teacher.
I: Okay, okay. So then what, if anything, motivates you to continue to implement class meetings as a strategy in your classroom?
P: Well, like I said, I really don't feel like I'm continuing them, and I'm very, very frustrated by that. So my schedule, the way we share our students, and it's kind of gone to a specialty what we're teaching. So I'm doing literacy and math, and she's doing science, social studies, and literacy. And that's all I have them for. It's not like there's a half hour it could be this or this. It's just not there. And so like today at the end of the day, I looked, and I gave the kids--- we had five minutes. I said, "We could work on this math sheet, but you guys have been working so hard. Or we could take time and go to the carpet and just have a quick meeting. You know, five minutes isn't quite-- and I was so frustrated and feeling like, ugh, I miss this. So I feel like I'm not continuing. Is that--?
I: Yeah, and would you say it is the time or the model of teaching?
P: I think it's mainly time constraints, which are maybe because of the model of teaching. Are you interviewing [my team teacher]?
I: Mm-hm.
P: So she has all of her kids all day long, and I'm pretty sure she's doing class meetings and has a little bit more of that wiggle room. But I don't really...
I: So if you had the time, you would feel motivated and wanting to do class meetings?
P: Mm-hm.
I: But that’s not existing right now?
P: Right, so we’ve had-- at the beginning of the year, I always start with them. So that first couple weeks we have them pretty routinely, and then it kind of starts to fizzle out. But then if there’s a big event that happens or something going on or it’s a transition time from a holiday-- I’ll trying to squeeze a few of them. They’re very infrequent.
I: So like a responsive kind of-- in response to something or--
P: I hate to say it, but I think it’s usually in response to something.
I: Okay. Well, thank you. So what-- how do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect the way you would like to engage in class meetings?
P: Um, I’m not sure if I’m understanding it. But if I’m understanding, I think it’s like the buy-in, you know? I think by developing that community and a culture of respect, which I think that happens during well-constructed community circles. And I think it’s funny. Last time we talked, you asked me something, if I felt I was controlling. And I was-- and then in talking about it, I was like, oh, gosh, I guess I kind of do like control. And I used to think I wasn’t wanting that control as a teacher. But as I kind of thought to myself, oh, I really want them to do it this way. I want your name here. I want-- so I kind of have a battle going back and forth between-- I think I digressed from your question.
I: No, that’s okay. It actually kind of fits. How do your beliefs about teaching and learning affect how you conceptualize or utilize class meeting?
P: I think the biggest thing is to have a respectful community where kids don’t feel embarrassed. They’re comfortable coming up to the Elmo with their math problem or sharing a writing piece or something. And I think that a community circle helps with that.
I: So would you say, then, that community or relationship improves the student learning?
P: Mm-hm.
I: Okay, and is that because of their rate of participation?
P: Mm-hm, and feeling comfortable participating.
I: So there’s also a safety component in there?
P: Yeah.
I: So you view it as your role to kind of establish that safety within a classroom?
P: Mm-hm.
I: And class meetings would be a strategy do that.
P: Mm-hm, yeah.
I: Okay, so this is a long question but not necessarily a long answer. So in my first round of interviews, I discovered that teachers take on multiple roles as facilitators of class meetings, from the manager during the meetings, the person who mediates during the meetings or even the person who creates the structure to allow students to facilitate the meetings themselves. All of these roles require some relinquishment of the teacher role during facilitation. What would need to happen for you to let go of a teacher role when leading a class meeting?
P: [chuckles] Okay, if I’m hearing it right, the way I’m thinking of it-- I think the thing I get frustrated with-- and you know when you have second-graders, like when you invite them for lunch-- let’s have this group come meet. They’re all talking at once and not hearing each other, and so if is set up as such where students are really communicating, listening, and offering suggestions or whatever, with the parameters of the goals that they’re trying to meet. Does that make sense?
I: Mm-hm.
P: Then I think I could stand back and just let it go. Does that make sense?
I: Yeah, so it seems like if the students can kind of follow some norms, maybe some social norms, and you guys have almost a task or something that you're working on, you could kind of relinquish a bit of control around that.
P: Right. And it could be a student, like this is always happening, kind of solving a problem, too. Whatever. I think I could. And what do you mean by relinquishing? I'm sitting back, and I'm not interjecting, but I'm still there?
I: Yeah. It could be lots of different things, but kind of my interest is how would your facilitator role look different than your teacher role? So when you come to circle, how does that look different than what you do in the normal classroom setting?
P: I think they're very similar and related because you're still guiding. I think-- everything I'm going to say I feel like, no, there's still really some more work--
I: So then could you imagine being a facilitator of a circle, community circle, where you're not guiding?
P: So give me an example of what it might look like. I'm being difficult [chuckles].
I: So maybe where-- maybe you would have a prompt or whatever, but the students are really engaging with each other, and you don't really necessarily jump into that dialogue.
P: Yeah, I think I could see that.
I: And that has to do with the norms piece?
P: Yeah.
I: Okay, so then how do they establish that?
P: That would be, I think, in your early-on meetings. It would be part of the meeting, learning it and practicing it. Does that make sense?
I: Yeah, so developing that through the meetings until they reach a point where they've achieved that goal or that norm. So when you think about that, how do you feel about leading a meeting that way or facilitating a meeting that way?
P: That would be, like, a goal of mine, you know?
I: Mm-hm.
P: Like I told you earlier what my ideal class meeting would look like, and I don't feel like I've ever really achieved them, either due to-- like, now, it's just I feel so pressed for time, or my first year, when I was like, "I don't know I'm doing!"
I: Yeah, there's multiple barriers.
P: Yeah.
I: Is there anything else you'd like to share about the class meetings? Even that time piece?
P: No, other than-- the only thing I hear myself saying, and you know, reality what you want and reality, and then when you try to implement, it doesn't always feel like-- after we met last time, I was like, you know, I just really need to commit to once a week. Or the same thing last year. I remember during Tribes training, they said, "You know, why don't you and your team, the whole building, commit to something?" But it wasn't actually specified. So we each were going to make sure that one of us had a meeting with one of-- so they each got a class. Each class had a community circle once a week, not necessarily with both of us. You know, you start doing it, and then it's EBCBM, and then we have to do DRAs. And we're behind in math. And so it gets chipped away at.
I: The pressure.
P: But the other thing is, like I say, building that community and that respect for each other should help with their learning.
I: Right, so it's kind of this--
P: It's a catch-22.
I: Where you know it makes a difference but you can't find the time to do it, and so then they're not reaping the benefits of it.
P: Yeah.
I: Okay, well, that's all I have.
P: All righty.
I: Thank you.