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# The Role of Celebration in Building Classroom-Learning Communities

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

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by

Virginia Farr

May 2003

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Dr. Louise MacKay

Keywords: celebration, classroom-learning community, collaboration, connections, enjoyment, equalization, solidarity, memories, socialization

## ABSTRACT

### The Role of Celebration in Building Classroom-Learning Communities

by

Virginia Farr

Today, teachers are expected to play a major role in the socialization of their students. Crafting strong classroom communities that incorporate celebration is one technique some teachers have developed to enhance a sense of belonging in their classroom.

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of teachers regarding what the practice of celebration accomplishes for the teacher, student, and class in reference to building and maintaining a classroom learning community. This study also examined approaches that teachers found to be the most successful in creating celebrations.

A multiple-site study design was used to gather qualitative data at 10 public elementary schools in East Tennessee. Data sources were standardized with open-ended interviews based on an interview guide. For the purposes of this study, celebration included group events and activities used to recognize, demonstrate, or promote significant classroom values, experiences, or occasions.

Many commonalities in teachers' perceptions about classroom celebrations emerged such as the enhancement of group solidarity, sense of belonging, and teachers' ability to find joy and meaning in teaching. Further qualitative and quantitative research should be conducted to determine how to best plan and implement celebrations for diverse classroom populations. In addition, a survey to capture ideas more broadly related to successful celebrations for a variety of age groups might be useful to practitioners. A study pertaining to the experience of classroom celebration from the perspective of the student was also recommended as a future area for research.

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated  
to all who work to  
nurture and protect children.

I also dedicate this study  
to all of the caring and talented teachers  
who have profoundly influenced my life.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am highly indebted to Dr. Russell Mays for his encouragement and consistent efforts in helping me to complete this large project. Knowing that he believed the subject matter to be important and useful made all the difference.

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I want to thank my family for believing in me and helping me to keep my perspective. My husband, children, parents, brother, and sister were constant sources of inspiration.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In order to provide a bright educational future for the youth of America, schools must be able to create meaningful, safe, and supportive learning environments. One has only to read newspapers or magazines or watch the news to get a glimpse of the many challenges, pressures, and problems children face in growing up today. Many reports, books, and articles published by child advocacy agencies outline these issues as well (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1997). Educators are challenged not only to teach academic skills but also to prepare children for life. Equipping children with social and emotional skills is a growing interest among educators. Johnson (1992) contended:

It is in school that students will learn, or not learn, how to cope with human diversity; in school, habits of productive work will be learned; and finally, schools will be where our children learn to work together for broad, mutually beneficial goals. (p. 61)

Creating a sense of community in the classroom has been found to be an important way to foster competence in these social and emotional skills (Kessler, 2000). Recognizing contributions and celebrating accomplishments are important ways that effective leaders build school communities (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993). Celebration is used to build a sense of community in many other types of organizations as well (Deal & Key, 1998). The ways in which celebration practices impact classroom communities is a topic that has received little attention in the existing research literature. Educators' knowledge base could be reinforced by investigating the role that celebration plays in building classroom-learning communities. This study investigated the perceptions of teachers with regard to the impact of celebration on building and maintaining classroom-learning communities and the approaches teachers have found to be the most successful in creating celebrations. In order for educators to meet the increasing needs of students, they must become better-equipped and knowledgeable regarding

building and sustaining learning communities in the classroom. If educators understand the role of celebration within the classroom, then they may be able to create effective classroom communities.

### *Background to the Problem*

Historically, socialization of youth occurred within the context of the family. Today, schools often shoulder the task of being the primary agent of socialization. There exists increasing pressure for schools to meet the social and emotional needs of children in addition to academic achievement. This presents numerous challenges and opportunities for educators.

For example, how students experience and perceive their classroom environment has been shown to be significantly related to their academic and psychosocial development, and to their school adjustment and performance outcomes (Garnezy, 1989; Haynes, Emmons, Gebreyesus, & Ben-Avie, 1996). Educators use a variety of strategies to build and sustain their classroom-learning communities, such as connected teaching, cooperative learning, and promoting emotional intelligence. Celebration has also been used as a strategy to build community in the classroom. Many educators have incorporated celebration as a means to recapture joy in learning, ease transitions, acknowledge effort and achievement, and show gratitude. For the purpose of this study, celebration includes commemorating or observing both big and small events, accomplishments, or special occasions to give them increased meaning and depth (Cox, 1998). Celebrations may be meticulously planned with food, music, and props or be spontaneous in nature. Celebrations may take the form of ceremonies, parties, story telling, or participation in special classroom traditions. Even simple activities can be transformed into small, yet treasured, ceremonies such as singing a certain song after the class roll is taken each morning. Celebrations generally include everyone who is present and they tend to incorporate some dramatic flourish that sets the activity apart from the mundane routine of daily life (Peterson, 1992). The intended goals of celebration are diverse, ranging from honoring a person,

motivating the group, enlivening an occasion, or providing healing or calming. Celebration calls attention to, or makes known, what is valued and important to the teacher and students in a given classroom. In summary, classroom celebration includes group events and activities used to recognize, demonstrate, or promote significant classroom values, experiences, or occasions. Educators who are knowledgeable in building and sustaining learning communities in the class will be better able to meet the increasing needs of students.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of teachers regarding what the practice of celebration accomplishes for the teacher, student, and class in relation to building and maintaining a classroom learning community. This study also examined approaches that teachers found to be the most successful in creating celebrations. A multiple-site study design was used to gather qualitative data at public elementary schools in East Tennessee. Data sources were standardized, open-ended interviews. The research conducted in this study was designed to provide useful information to teachers, administrators, and teacher-preparation programs. By developing an awareness of current teachers' perceptions and practices of the celebration dimension of classroom community building, school personnel may be able to improve their overall abilities to build effective classroom and school communities.

### *Significance of the Study*

Teachers are challenged more than ever to create productive learning communities within their classrooms because of changing demographics, multicultural classroom populations, inclusive classrooms, increased teacher accountability, and other factors. Often, the teacher's preparation and training do not address classroom, group, or interpersonal dynamics under these changing circumstances. Creative and effective ways to craft a strong classroom learning community are needed in order to move students toward increased interpersonal understanding,

academic growth, and cooperation. Celebration is one strategy that has been used by educators to create a sense of community in the classroom. Results from an investigation into the role of celebration in building and sustaining classroom-learning communities may offer educators clarification and strategies.

### *Research Design*

A qualitative approach was selected for this study based on the review of literature and the lack of substantial research addressing the incorporation of celebration in classroom community building. Because the objectives of this study were insight, discovery, and interpretation, the use of qualitative design allowed for both an indepth approach as well as freedom from preconceived categories (Patton, 1990). Elite, open-ended interviews using questions based on an interview guide elicited valuable information from the participants.

### *Limitations and Delimitations*

The major source of data was based on open-ended interviews; this limited the number of participants whose opinions and experiences could be gathered. Participants' varying degree of willingness to share their experiences in a one-on-one context may have also created some limitations. A major delimiting factor was the selection of exclusively fourth- and fifth-grade teachers as participants in the study. The study focused on fourth- and fifth-grade teachers because of the unique needs and characteristics of children from 9 to 11 years. Interviewing only teachers in the public elementary schools in East Tennessee delimited this study as well.

### *Overview of the Study*

The study is organized and presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the problem and provided the background information on the increasing importance of classroom-learning communities. The problem was stated, the purpose and significance of the study were explained,

the design of the study was presented, the limitations and delimitations were outlined, and an overview of the study was given. Chapter 2 includes a review of related literature pertaining to classroom community and the use of celebration in building community in a variety of contexts including the classroom. Chapter 3 presents the methodologies and procedures that were used to obtain and analyze data. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data collection. Chapter 5 gives a summary of the findings of the study. Along with this summary, Chapter 5 also includes conclusions and recommendations for further research and future practice.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of teachers regarding what the practice of celebration accomplishes for the teacher, student, and class in reference to building and maintaining a classroom learning community. This study also examined approaches that teachers found to be most successful in creating celebrations. This chapter contributes to this purpose as it presents a review of background studies that have influenced the present research pursuit.

Many changes in society such as globalization, advancement of technology, the rise in the number of children growing up in poverty, homelessness, and the changing structure of the family have increased the complexity of the teaching and learning relationship and the demands placed on professional educators. These and other changes have necessitated that additional responsibilities be accepted by schools. Teachers are responsible for fulfilling basic needs such as belonging to a supportive social group. Building classroom-learning communities has been viewed by educators (Dalton & Watson, 1997) as one possible way to increase a sense of belonging, trust, motivation, and prosocial behavior among students; thus contributing significantly to fulfilling students' needs for socialization and affiliation. In order for educators to meet these increasing needs of students, they must become better equipped and knowledgeable regarding building and sustaining learning communities in the classroom. Knowledge of additional ways to build and preserve classroom communities may offer educators multiple ways to create effective classroom communities.

In this review of literature, theoretical works, research findings related to classroom community, and classroom community-building strategies are presented. Among these classroom community-building strategies, this chapter will focus on the role of celebration. In

order to increase the understanding of the role of celebration in community building, the sections contained in this review are: (a) definitions and theoretical background of classroom communities, (b) selected classroom community building strategies, (c) the role of celebration in building community in a variety of organizations, and (d) the role of celebration in building and preserving classroom community.

### *Definitions and Theoretical Background of Classroom Communities*

A community of learners has been defined as a group of children and adults who learn together by sharing information, supporting each other's learning, and searching for and making meaning together (Kasten & Clark, 1993). Brown and Campione (1994) referred to learning communities as groups in which "each participant makes significant contributions to the emergent understandings of all members, despite having unequal knowledge regarding the topic under study" (p. 43). The desire to be a part of the group is basic to all human beings. Dreikurs (1968) contended that the potential for humans to function as social beings is innate. He argued that human beings are biologically predisposed to find both meaning and purpose in belonging to social groups. This premise has led educational researchers to explore the connection between classroom culture and motivation (Kessler, 2000; Oldfather, 1993; Peterson, 1992).

The role that classroom interactions and group dynamics play in learning and class participation has been viewed as far reaching and powerful. Oldfather (1993) explained that the truly responsive classroom honors the voices of students by building a community of learners that values caring for one another. This allows students to have control and responsibility for their own learning, and decreases motivational struggles by increasing the teacher's awareness of the students' individual needs.

Similarly, Dalton and Watson (1997) argued that there are many advantages to students' feeling that their classrooms are friendly places. These educational researchers found students to have increased trust and respect for teachers, enjoyment for challenging learning opportunities,



conflict resolution skills, willingness to help, and concern for fellow classmates. Peterson (1992) referred to teachers who build classroom communities as cultural engineers who work to establish values of trust, caring, integrity, and belonging. He viewed the classroom community as something that teachers and students actively construct together, with the teacher acting as facilitator. Overall, the classroom community functions to influence the quality of learning and life in classrooms.

### *Selected Classroom Community Building Strategies*

How students experience and perceive their classroom environment has been shown to be significantly related to their academic and psychosocial development and to their school adjustment and performance outcomes (Garmezy, 1989; Haynes et al., 1996). Educators who foster a strong sense of community in their classrooms focus on developing students' abilities to form and maintain mutually supportive relationships with one another and the teachers. Educators use a variety of strategies to build and sustain their classroom-learning communities; among these are connected teaching, cooperative learning, and promotion of emotional intelligence.

#### *Connected Teaching*

Empathic understanding of, and response to children's thinking and feeling form the basis for creating nurturing classroom environments that foster and maintain caring (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Noddings (1984) articulated an important distinction that further illustrates this point when she said that the student is immeasurably more important than the subject. She asserted that the most important goal of every educational institution must be the production of caring students and a caring environment. She argued that even though a student may accomplish the learning of a skill, if he or she hates the teacher as a result, that child is the victim of a substandard educational experience.

Noddings (1984) articulated some of the broader outcomes of education and considered affective goals as central to learning, perception of self, and caring. Viewed in this way, the responsive classroom environment is seen as having the potential to nurture students' ownership of learning. In order to create this unique environment, connected teaching has been found to be successful.

The concept of connected teaching (Belenky et al., 1986) is closely related to responsive classroom environments and represents another dimension of the classroom community. Connected teaching is based on a constructivist epistemological stance that all knowledge is constructed and that the knower is an intimate part of that which is known (Belenky et al.). A salient characteristic of connected teaching is that everyone in the community teaches as well as learns. The teacher in this context shares the ownership of knowing (Oldfather, 1993). Connected teachers craft a caring community of learners that encourages risk taking. Connected teachers invite students' collaboration in the construction of meaning, and they nurture students' voices by facilitating "the having of wonderful ideas" (Duckworth, 1987). As a result, students become more fully engaged as a classroom community and as a community of learners.

The work of Dewey (1938) can be seen as foundational for the development of ideas about connected teaching and the importance of the social and community facet of the classroom. Dewey was committed to such core social values as justice, tolerance, concern, and respect for others. He stated that these values cannot be decontextualized but must be developed through the direct personal experience of seeing and living the values in action amidst the daily life at school. The classroom, according to Dewey, is not a prelude to life; rather, it represents a miniature society. Dewey theorized that students grow as they participate, cooperate, and solve problems together. Dewey regarded the classroom life as critical training for learning to live in a democracy. He proposed an open, active, and participatory learning in which the learner develops self-control, social, and cognitive skills.

Similarly, Vygotsky (1981) concluded from his research that learning is indeed social and is fostered through social interaction. He articulated the idea that students and teachers share responsibility for creating classroom community. According to Vygotsky, the intellectual abilities that make individuals distinctively human "are a copy from social interaction; all higher mental functions are internalized social relationships" (p. 164). Vygotskian theory calls for an approach to learning and teaching that is both exploratory and collaborative. From this point of view, the classroom is seen as a collaborative community of participants working toward shared goals, the achievement of which depends on collaboration (Wells, 1986).

Both Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1981) placed much importance on the social and political implications of teaching. Likewise, the topic of classroom community challenges one to consider what education is all about and what the goals should or could be. Promoting and maintaining a spirit of cooperation in the classroom has been viewed as one of the most important building blocks for the classroom community. Cooperative learning is one primary tool that has been used to enhance students' abilities to solve problems by learning through interaction, teamwork, and interdependence.

### *Cooperative Learning*

Cooperative learning has been viewed as an important strategy for increasing sense of community of classroom (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Slavin, 1990). Used appropriately, cooperative learning is a strategy originally designed to supplement and complement traditional classroom instruction methods. One of the main reasons for using cooperative learning is to help offset much of the competitive and individual seatwork that is so predominant in many American classrooms. As the name implies, the method involves organizing students into small groups in which students tackle assignments cooperatively, help one another, share materials, solve problems together, and participate in discussion. Cooperation among students is heavily emphasized as the teacher promotes an all-for-one and one-for-all attitude among students.

Cooperative learning in the classroom enhances the quality of the learning community by increasing students' participation, feedback among students, and the mutual construction of meaning, which develops over time (Slavin, 1995). The cooperative learning experience offers students a unique opportunity to develop social skills and problem-solving abilities simultaneously.

In order to implement cooperative-learning methods effectively, it is important to know how it differs from traditional, didactic teaching methods. Five essential elements must be present in order for an activity to be considered cooperative (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Among these essential elements are: (a) positive interdependence (individual success is directly linked to and dependent on the members' success and each person's work benefits the other group members), (b) individual accountability (to ensure that each member achieves, students are held individually accountable to do their share of the work), (c) face-to-face promotive interaction (students are involved in promoting one another's learning by assisting, praising, helping, and encouraging each other toward success), (d) social skills (students must be taught the skills of communication, conflict resolution, leadership, and decision making just as deliberately and methodically as academic skills in order to participate in a cooperative effort), and (e) group processing (group members identify, describe, and solve problems they encounter in working together). It is imperative that educators understand these five basic elements and develop competence in structuring groups in order to prevent and solve problems that students will have in their groups, and to be able to adapt cooperative learning to relevant curricula, situations, needs, and students (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

A significant number of studies has been conducted over the course of the last century comparing the relative effects of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic methods of instructional outcomes. The majority of the instructional outcomes may be classified within the three interrelated and broad categories of achievement, interpersonal relationships, and psychological health (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Numerous studies indicate that the more

conceptual the task, the more creativity and problem solving required, the more higher level reasoning, and the greater the relevance of what is being learned to the outside world, the greater the superiority of cooperative over competitive and individualistic efforts (Ellis & Fouts, 1993; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Jordan & Le Metais, 1997). These positive effects of cooperative learning have been found for methods that emphasize both group goals and individual accountability, whereby cooperative groups were evaluated based on the individual learning performances of all members (Slavin, 1990).

Researchers indicate that effective cooperative experiences tend to promote stronger development of caring relationships than do competitive or individualistic efforts (Ellis & Fouts, 1993; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Slavin, 1983). Johnson and Johnson (1999) found that cooperative learning groups could teach children how to establish and develop friendships with peers to the extent of being actively engaged in peers' successes. Effective cooperative-learning groups have also been shown to significantly reduce absenteeism and destructive behavior in behaviorally disruptive group members (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Numerous studies indicate that working cooperatively with peers and valuing cooperation results in greater social competency than does competing with peers or working independently (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Jordan & Le Metais, 1997; Slavin, 1999). Many studies spanning several decades noted considerable evidence that when efforts are structured cooperatively, students tend to build positive and supportive relationships, engage in higher-level reasoning, and develop problem-solving skills. This classroom-community building strategy, by design, places learning in a social and interpersonal context. In order to help students acquire the necessary social skills for cooperative learning, the concept of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) becomes indispensable.

### *Emotional Intelligence*

Establishing values of caring and trust is an integral part of building a classroom community. Educational philosopher Martin (1995) referred to this as the 3Cs of education: Care, Concern, and Connection. Gardner (1993) originally coined the term "interpersonal intelligence." His explanation of this included the ability to understand others and to be able to use that understanding to work cooperatively with others. Goleman (1995) further developed Gardner's research and found that emotional intelligence is highly correlated with life success. Emotional intelligence includes abilities such as self-awareness, self-control, ability to motivate one's self, empathy, and handling relationships well (Goleman). Closely related to this is the notion of group intelligence (Williams & Sternberg, 1988), which attempts to illuminate why some groups are more effective than others. Williams and Sternberg found that the single most important determinant for maximizing the productivity of a group was the extent to which members were able to create harmony within the group. This internal harmony allowed the group to take full advantage of the talents existing among all group members. Highest functioning groups had the ability to constructively resolve conflicts and to downplay personality clashes, which were integral pieces of the internal harmony. Building a classroom community hinges on the teacher's ability to help students learn the fundamentals of emotional intelligence.

A growing number of educators have taken the position that the classroom plays an enormous role in influencing a student's social and emotional growth (Bocchino, 1999; Saarni, 1999; Strahan, 1997). The classroom provides children with an important opportunity to develop and test the social skills that elicit caring and support from others. For example, fostering students' abilities to form and maintain mutually supportive relationships has been found to greatly reduce social, emotional, physical, and academic problems (Parker & Asher, 1993; Rutter, 1985). Addressing the social and emotional needs of children at school has many far-reaching implications for the child, classroom, and school. A study undertaken by the National Center for Clinical Infant Programs (1992) illustrates this point well. According to the findings,

school success could be consistently predicted by certain emotional and social measures such as being interested in learning, being able to wait, being able to ask for help, knowing how to control impulses, being self-assured, knowing how to follow directions, and being able to get along with other children. This study's researchers claimed that almost all students who performed poorly in school lack one or more of these elements of emotional intelligence. In addition, a child's readiness for school can be evaluated according to the extent to which he or she knows how to learn. The study listed seven key components as essential to knowing how to learn, and all seven were related to emotional intelligence: confidence, curiosity, intentionality, self-control, relatedness, capacity to communicate, and cooperativeness.

Helping children acquire self-control and self-discipline has long been an area of research interest because these capacities relate to school performance. For example, Mischel (1990) studied impulse control in four-year-olds during the 1960s. The study involved presenting children with the option of delaying gratification and, in return, being treated to two marshmallows to eat versus not waiting and being given only one marshmallow to eat. These same children were traced 12 years later as adolescents in order to study the emotional and social differences between the group that chose to delay gratification and the group that impulsively grabbed the marshmallow. The research findings showed that those who had been able to delay gratification at age four were more socially confident and personally effective and had ample abilities to cope with frustration. This group tended to be more self-reliant, dependable, and achievement-oriented as opposed to the group who grabbed for the marshmallows. The group members who did not delay gratification were more likely to be rated as stubborn, indecisive, quick to anger, and immobilized by stress. In addition, after 12 years, they were still evidencing signs that impulse control continued to be an issue. As these students were finishing high school, they were evaluated again. Those in the group who had been able to delay gratification had dramatically higher scores on the SAT tests than those who had given in to their impulses. Poor

impulse control in children has been found to be a powerful predictor of later delinquency (Saarni, 1999).

Many school programs have been designed to address social and emotional problems such as violence, rage, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, and dropping out of school. The research findings indicated that timely help in developing emotional and social skills could stop a child's trajectory toward delinquency and other problems. For example, the Seattle Social Development Project, designed to teach and promote prosocial behavior, was evaluated in Seattle elementary and middle schools as compared to similar nonprogram schools. The overall results showed that the schools that implemented the program evidenced less delinquency, fewer suspensions and expulsions among low-achieving students, less drug use initiation, better scores on standardized achievement tests, less aggression in boys, and less self-destructive behavior in girls, when compared to both preprogram school records, and to nonprogram schools that were used as control groups in this study (Hawkins, Von Cleve, & Catalano, 1991). Similarly, the Yale-New Haven Social Competence Promotion Program was evaluated in New Haven Public Schools in grades five to eight, using independent observations, students' and teachers' reports, and comparison with control groups. The results showed improved problem-solving skills, better impulse control, better conflict-resolution skills, and less delinquent behavior in students having completed the program (Caplan et al., 1992). The Improving Social Awareness-Social Problem Solving Project studied in New Jersey Schools in grades kindergarten through six, used teacher ratings, peer evaluations, and school records, compared to nonparticipants. The results indicated that this program helped to increase prosocial behavior, sensitivity to the feelings of others, social awareness, self-control, and understanding of the consequences of behavior (Elias, Gara, Schuyler, Branden-Muller, & Sayette, 1991).

Mastering social and emotional skills has been strongly linked to academic success and interpersonal/relationship success as well as providing some insulation against delinquency and substance abuse (Goleman, 1995). A growing awareness among educators regarding the



powerful role that emotional intelligence plays in the lives of their students has initiated a move to community building in the classroom (Kessler, 2000). The desire to connect meaningfully with a group or community is a strong motivator for children, and a sense of belonging at school plays a vital role in the development of trust and healthy attachments. Deliberately creating opportunities for students to develop emotional intelligence within the context of a classroom community has been shown to provide many positive advantages for both the students and the quality of the classroom learning community that evolves over time.

In addition to the three strategies of connected teaching, cooperative learning, and emotional intelligence that have been discussed, celebration has also been used as a strategy to build community in the classrooms and in other settings. Many leaders in the classroom, and beyond, have turned to celebration for such purposes as: recapturing joy at work, easing transitions, acknowledging effort and achievement, and showing gratitude.

### *The Role of Celebration in Building Community*

The psychological and functional benefits of celebration have received attention in fields such as business, schools, community psychology, psychotherapy, and family studies. Celebrations have been used as tools for creating effective school communities. For example, Cunningham and Gresso (1993) contended that the best schools are developed by organizations that build excellence through enthusiasm, extraordinary individual efforts, and celebration. Schlorshere (1989) studied the sense of community among college students and suggested that symbolic rituals and celebrations created a sense of belonging and of being a part of something important. McMillan (1996) investigated the role of celebration in the area of community development. He found that symbols, stories, and music express those aspects of a community that transcends time. These symbolic expressions encourage values such as courage, wisdom, compassion, and integrity, which create powerful momentum in a community.

Kouzes and Posner (1990) noted the incorporation of celebration as a primary function of leadership in general. They referred to this as “encouraging the heart” and emphasized the importance of taking the time to recognize contributions and celebrate accomplishments.

Deming (1986), whose ideas transformed Japanese industrial management and ultimately American management as well, wrote extensively about cooperation and culture in the workplace. His ideas have become critical knowledge for school-reform activists. One of his central maxims for leaders was the charge to remove obstacles and replace with joy in work by creating interest and challenge, by helping people develop professionally, and by celebrating accomplishments. In his latter days, he condensed all of his principles of leadership down to one, which he told to a close friend: "The essence of our work in quality is about the human spirit" (Deming as cited in Deal & Key, 1998, p. 196).

Similarly, Peters (1987) argued that celebration builds community, purpose, and meaning at work by decreasing the fear of failure and accentuating the positive. He suggested that celebrating small victories and efforts is an effective way to build momentum and enhance loyalty of employees. Peters cited the Domino Pizza Corporation as an example of a company that used celebration as the chief means to maintain the company's cohesion and focus in the face of extremely rapid growth. The Domino Pizza Distribution's compound annual growth over an eight-year period was 75%, attributed largely to the implementation of creative community building celebrations (Peters).

A study pertaining to the Milliken Company illustrated another example of the implementation of celebration for the purpose of community building. In studying this company, Peters and Austin (1985) found that the frequent practice of celebration was highly correlated with Milliken's extraordinary quality-enhancement program. The Mary Kay Cosmetics Company, founded by Mary Kay Ash, used frequent celebration as one of its most successful strategies for recruiting, motivating, and retaining employees. Celebration of employee accomplishments and dramatic ceremonies largely defined the key ingredients to success,

according to Ash (1984). As cited in Farnham (1993), Kotter, professor of leadership at the Harvard business school, called Ash one of the best business leaders in the United States, claiming her creative employee recognition programs to be powerful and effective. Celebration has been studied within families and many of the purposes and outcomes are similar to those found within the workplace.

Celebrations have been found to be especially beneficial for children. For example, Cox (1998) cited at least 10 good things that ritual, celebration, and traditions do for children:

1. impart a sense of identity,
2. provide comfort and security,
3. help navigate change,
4. teach values,
5. solve problems,
6. teach practical skills,
7. cultivate knowledge of cultural or religious heritage,
8. create meaningful memories,
9. generate joy, and
10. keep alive a sense of departed family members.

Cox (1998) reported being amazed at how people tenaciously cling to their family celebrations and that they credit rituals as being the core definition of their family. Wolin (1988) found that family rituals and celebrations are the most accurate and telling aspect of family life as they illuminate the myths, history, and identity of a family.

Pipher (1996) asserted that ritual and celebration in families make a statement about the importance of the moment and the sanctity of family members' gathering together, which, in turn, provide security and a sense of well being for children. Lieberman (1991) described traditional family celebrations and rituals as a type of insurance against the uncertainty and

turbulence of life; providing family members with emotional resilience. Deal and Key (1998) captured the essence of ritual, tradition, and celebration well as they suggested:

Celebrations have feelings, functions and forms that go with them. Call the overall experience soul, a mood that cannot be manufactured. It is, in its essence, spirit. Something to be summoned, called up as it lies waiting beneath the surface of our being. . . . It is the creative space that gives life meaning and majesty. (p. 30)

Celebration, ritual, and ceremony undergird and intertwine with all aspects and phases of life.

Celebration is an integral part of the culture humans create and a primary expression of a culture's identity. Celebration, ritual, and ceremony imbue ordinary and special occasions with spirit, passion, and purpose. As the task of the teacher becomes more urgent and the classroom becomes the only safe haven and source of stability many children know, the role of celebration, tradition, and ritual in the crafting of a classroom community becomes an increasingly important area of study.

### *The Role of Celebration in Building Classroom Community*

Many professional educators believe that interpersonal relationships, a sense of fellowship, and sharing are basic building blocks of an effective classroom. Peterson (1992) explained that community is the single most salient means to learning, as opposed to any instructional method or technique. As in industry, one strategy that has been used to enhance the effectiveness of classroom-learning communities has been the use of classroom celebrations. Classroom celebrations take on many forms, such as rituals, ceremonies, and parties. Peterson described the potential and power of classroom ceremony as forming attitudes and creating a feeling of group purpose. He described its ability to initiate emotions, create a contemplative mood, or achieve an internal order. Bridges (1995) asserted that celebrations, whether impromptu or meticulously planned, help to define the classroom as a bonded group by creating a shared experience and a shared history. Bridges viewed this as a means to developing a classroom character with a distinctive internal order. Celebration was also an integral part of Holdaway's (1979) framework for creating a successful learning community in his classroom.

He used the celebration of developmental progress to recognize growth and accomplishment in his classroom.

A number of studies exist that explore the incorporation of celebration in corporate, family, organizational, community, and religious settings (Cox, 1998; McMillan, 1996; Peters, 1987; Pipher, 1996; Shein, 1985). Many of these studies serve to explain the particular rituals and rites observed by various groups. Much of the literature includes speculation and anecdotal material regarding various types of occasions or holidays that are celebrated. Unfortunately, the role of celebration in building and maintaining a classroom-learning community has received little attention in the existing literature on celebrations.

The purpose of the present study is to add to the research base on using celebration in the classroom as a strategy to build and sustain a sense of community. Analysis of responses from interviews involved grouping similar responses together and coding responses according to their similarities. Colaizzi's (1978) data analysis method was used. This method included reading teachers' descriptions of their experiences and thoughts related to classroom celebrations several times in order to acquire an overall feeling for them. All significant statements that contained phrases or sentences that directly related to classroom celebrations were recorded. Formulated meanings were ascribed for each significant statement. Clusters of themes that displayed the general commonalities between teachers' perceptions were organized. Lastly, a thorough and comprehensive description of classroom celebrations was developed.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of teachers regarding the contribution of celebration for the teacher, student, and class in building and maintaining a classroom learning community. This study also examined approaches that teachers have found to be most successful in creating celebrations. This chapter describes how the research was conducted, the participants, the instrumentation, data collection and recording techniques, data analysis, report preparation, and steps that were taken to ensure trustworthiness of data.

#### *Research Design*

Based on the review of literature and the lack of substantial research addressing the incorporation of celebration in classroom community building, a qualitative approach was selected for this study in order to discover insights, and interpret them. A qualitative design allowed for both an indepth and detailed approach and freedom from preconceived categories (Patton, 1990). Elite, open-ended interviews with questions based on an interview guide allowed for soliciting valuable information from the participants. According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), "elites" are considered the experts, the well informed, and sometimes-prominent people in an organization. Using this interviewing technique allows the researcher to gain access to what Patton referred to as "depth, detail, and meaning at a very personal level of experience." (p. 18).

#### *Setting and Selection of Participants*

The setting for this study was 10 public elementary schools in East Tennessee. The participants in the study were fourth- and fifth-grade teachers identified by each selected

school's principal as having expertise in the incorporation of celebration in building and maintaining classroom-learning communities. The study focused on fourth- and fifth-grade teachers because of the unique characteristics and needs of children ages 9 to 11 years.

Kaplan (1993) referred to this age as middle childhood and explained that during these years, the social world of children grows rapidly and the number and importance of their friendships increase; hence, they receive feedback from more sources. In this developmental stage, children's self-concept develops from a combination of this feedback and their own evaluations of their subjective experiences (Kaplan). Stepp (2000) described this developmental stage as a critical time because of the many maturing emotions, cognitive growth, expanding creativity, and emerging moral sensitivities. Children at this age begin to wonder in a serious way who they are, what they believe, and what they have to offer the world. Because of these unique circumstances, children in these two grades are particularly sensitized to peer relations and group dynamics in the classroom making them an appropriate choice for this study.

Teachers participating in this study were employed in 1 of the 10 elementary schools in which the interviews took place. The elementary schools varied in terms of their focus and the populations they served. Two of the 10 schools were county schools and the remaining 8 were city schools. Twenty teachers were interviewed for this study. Their years of teaching ranged from 3 years of teaching to 26 years in the classroom. The majority of the interviewed teachers had previously taught at least two grades. Because elementary education is a primarily female-dominated profession, this study included only one interview with a male teacher. The number of students in each participant's class at the time of this study ranged from 18 to 29.

Initially, a letter was sent to the elementary school principals introducing the researcher, the study, and the purpose of the study. The letter, as shown in Appendix A, also included a request for help in identifying teachers appropriate for the study and informed the principal that I would follow-up with a phone call to answer any questions and to determine his or her willingness to accommodate and cooperate with the study being conducted at the school.

During this phone conversation, I requested permission to conduct interviews on campus. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), access and entry should consist of four items: (a) making initial contact and gaining entry to the site, (b) negotiating consent, (c) building and maintaining trust, and (d) using informants. I established trust by remaining friendly, patient, and sensitive toward participants, and I assured each one that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the study. In addition, I expressed appreciation for the time and information from each participant. I worked to establish and maintain credibility by using open and clear communication, being available to answer questions, and working around teachers' school schedules. In order to contact the teachers identified by principals as potential participants, a letter was written and sent that explained the purpose of the study and requested their participation. A copy of this letter can be found in Appendix B. My e-mail address was included so that teachers who agreed to participate could easily contact me. An informed consent form was sent along with a copy of the interview guide to each teacher who agreed to participate in the study. Copies of these forms are located in Appendices C and D, respectively.

### *Instrumentation*

The instrumentation used in this study included an interview guide to aid in the interviews with teachers. A copy of this guide can be found in Appendix D. Teachers were interviewed using the general interview guide approach, as described by Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), to determine their perceptions pertaining to what incorporating celebration accomplishes for the teacher, the student, and the class in reference to building and maintaining a classroom community.

The interview guide was developed by the researcher following a review of the research base on classroom-learning communities, and the use of celebration in community building, reflection on personal experiences in the classroom, and multiple formal and informal conversations with teachers.



A pilot study was conducted to further ensure quality of the interview guide and to verify that the five teachers interviewed in the pilot study interpreted the questions as they were intended to be interpreted. The pilot study took place at a small private school in East Tennessee. The teachers were identified by the researcher as having both interest and experience with the incorporation of celebration in classroom community building. Modifications and refinements were made accordingly, in order to arrive at the revised and final interview guide (see Appendix D). This field-testing also served to test and refine the researcher's ability to interview, record, and interpret data.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

The data were collected by use of open-ended interviews using an interview guide. The researcher collected all data personally and the interviews took place at each participant's school. With the express permission of participants, interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The researcher took notes during the interviews, listened to the recorded version of the interview following each interview in order to further understand and analyze the information, and then listened to each tape again to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. A copy of his or her transcription was sent to each participant for review, further comments, and validation of the transcript's accuracy, and accuracy of interpretations made. The researcher worked closely with a peer debriefer in all phases of the study. We read each interview transcript, paying close attention to teachers' descriptions of their experiences related to classroom celebrations. All significant statements were recorded that contained phrases or sentences directly related to classroom celebration. We ascribed formulated meanings to each significant statement and then organized clusters of themes that displayed the overall commonalities between all the teachers' descriptions. This enabled us to develop a very thorough and comprehensive description of teachers' perceptions relating to the role of celebration in building classroom-learning communities.

In order to be trustworthy, qualitative studies must satisfy the constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was used as one method to establish credibility in this study. Member checking, according to Lincoln and Guba, involves the researchers' testing data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions with members of stakeholder groups from whom data were collected. They suggested that each participant should receive, via postal mail, a copy of his or her interview transcript for review, clarification, and suggestions. As suggestions were made, transcripts were revised accordingly and reissued for verification.

#### *Trustworthiness of Data*

A peer debriefer played an important role in establishing the trustworthiness of the data as this individual examined interview transcripts, field notes, coding patterns used, and reflective journal entries (See Appendix E). The peer debriefer ensured the confirmability of the study as well as reviewed and questioned the researcher's analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). A faculty member who holds a faculty position in the College of Nursing at East Tennessee State University served as peer debriefer in this study. She teaches research and theory at the doctoral level as well as conducts qualitative studies. She has an interest in this topic of study as well.

An audit trail consisting of raw data (interview transcriptions, field notes, audio tapes), records containing pattern coding, all notes, interpretations, analyses, and reflective journal entries was established and maintained (See Appendix F). A colleague who holds a faculty position at Northeast State Community College audited this study. She has an interest in classroom-learning communities.

#### *Researcher's Background*

The researcher holds masters degrees in the fields of education and psychology and has worked predominantly in the area of mental health over the past 13 years. The researcher holds

the viewpoint that schools should accept responsibility to address the social and emotional development of children to promote academic learning. The researcher remained mindful of the bias this opinion might have created and worked with both the peer debriefer and auditor to minimize the possibility of compromising the quality of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of teachers regarding the impact of incorporating celebration into the classroom learning community in reference to the teacher, student, and class. The study explored how teachers viewed the practice of celebration to influence students' feelings of connection to their class and influenced classroom life.

Data were collected by interviewing 20 teachers from public elementary schools in East Tennessee. The participants in the study were fourth- and fifth-grade teachers, identified by each selected school's principal as having expertise in the incorporation of celebration in building classroom-learning communities. The data were collected by use of semistructured, open-ended interviews using an interview guide. The researcher collected all data personally and the interviews took place at each participant's school. Member checking was ongoing throughout the research process to confirm accuracy of transcripts and interpretations.

Although the interviews were scheduled to take place at specific times and places in the participants' schools, I was frequently invited into their classrooms and given opportunities to observe. This offered me a unique chance to observe participants' interactions with individual students and with the class as a whole. I recorded notes from my observations on a legal pad. These observations became an important tool for my research and gave me insight into the information I was obtaining during the interviews.

Each interview was scheduled for 45 minutes, although most lasted for at least 1 hour. All of the teachers interviewed had received a copy of the interview guide at least one week in advance of the interview. The participants all showed enthusiasm and interest regarding the topics of celebration and the classroom-learning community. Having already been identified by

their principals as being experts in these areas, they were generally well prepared for our meetings. The majority of the teachers brought in various artifacts to share, ranging from journal articles to photo albums. One teacher brought me a Kudo's candy bar as a way of showing her appreciation that I was studying a topic so important to her.

As the interviewing process progressed, patterns, relationships, and themes began to emerge. The major theme categories identified during the study are presented using descriptions and quotes from the interviews. The data analysis was divided into three sections that examined teachers' perceptions about what the practice of celebration accomplishes for the teacher, student, and class in reference to creating and sustaining classroom-learning communities. The themes that developed from teachers' perceptions regarding what celebration accomplishes for teachers were: increased academic achievement, equalizing social status, decrease in discipline problems, teachers' enjoyment of students, and finding joy and personal meaning in teaching. The themes that emerged from teachers' perception regarding the impact of celebration for students were organized into affective, cognitive, and social categories that addressed students' sense of belonging in the classroom community. Themes that evolved from teachers' perceptions about the effects of celebration on the class as a group were meaningful student connections, collaboration, and awareness of others.

### *The Impact of Classroom Celebration for Teachers*

Academic achievement, equalization of social status, class discipline, enjoyment of students, and finding joy and personal meaning in teaching were major categories of thought that emerged from the interview dialogue.

#### *Academic Achievement*

Throughout the interview process, teachers consistently listed academic achievement as a top reason they chose to practice celebration. The ways in which celebration furthers learning,

invites risk-taking, creates shared responsibility, and increases time spent on academics were major patterns of thought in many interviews. Elaine, a fifth grade teacher of 21 students, explained,

It is encouraging to see them (students) working toward a celebration that is directly tied to what we're learning or a book we're reading. When we celebrate the book, for example, they make all kinds of extra connections. Because celebrations are a learning experience, it becomes a fun way for them to apply what they've learned and you know that's very satisfying. I mean, just going back to the latest book they've read, *My Side of the Mountain*, some of the parts of it would have been lost if we had not tried to do some of the things the character did in the story. Just like him, we dried apples and made beef jerky as a class. Then on the last day, when we finished the unit, we ate the beef jerky, and ate the apples, and celebrated our learning. The story really all came together for them, you know it was real.

Another teacher, Karen, gave her story of how celebration impacts learning. She elaborated,

Celebration sets up learning goals. It gives them something to work toward. If I tell them that at the end of this brain unit, we're going to have human brains coming from the hospital that you will get to hold and touch – then that becomes a motivation. You know, we're not just going to have a test and be done with it. This gives them something lofty to reach for. It allows them to work together in peer groups and work on study habits because you know you may have two friends, one academically stronger than the other, and you desperately want this friend to be part of the celebration at the end of the unit, and he'll say "come on let me help you study" or "we'll practice this test together" or "let's pair up in a group and I'll help you along." They tend to be very supportive of one another, to encourage one another. Peer teaching goes on quite a bit and I don't limit that. We open the classroom up. If your buddy needs help, then by all means help that buddy. We don't isolate ourselves as adults so why should we isolate children in the classroom? If a buddy beside me is struggling and I'm good at what I'm doing, then it's my responsibility to help teach the person beside me.

Another teacher, Kara, who celebrated peer tutoring in her classroom community related her story,

I use what I call Math Experts. What happens is, I'll teach a concept and I'll put a problem on the board and the first child at my various group tables who seems to have the right answer, gets to wear a tag entitled Math Expert. They're responsible for peer teaching the rest of the group at their table. What this does for me as an educator, is it allows me not to be bombarded by 22 children who need help on a problem. So more are taught and more are guided efficiently. Children are able to get across things to each other that I can't do. Sometimes you know, you can dance it and sing it but they still look at you as if they've never heard what you said. Then you allow peers to explain it and the light bulb comes on. Of course when they teach, it also reinforces what they've learned. This type of learning is a celebration and gives us something to celebrate. At

the end of that period, they take the badge off and put it away. And the next day they might get it again and they might not. It's exciting to watch them enjoy it!

Risk-taking and feelings of safety as it relates to academic achievement were mentioned repeatedly during the interviews. According to many teachers, the use of frequent celebrations sets the stage for risk-taking by increasing feelings of emotional safety. Celebrations were also seen as a means to include even the more introverted, hesitant students. A fourth-grade teacher, Ellen, explained,

I think I have to really like my students before they can care about each other. And I think the children perceive it so easily - they're sensitive to whether you are a facade or whether you are genuine. As a teacher you can make an awful lot of things happen and I don't think you're ever as valuable with children in teaching curriculum until you have attended to some of these other things. I have to value them – celebrate them for who they are – celebrate their learning and help them to realize that they are good enough. And the role of risk-taking is the thing we need more than anything else in the classroom. They're never going to take a risk if they feel like they have to be perfect and correct all the time. When they feel valued, they will take risks and give you answers and it becomes so wonderful, you know, to get answers that are so much better than what I could have thought up.

Another teacher, Linda, commented,

If you make your classroom a safe, inviting, and fun place to be, the academics will kind of take care of themselves. You've got to set the stage for thinking outside the box and taking some risks so that students will feel comfortable doing that in your class environment.

James, a fourth-grade teacher of 29 students, shared his insights on taking risks and creating emotional safety in his classroom-learning community. He recounted,

An example of celebration embedded in my curriculum would be in reading. The children will read silently, sometimes all of us in one book, sometimes kids in different books, and they write responses. Always, I have to teach what a response is and what quality responses are. And, typically we'll start each reading lesson by having some kids read responses from the day before. It's a way of pointing out what is really strong in those responses. An example is a reflection like a stream of consciousness about what they're reading and thinking. Maybe they'll say they really liked a part because they were reminded of a similar experience in their lives. All students see that there are a variety of ways to react to the reading. They model different points of view for each other and that's a kind of celebration that is occurring and I think this does lead to a sense of community. I think this has a substantial impact. A lot of times kids who other children would not perceive as being great students, tap into something, like an idea or emotion that is very powerful and personal and they come up with a really interesting and

powerful piece of writing. I see more tolerance develop, more acceptance, a sense that we are all sharing that little piece of space that we live in for six and a half hours a day. So I think sharing and celebration contribute to individual children's sense of belonging and feeling validated.

Karen shed a great deal of light on this idea when she explained,

I think if a child trusts his peers, then when he gets up to give a class presentation or speech, then there's going to be more strength behind his ability to perform. Imagine if we all could feel comfortable enough in your own classroom that no matter what happened, you were safe and those kids were going to support you and encourage you and your teacher will too. Imagine what could be done in the classroom if those fear factors were taken away. Your focus wouldn't be on being scared to death – your focus would be on academics. You would focus on your content instead of your fear. That comes from building a level of trust and community.

Another relevant theme pertaining to the relationship between academic achievement and celebration was shared responsibility for learning among students. In order to earn a celebration, classmates must share in the responsibility for learning. Melissa, a fourth-grade teacher of 25 students, explained,

When they learn that through cooperation they can be rewarded and celebrate, then they also learn with cooperation and working together, they can get through any tasks that they are given. We do a lot of cooperative grouping activities. I believe firmly in dialogue, problem solving, talking it out – different ways and strategies for problem solving skills. I want them to know that working together is better than working separately. It's a life skill and they can accomplish goals by working together. If you make learning a community effort, everybody works so hard to be involved and it's not just one child that shines, it's the whole group.

Karen, a fifth-grade teacher introduced earlier, stated,

I tend to focus on the group as a whole instead of individuals. A lot of the students are intrinsically motivated and are going to be focused on self, so it's difficult for them to step outside of that and worry about their neighbor's learning. So I think I've gotten better at group celebration instead of individual reward and making sure that we join in each other's successes – so there's group encouragement and opportunities for them to praise each other and encourage each other and uplift one another instead of just focusing on self.

Louise, a fifth-grade teacher with 19 students in her class, explained,

I have taught in the county and in city schools. This is real life – you have poor, you have wealthy. These kids learn that, hey, we all have strengths and weaknesses. Using celebrations and consequences both helps me get them prepared for life. To earn a celebration the whole group has to work together. When they have something to look



forward to, they begin to really notice each other and help each other out a lot more. They get invested in the success of the other students and begin taking responsibility for watching when others need help. I guess the moral for them is if your neighbor doesn't succeed, you don't succeed. So it becomes real personal and they get good at taking responsibility to help and be helped.

Along with sharing responsibility, teachers discussed the ways in which incorporating celebration increases time spent on academics. Marci, a fifth-grade teacher of 19 students, explained,

If my students don't feel good about themselves and also feel accepted, then they are going to have a ton of bad behavior, and academically, they just don't get anything done. When I get them to work on friendships, teamwork, and taking responsibility and we celebrate all this – the results are unbelievable. They work so much harder, their grades are better, and they are just more independent altogether. When we're doing all of this stuff well, we just have to celebrate it too, and that gets them excited to work even harder.

Another teacher, Heather, who has 24 fourth-grade students and has taught for 23 years, remarked,

I want them to know that the classroom is actually theirs. I tell them, "This is your education." A lot of my kids are needy and have lots of issues. I use celebration to push and motivate. Sometimes there's no support at home so I'm limited in terms of finding ways to help them succeed. They will work a lot longer and harder when they get breaks to relax and celebrate. Sometimes that one celebration of even a small accomplishment of an at-risk child is going to be the key for them. It will impact how the rest of the year goes.

Another teacher, Sonya, who is a fourth-grade teacher and has 26 students said,

We are a Title I school and a lot of our kids are needy. I try to help those students just improve overall and know their self worth. I use celebration to push them. I tell them that they need to complete certain things in order for us to celebrate - they can have their desired result but they have to work harder. So it is a lot of that. I use celebration to get their best work.

Leslie also commented on the use of celebration to increase the time students spend on task. She explained,

When I use celebration, I have so much more teaching time and they're happier. And when they feel good about the way things are, then they're going to learn, you know. Whereas if everybody in the class is mad at one child, I will get nothing accomplished with that child that day because that's all that's on his or her mind. So I mean it's a priority. It's up there with academics. Because if you don't have their social and emotional needs being met, then it's hopeless.

## *Equalization of Social Status*

In addition to teachers' emphasizing the way celebrations impacted academic achievement, they also spoke repeatedly about the ways celebrations equalize social status in the classroom. Amy, a fifth-grade teacher of 28 students, explained,

I think that it (celebration) makes them see each other as more valued than some of them thought. You know the little cliques that happen. When you take a child that's maybe a little on the fringes socially and you recognize that they are positively contributing to the group, I think that makes a big difference. At this age they still think teachers are wonderful you know and so, "Wow if my teacher is impressed with what another student is doing then that student must be okay." I've seen that. The dynamics of a peer group change when you can find ways to positively foster what that child is doing well.

Bee, a fourth-grade teacher of 22 students, shared her experience with using celebrations as a way to equalize social status when she explained,

At the beginning of school and all throughout the year too, our class celebrates in different ways. First of all though STARS, which stands for Stop, Take a breath, and Relax. This is to build community, to have them be aware, of feeling comfortable, of feeling safe, that this is a safe environment and knowing that there are times when we're going to be a little relaxed and that there are times when we're going to be working, and know the difference. So we have STAR time to help with that and getting to know one another. I have my work groups set up in a heterogeneous grouping with different abilities and I have high, medium, and low at most tables. And the kids help each other out and I see some carryover from the skills they learn from STAR. So those who are following directions will help the other ones – to remind them that they will have a chance to celebrate too. So we have a buddy system to help out with celebration. In that respect they all feel a part and that the classroom is actually theirs. I'm just here to facilitate and help direct their learning. I have the planned curriculum and I have everything set up that they're supposed to do, however, they have to work it and walk it out and that when they actually become, you know, a part and then we have these celebrations because we've all done well together.

Sue, a fourth grade-teacher with 15 students and 17 years of teaching experience, shared her point of view,

Well Virginia, I think in the elementary classroom we need to take every opportunity to celebrate their successes, however minimal they may be. It's critical that they feel good about coming to school every day. There are so many things that are secondary to them just wanting to be here and enjoying being with their peers and loving their school and their teacher and their special-area teachers. Celebration in this setting is very important. I feel like this classroom really needs to approximate life. We work together. We're not all alike. We all have our gifts and they're not the same. I feel that it is paramount that

with all the children we lift them up. Celebration helps me promote the things that they do right and downplay the other things because right now they are still children and they are learning all the time. And the children, these children, they are good, they encourage each other. When a child has stumbled and struggled over and over again, they are so forgiving and you know just gather them up and they are trying to bring each other along. I've got a child that's a good speller, and then one that's a poor speller, and then one that's a little boisterous, and one kind of on the timid side. And so, isn't that what life is you know? We have to work with those that are not on our ability level, and sometimes we're getting pulled along and sometimes we're pulling them along.

Another teacher, Tonya, shared her story,

I had several students last year who had some differences because of their cultural background. For example, after September 11<sup>th</sup> was hard. I had a little girl who wore a headdress. And so we used celebrations in that area to talk about the differences in people and how we relate to people and you know how it's okay to be angry at things that happen in our world but how it's not okay to be angry at someone in our classroom because they might represent a group of people that other people in our world are angry at. So I used celebration as a way to model, to help students feel and understand, you know, that this is still the same person you've known for six years and that you've been in school with for the last six years. And just because the United States was attacked by a group of people from whom this person comes culturally, is not to say that all of a sudden we look at her differently or we treat her any differently.

According to many of the teachers who were interviewed, celebration can be used in a deliberate way to prevent individual differences from becoming variables that separate students from each other. Celebrations used in the above contexts promote dignity and fairness that are the underlying basis for equalizing the social status in the classroom.

### *The Influence of Celebration on Classroom Discipline*

Another impact of celebration that teachers frequently mentioned was in the area of student behavior, particularly discipline problems. For example, teachers spoke about the use of celebration as a tool to promote conflict resolution, increase classroom safety, and to encourage socially responsive behavior in students. An example of this was explained by Leslie,

At the end of the day I'll play a "What did you learn today?" game. They can earn Bonus Bucks for this, which is one of my more individual rewards. Whether it's having stickers on their behavior chart or earning a hundred on a test. And then we have an auction at the end of the week and I auction off like five things. So they really work to get the Bonus Bucks. And we sit in a circle and I draw their name and I say, "Okay David what

did you learn today?" And they can't repeat what someone else has already said. So it's a great way to review and they'll help each other too. They try to encourage each other along. And then if something has happened that day that needs to be discussed then, like there's been an argument between two kids or you know, we'll talk about it and say what we could have done differently and what we should do next time and they give each other ideas and let each other say their piece. Other people will add to it until it's been resolved. They need to learn how to work things out on their own and this gives them more ownership.

Jane echoed a similar experience as she said,

Well, I want to tell you what my opinion is about celebration in the classroom and building community. What I do is try in my classroom to build a positive environment and the way I do this equals celebration, in my mind. Beginning the first day, I tell students that we are going to focus on positive occurrences, positive comments, positive behaviors, and we will be earning Positive Points for this. After the class has worked toward a goal of 50 points with everyone helping, we have a celebration. In deciding which celebration to use, I involve the classroom community and they decide as a group. We have a democratic voting procedure and they learn that everybody's vote is important. Now the impact that I've seen is, I have very few discipline problems. It's unreal how this affects my discipline. So that's an advantage I see, that celebration really improves my classroom discipline.

Ellen shared her story regarding how celebration impacts discipline when she said,

At the beginning of the year, several of the students were having a little bit of a problem just getting organized. It seemed like a new skill that they hadn't mastered yet. And so we had a class meeting and we said "We've got a problem. We've got some who haven't learned how to bring what they need to school yet. And what do we need to do?" And so we had not begun to use the discipline cards at all at that point. In fact, I didn't even have the cards up. And they said they thought I needed some type of discipline system. So I told them I would have the board with the cards up tomorrow. I told them that I would put the pockets out with their names first and then if we do need the cards, we'll get them out and put them in the pocket. And do you know, that fixed it. Right off the bat. It was just like because there's a system, let's do it. And so the celebration was in that they came up with the idea themselves of what their peers needed to do and they just wanted me to implement it. You know, that there would be a consequence because it was affecting their learning too when we would have to stop and deal with that. And they didn't like that. And so that was a celebration to them that "Oh good you've got your act together." And we've had to use the cards just a little bit but minimally all year long. It pleased me that they knew what we needed. And we could celebrate that we moved on, made the right decision, got their act together, and moved on. Well it just shows the power of wanting to be part of the norms that are established.

Heather shared a slightly different personal account of her method of using celebration in an effort to influence classroom behavior. She explained,

Celebration and sense of community gets me more time on task. They're going to be more respectful of what I ask them to do because they know they're respected. And I try to show them that they're respected. My mother's best advice to me in my whole life was "Shut your eyes sometimes and don't see everything that happens." And in a classroom this is so important. You know, I used to think, Oh I'm a great teacher because I see everything that happens and I'd go running and say, "I saw you do that." Sometimes I think it's being daring enough to stand up and watch things that happen and let them work through things. I find more times than not that they work it out. This is really a celebration of life. It is celebrating who we all are. They learn to work things out and see that it wasn't that big of a deal. My mother-in-law used to say, "If you step back, they'll love each other better and they'll like you better too." And my goal is that they love each other more.

Marcia shared another aspect of the way that celebration can be used as a way to call attention to achieving desired behaviors,

I just wanted to say that sense of community is a strong goal. I really do work at that. In that community I want them to show respect for each other and to me and to others in the school. They should be polite to each other. And one of the main reasons for this is safety. I think it's real important in terms of safety that we be kind to each other so we don't get choked on our food at lunch. Take care of one another. But you have to teach these skills. You have to bring some groups to that point, to the celebration point. So that there is something to celebrate.

Teachers shared that celebration was something they relied heavily upon to motivate students toward prosocial behaviors and for the teachers interviewed, this was described as a successful behavior management tool for their classrooms.

### *Teachers' Enjoyment of Students*

The enjoyment of students was another frequently cited reason that teachers gave for practicing celebration in the classroom. As the teachers' interviews progressed, it became clear that bonding with students and truly knowing students' lives and interests were things that mattered a great deal. Louise explained,

Celebrating with my students lets me get to know them as individuals. I try to get a lot of feedback from them and to figure out what they know and what they think. I want to know about the stuff they want to know of, stuff they think they need to know more about and this can change how and what I teach sometimes. Really knowing these kids makes my work more fun.

Bee explained how celebrating with students increases her ability to enjoy them,

Something else too is that I share a lot about myself with them. You know, the first week of school I do a lot of that. It's not necessarily academic but I think it's very important because I want them to know, you know, who I am. They hear stories about my husband. My mother lives with us and I share stories about that. We don't have any children but we have a little dog, Elsie, and she's our baby. And I tell them funny little stories, and I just feel it helps them to see me. I'm human just like they are. I go to the grocery store and have to do all those things too. My husband and Elsie even go to Cedar Creek with us and I think that builds a sense of family. I just want them to know I'm a person like they are. A couple of years ago I took my class to Williamsburg and when we came back, well I took pictures from the trip and we did a very primitive powerpoint presentation of the trip. Then we had a cookout here at school and we all got up and shared. Parents came and, you know, we had hamburgers and hotdogs and shared and that was just wonderful. That was one of the most wonderful things that I've ever done. I felt very much a sense of community with those parents and with those students. I always feel that I should share a part of myself with them. I would have to say don't be afraid to get to know your students and parents. I let them see me laugh and cut up.

Ellen described close connections to her students as she explained,

You know I try to walk beside a different child everyday from lunch to the classroom. I ask them to tell me about their baseball game or dance recital. I go to everything they do. I've gone to horseshows in Abingdon. I show that I value them and I do. I told them last week, I said, you know, "Can you imagine any other way you could spend your day and be as happy as we are in this classroom?" I said, "Look around, these are wonderful people in this classroom." And they are wonderful people! I make the effort and that's the way I learn to love them. And I really do believe that you have to value them and love them as an individual with their warts and all, and it works well.

Teresa related a similar feeling toward her students as she explained,

My birthday is on July 11<sup>th</sup> and we were in school. And I have this big thing, about not telling my age. Well, last year when I arrived at school, all of the elementary students and teachers had a little square on their shirt made out of tape and it said "47." And nobody would say anything. They would just smile as I walked past them and they would point to their shirt, which of course represented my age. And this year all of the elementary students gave me cards on which they'd created mathematical problems. Some were like ten different ways to write the number 48 and you know everyone made cards and read jokes. We're very committed at our school to helping students share in celebrations with teachers. We celebrate not only in our classroom with our students but also with our faculty. And going back to classrooms, and looking at what celebration in the classroom does for us, well, for a lot of us it just allows us to have a good time every now and then. It allows us to, you know, laugh with each other and see each other in a different light. Like for birthdays, you know, we don't do presents but we talk about what makes this person unique. We're sitting down and we're having a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and yet everybody is just as happy as if we'd brought in a cake with

candles. It gives us some downtime to just sit, visit, and get to know each other. You know, for me that's real important as a teacher to have that opportunity. Every couple of weeks we have a morning breakfast and we celebrate what is happening in our lives. And I have my coffee and they bring something to eat and we just sort of sit and talk and that's a neat time to get to know each other.

Karen echoed the same feeling of closeness and enjoyment with her students when she explained,

We talk about being a family. And if they make a mistake I'll say "Denny you made a mistake. We still love you and we won't divorce you because you made a mistake." And I've said that before because most of my kids come from divorced families. When I tell them they're still part of our family no matter what, then it's over. Everybody makes mistakes and I want them to know that. Okay, I'm a mom too and I treat these children the way I treat my daughter. And I tell them that often. I share my home life with them and I've got pictures of my daughter and husband and dog up. If I'm going on a trip, I bring them back slides and pictures. And we take time for all this sharing and they are fascinated with it. You see my rocking chair over there? That's our, well that's the center of our community. I sit there and I've always believed that children need to gather around. I don't want to preach to them at their desks and stuff like that. They all come close. They sit on the floor and sit all around me and we talk about anything that's important to them.

Sue gave a poignant example of her bond to students when she explained,

I am playing mother, teacher, nurse, and counselor because they don't have a lot of things they need at home. It is very much a family here and I tell the kids that. And I say, "You spend more time with me than you spend with your parents. And you spend more time with me than you spend with your siblings." Another thing I do is I have a mailbox and anytime a student has something they want to talk to me about, maybe a grade, it may be a problem at home, they can write me a letter. And I will write them back. And that helps for them to feel like I really care about them on a personal level, you know, on a personal basis. I think it's so important. And as they go on to middle school and high school, you know, they switch classes so much they don't really get to know the teacher. I mean, they do, but not to the extent that they do at this age and I think it's a crucial time in their life to be able to teach them good values and the importance of friendship and teamwork and responsibility and how to encourage each other. I feel like my goal as their teacher is to prepare them for the real world. And I feel strongly about that. I don't want to mother them too much but at the same time I really want to be there for them.

Consideration of being connected in a meaningful way to students was a constant thread running through all of the interviews. Enjoying students seemed to be closely tied with knowing them well, being able to share one's self, advocating for students, and being openly supportive of them. Celebrations were frequently mentioned as playing a critical role in that bonding process.

### *Finding Joy and Personal Meaning in Teaching*

Closely related to enjoying students, teachers often referred to celebrations with students as a major factor in their overall satisfaction with teaching. Tonya gave an account of how celebrating with her class created meaning for her personally as she explained,

I feel like children need to be rewarded and need to have celebrations and other things to look forward to. I would say that I pretty much couldn't do without it. I'm the type of person that I like the fun of looking forward to something and then having a special day or special event, just something to look forward to. And it makes me feel better as a teacher to give them things. I know I'm a big fan of pencils and bookmarks. So they always look forward to it. They know when I have gone out and I've bought new pencils and bookmarks, that they've done something that I've really appreciated. That makes every child feel very important and that they are a very important part of the group and that just to be here everyday and get through the day and doing their best is a reason to celebrate. It makes me feel good and it makes me feel like a better teacher and a better person. It really feels good to have some time just set aside to enjoy the kids because I like to laugh and have fun. It means a lot to me.

Jane shared a similar outlook as she explained,

I'm even more elated when a celebration has been successful and made some changes for a child who is at risk than I am over a child who I know has support at home. Because I know they're going to make it. They are going to somehow get it no matter what, even without the parent support at home. Sometimes you can change a child's life. So that really makes me feel good about myself and about teaching. When they're happy, I'm happy.

Ellen expressed the same sentiment when she stated,

In my reading class, for example, they don't all have to read the same thing. They are all so different and my goal is that they read. I am not here to make them all the same. I like to find things in their lives that make them different and to help them grow and to become richer. And it changes completely what you do, if you establish that as your goal. And I think really that's the way to make the world better, if we would give children the chance to bloom and show us what their interests are and that it is valued. I want to make a major contribution to that child's feeling of self-worth, to their attitudes toward reading, their attitudes toward learning, and their feelings about what is happening in the classroom. Celebration has become a very, very important part of that.

Melissa shared her experiences with finding meaning and joy as she celebrated with her students. She explained,

I am much more celebratory from year one when I started teaching to now. My first year teaching, you know, I look back and I want to hang my head. As far as community, I did more of the rows when I first started teaching. I did rows here and rows here. Having



the children grouped now where they're arranged in heterogeneous groups I think promotes a lot of good stuff. We have the haves and have-nots, material-wise and support from home-wise and it's my goal to really help each child. I want them to realize that they are teachers too. I'm not the only expert in the classroom. You want to know more about animals, talk to Josh. Josh knows tons more about animals than I know. And Josh is a child that really, really struggles in this class. My husband, when I'm getting ready for work in the morning will go, "Wipe that smile off your face, nobody should feel this way about going to work." But I do and I love my job and it makes a world of difference since I work with kids. I can't imagine doing anything else other than teaching school, ever.

Heather stated a similar outlook as she said,

Celebration has done a lot overall for me as a teacher. It makes me want to come back every day. I love my day at school. You know it's hours grading papers and things like that, you know, that kind of drag you down. I mean, I usually can't wait to get here to the kids. There are days when I just want to stay in bed and then I get here and see their smiling faces and it makes me want to come every day.

Celebrations were described by teachers as making a real difference in their motivation and in their ability to find joy and personal meaning in their classrooms.

### *The Impact of Classroom Celebrations for the Class*

Teachers' perceptions of what celebrations accomplish for the class revolved around cultivating a sense of group solidarity. The main themes throughout the interviews were the ways in which celebrations foster connections between students, collaboration, and an awareness of others.

### *Connections in the Class*

The idea that celebrations in the classroom tend to draw children together and promote a community spirit arose numerous times throughout interviews. Karen gave an example of this process when she stated,

It is very difficult for some of us to step outside of ourselves and worry about the other person. You know, with 9/11 last year, events like that tend to bring you close together. This year as a memorial, we made a memorial wall out of tile. Each child painted an individual tile as a memory of 9/11 and then we put them all together. The kids spent a whole day discussing, you know, how we're Americans and how we can bond together in

the classroom to take care of each other. And we can celebrate by coming together and just circling our wagons, to protect one another, by honoring this memory of 9/11. So there are lots of opportunities for them to break down some of the distinctions among them in the class and come together as a group and encourage each other. Sometimes I just sit back and watch them as it's happening.

Another teacher, Teresa, gave an account of her experiences in celebrating with her students as she explained, "Many of the celebrations that we have here at school connect us to each other and allows us to be a little more intimate, a little more understanding with each other. This draws us closer to each other." Sonya echoed this same sentiment as she explained,

I often use celebration as a tool. I don't just celebrate their work but also who they are. The narratives in the morning do take time, a chunk of time, in the mornings. Everybody has their turn to tell what they have done since we saw them yesterday. And they love it! It is a huge bonding activity. But what also happens is that it is a huge linguistic tool because they have to say a main idea before they start. They have to give a topic sentence. And you find out a lot about a kid. It really gives you a lot of insight into what they're having to think about and deal with and you know what they're up against that day. I wouldn't give anything for that bonding time in the morning because we also celebrate how articulate they're becoming and how brave they are to share with somebody else what's going on in their lives. There are just so many skills involved there and that celebrates a lot.

In addition to promoting connections in the class, most teachers who were interviewed described the ways in which celebration encouraged collaboration among students.

### *Collaboration in the Class*

The desire for students to be able to work together was mentioned frequently in the course of conducting interviews. Teachers discussed how celebrations in the classroom provide a good context for collaboration. Melissa explained,

That's my job as a teacher, to set up opportunities for learning and just see what they will do with it. In the beginning of the year, you set up these learning opportunities and instead of gravitating toward each other, they want to go another way. You have to push and prod and shape them toward working together. Then there comes a time somewhere in the year where they want to work in groups and get with their teams. They don't want to read by themselves anymore because they want to read with a partner and they tend to cling to one another. You force the issue initially until they become comfortable with it. So there's a sense of "Look what we've accomplished and look how far we've come.

Let's have a big celebration to recognize what we've accomplished." Instead of an "I did this," there's more of a "We did this and look what our class learned."

Another teacher, Jane, shared her experiences when she stated,

Well, I think you have to look for moments to give rewards and celebrate. Like, unless everybody's working together at this table, you don't give a reward so that encourages teamwork. So celebrating can be another team building type of exercise I think. You see some of them are not getting socialization in their homes. They have not had that experience of the give and take in positive ways so you have to teach that. We tell them that life is about working in groups. So they need to learn these skills and learn how to compromise and that's tough for some kids at first. But as you build your sense of community you're building groupwork and teamwork too.

Louise expressed her experiences with how celebration enhances and reinforces collaboration among students. She stated,

The concept of learning something by working together is the key. I don't think they really care what they actually do. It's just a break in routine and they have some ownership because they get to say what they want to do. It's the group process of getting to the reward. In the end, it doesn't matter what the reward is because it's the accomplishment of getting to do something together.

Working collaboratively and forming meaningful interpersonal connections in the classroom are both predicated on developing an awareness of others. Sense of community and celebrations were viewed as important ways to foster students' increasing their awareness of others in the classroom.

### *Awareness of Others in the Class*

During the interviews, many teachers commented on the critical role the teacher plays in socializing students. It seems that the success of the classroom community hinges on being aware of and responsive to others. Being aware of others was talked about as both an emotional and a physical type of awareness. Sue explained,

In our morning meeting is where we build community for the day. And we start out by greeting each other by name and we use several different kinds of greetings. The greetings are to recognize everyone in the room who's here and to find out who's not here. We'll usually call them and find out why they're not here during our morning meeting. If they're sick, we'll usually put the phone down in the middle of the morning meeting so that the sick student could still sort of participate. We tell them that we miss

them. We also play a ball game where we pass the ball behind everybody's back and one person is in the middle trying to find out who has the ball in their hand. And you're watching very carefully because the person might throw the ball to another person in the group behind your back, when you're not looking. So you have to be looking at signals and we're trying to make people even more aware of how people look and signal when there's something going on that's important. Sort of making people aware of signals and gestures just to heighten awareness, you know, both physically and emotionally of each other. We talk about, you know, what caring looks like, what tactfulness looks like, and also trustworthiness.

Marcia elaborated on this point when she explained,

That sense of community is what I just fell in love with at this school. Students helping each other, you know, with school work or anything. Someone drops something and someone rushes over to help them pick it up. I try to make sure that I call attention to that and I praise them and say "Thank you very much, that was very nice of you to do that." They should most definitely be mindful of others. I think of us as a kind of family and I think as long as they feel that and as long as they understand that their actions not only affect them but it can affect the rest of the group, just like in a family.

Ellen related her experience with using praise, celebration, and recognition to increase awareness of others with her class. She said,

We value each other's names. We put a high sense of importance on an individual's name and we feel so strongly about it that we've included it as part of our rule in terms of respecting others. We call others only by the name that they want to be called and we make that clear on the very first day of school. We try to honor that in the very best way we possibly can because that makes it really clear to the rest of us what that person's boundaries are. We really value that so we put great emphasis there. That goes along with their specialness, so their name is valued. I think it's real important that they act like they care about each other, not just to feel that way, but to act like they do . . . to show it.

Awareness of others seemed to be a staple in the process of building community in the classroom and emphasizing it through celebration and recognition was a major concern for every teacher interviewed.

### *The Impact of Classroom Celebration for the Student*

In the previous section, the impact of celebrations for the whole class was explored. This section will investigate teachers' perceptions regarding the ways in which celebrations affect the individual student. The sense of belonging that celebrations gave to students was a major idea

that frequently emerged in the course of the interviews. The impact of celebrations was divided into social, cognitive, and affective categories.

### *The Impact of Celebration on Students' Social Development*

One of the benefits given for taking the time to create a classroom-learning community and incorporate celebration was that students were acquiring and practicing social skills that they will need in order to function as competent adults. In the context of celebrating in the classroom community, students have the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships and experiment with a variety of social interactions. The classroom community celebrations were also viewed as a way to learn how to balance being an individual yet fitting into and contributing to a group.

Sonya explained,

They will take a lot of pride in watching the plants grow because of the way they've watered them and taken care of them. Even reporting the weather on the computer just needs to be done really accurately or we won't have that data right. And so it's like a celebration because they're taking ownership of what has to be done to make it function as a community because no one person can do everything. Just even something as insignificant as being door holder, that's like a celebration, because that's very important when someone's arms are full and they need assistance. That's celebrating cohesiveness. Then a real biggie is to celebrate not just the uniqueness of each individual, but their specialness. Why are they just so special? I think that it's really important for them to realize that themselves. Just like in all relationship issues, if they have a strong sense of who they are and what makes them special, then it enables them to conquer some relationship problems. They can take a lot of things less personally if they know that they are special. If they can celebrate that they are special no matter what, then the whole community relates better. And in doing so, there's that fine line between celebrating their specialness and then making it cohesive in the community. You're not so special that you get special treatment because you're still one of the group. So with celebrations a lot of times I focus on feeling good about yourself, knowing that you're special and being able to use that to fit in. You see, it's all got to go back into the collective to work right.

Elaine shared her experiences about how celebration impacts the social development of students.

She stated,

The concept that a community of friends can accomplish something that you as an individual can't accomplish, is really important. And along with this, it's real important to try and solve the relationship problems in a democratic way. They want justice. They want justice from you, the authority figure, but they also want it from their friends. And

they feel wronged if that doesn't occur. And so there's just a lot of celebration where relationship problems in the class get worked out. That establishes trust. They need to trust you enough to be able to share, you know, what's wrong and what injustice has happened. And you may not have to say anything. Just listening can be cleansing and they use their peers as sounding boards a lot too.

Jane expanded on social development also, as she explained,

Celebration has become a way for me to get students working together so they can feel some success and pride. Reinforcing social skills is the biggest role that we play as a community. These skills are going to be absolutely necessary for them to be successful. When you can help your kids celebrate being respectful, being a good listener, taking responsibility, you know, those are life skills. You're giving them life skills.

Melissa offered her experiences as she stated,

I think that unity of spirit and trying to incorporate children into a classroom family is so important. At the beginning of the year I always have the words "We are Family" up on the wall. We talk about that an awful lot and I think we really have established family that way. It's not always easy to make that feeling among children, that each child is to belong, to be a part of what we do. You know, you're always trying to build in that making of friendship. They sit in groups in the class and when they walk, they walk with a buddy. I change the study groups every nine weeks to give them the opportunity to make a friendship with somebody else and to learn how to be supportive of another child. I think all of that is part of trying to make them feel like part of a group. And all this celebrates what life should be although that's not really the curriculum. It has nothing to do with curriculum at all but I still think it's extremely important.

In addition to celebrations' being used as a way to enhance the individual student's social development, many teachers spoke of the impact of celebration for student's cognitive development as well.

### *The Impact of Celebration on Students' Cognitive Development*

Celebration was seen by interviewed teachers as a means to create excitement about learning, increase motivation, and to build momentum for learning. Setting goals, taking responsibility for one's own learning, and increasing memory retention were also mentioned as benefits students derived from celebrations. Kara explained,

Having "Math Experts" removes a lot of stress for me. As smart as we tend to think we are and as educated as I tend to think I am, my ways and my thoughts are not always the

ways and thoughts of the children. They meet each other's needs in ways that I can't do. The teaching doesn't always have to come from my mouth. So if you're going to wear the badge that says "Math Expert" you have to pay very close attention to what you're teaching your group and what's not working. And the experts will change from day to day so there's an opportunity for each child to become a math expert, which of course motivates them and gives them the self-esteem that they need. So we celebrate being able to teach others and being taught by others. It's amazing how excited a child gets just with that badge on that says "Math Expert," even though it is only a .99-cent badge from Michael's. It's exciting to watch them enjoy it. Children see that if you need help, you find the person who has the badge on because they're deemed as worthy to help and so the math experts are received very well by their peers and this is a big accomplishment that I celebrate in class.

The process of becoming an effective learner was also mentioned as an area where celebration was used. Ellen explained,

Even an applause is a celebration. Like "Good for you." Because it's real easy for some children to say "I can't" or "I don't know how" or "I don't want to." And so if they take that risk and go for it, then you celebrate that too. You want to say "I'm proud of you for even trying." Even trying is something that we must celebrate and not always the end product. In today's society, sometimes we feel like we can just pay someone else to do our learning for us, and it doesn't work that way. That effort part has to be taught, you know, that you work for what you get and yes it's going to be a challenge but that's just what we do. As a teacher, you're trying to instill some values that you take responsibility for your own learning. You're also expected to contribute to the learning of others. And that's kind of a theme here. I want them to learn about the joy that can exist there in the learning . . . just that sheer delight in learning. It can all be very tedious if we didn't have celebrations interspersed. It would be counterproductive to have the high expectations and then not turn right around and celebrate every aspect of the effort and risk taking. I would not be brave enough to have the high expectations without the celebrations.

Jane shared her experiences regarding the incorporation of celebration into the curriculum for the purpose of enhancing memory:

I think celebrations do a lot of good for memory. Through celebration, we establish more memories connected with our learning and that is going to accomplish a lot and make the memory richer. So that has to make more happen in general with students learning I would think. As time goes on, I've incorporated more and more ceremonies and festivities because I feel they make such a difference for learning.

Sonya's comments added yet another dimension of understanding the learning through celebration link as she said,

It's real easy for celebrations to take much longer than you'd ever dream, so I try to make sure they're very focused on the substance of what we're studying. It requires a lot of focus so I like to evaluate my celebrations and what I look for is feedback from the kids. I listen to them. I want to know what was significant, what worked well and what didn't. And I really do value that, what they say. I want the celebrations to be fun but to also have significance. Then I also look to see if it initiates any further investigations. Do they end up wondering about something else as a result of the learning and the celebration? Does it bring any new thoughts to mind? Or, they may say something like, "My family decided to do something related to what we studied." That's what makes me keep wanting to do celebrations . . . that even after we've put closure on whatever we're doing here, they are still carrying on learning outside of class and that's pretty exciting.

Jane spoke of the connection between celebration and improving cognition. She explained,

I give the students the chance to earn positive points in my class and the celebration part in my mind is when we achieve our goals. One of the goals we celebrate is improving our higher level thinking ability. I use positive points to improve the students' abilities to think on a higher level.

Erin also spoke of the ways in which celebration can be used to motivate and stretch students.

She explained,

I'm convinced all a teacher needs to do is set the bar high and they'll rise to the occasion. You have to give them something to celebrate. If you don't give them cause to celebrate then what's the point? Give them something to work for, set the bar high, and let them rise to it. They will rise to the occasion. And so maybe that's what celebrations are for, they represent the bar that students have to reach for. If you only set one, then some of them aren't going to get there the first time...but if you set them regularly, then they watch as their friends reach and struggle and then make it. Then they begin to pull each other up. The more celebrations you have, the more opportunities to get to that bar. Then the more chances you have to get the whole class performing well.

Each teacher interviewed mentioned using classroom celebrations as a way to enhance students' learning. In addition to using celebration to augment learning, teachers also spoke of the numerous benefits of celebration for the affective development of students.

### *The Impact of Celebration on Students' Affective Development*

During the interviews, teachers spoke regularly about how celebrations in the context of a classroom community offer certain commodities to the emotional life of students. The sense of belonging that celebrations engendered was an important thread running through the interviews.



Teachers described celebrations as a means to promoting acceptance, caring, and affirmation for students. Louise shared her insight when she stated,

Hopefully what the community will allow for in a classroom is some really good peer assessment, as well as the ability to self assess. Empathy is an important part of this peer assessment and can allow students to celebrate, you know, one-on-one too. Like, one may say to another student, “Since the last time we worked on this, I can see some real growth and real improvement.” And just a comment like that from a peer, I think of as being a celebration. You know, an affirmation from a peer can go a long way.

Teresa recounted her experiences with using celebration to enhance affective development. She said,

I have so many children from different backgrounds that getting them finally on the same page and working together smoothly is a major feat. I have several children who come from very chaotic homes and they have a hard time controlling their frustrations and anxiety. Part of this classroom community model for me is a way to help them learn to think before they act. I do want them to learn how to express themselves but also respect the feelings of those around them. I guess self-control sums it up. I try to keep my routines as consistent as I can to give all of them a sense of exactly what the expectations are going to be from day to day. In time, as the year wears on, they grow up a lot . . . start being more responsible, more helpful, and more at ease. Then we can celebrate because they’ve learned their limits and boundaries and they’re just so much better off than they were when I got them in the fall. The celebration of all this lets them see how far they’ve come and how important it is to have yourself under control, to do what you’re supposed to and to treat others with kindness.

Bee explained her insights when she stated,

The thing that I’ve seen celebration help students with the most is probably self-esteem and also giving them more understanding of other people. I had one little girl in class from a totally different part of the world come in and give very beautiful little Valentine’s Day presents to every child in our class. The presents were decorations from the Middle East and she was able to talk about her family and share a lot about herself. She was always shy and sort of not very popular. When she had that opportunity to share with the other kids, suddenly she had ranking in the classroom. I’ve seen that happen a lot where a kid who is shy, misunderstood or sort of passive gets an opportunity to stand out during a celebration. It can really change things for the better. The “Christmas Around the World” program that I do each year is good for promoting understanding too. We have a mini celebration after we study each tradition around the world. Children get a better worldview and it builds understanding in the classroom too. Some of the student’s parents come in who are Jewish or have African roots for example and help me. So it really opens up the classroom to the larger community and helps kids develop more understanding and hopefully more acceptance.

Louise’s experience echoed similar findings as she explained,

What I feel like celebration helps with a lot is being okay with delayed gratification. A lot of kids just don't yet have the hang of working toward something that will be delivered at a later date. This is really hard at first, you know, the whole concept of earning something by working hard and achieving your goals. I want to get them in the groove of this kind of thinking because when they enter the work force it's all about working for a paycheck, working for a promotion or other things they will want. A celebration is good for teaching them to hang in there and keep at it and some students need this structure more than others. If I can use celebration just to accomplish this one purpose of learning delayed gratification then I'll feel like I've done a lot of my job well.

Within the data analysis, several themes were found in perceptions expressed by the study's participants. The themes were divided into three categories addressing what participants perceived to be the impact of incorporating celebration in the classroom community for teacher, class, and students. Themes in the "teacher" category included celebration as it related to academic achievement, equalizing social status, discipline problems, teachers' enjoyment of students, and teachers' finding joy and personal meaning in teaching. Themes in the "class" category related to celebration were: forming healthy student connections, promoting collaboration, and awareness of others. Themes for the "student" category were: social, cognitive, and affective development. Thick descriptions through quotes were used to present themes from the teachers' interviews. Information from the data analysis section was then used to develop themes and implications presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5  
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH  
AND FUTURE PRACTICE

The perceptions of teachers regarding what the incorporation of celebration accomplishes for the teacher, class, and student in reference to building a classroom-learning community were investigated through a phenomenological study. Interviews were conducted with 20 teachers identified by each selected school's principal as having expertise in the incorporation of celebration in building classroom-learning communities. The interviews took place in 10 public elementary schools in East Tennessee. The participants were fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. The data were collected by the use of semistructured, open-ended interviews using an interview guide. Transcripts of taped interviews were coded into categories derived inductively by the researcher. Themes were drawn from the coded materials and formed the base of the organizational structure for the data analysis. Member checking was ongoing throughout the research process to confirm accuracy of transcripts and interpretations.

The specific purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of teachers regarding what the practice of celebration accomplishes for the teacher, class, and student in reference to building and maintaining a classroom-learning community. The description of teachers' experiences as shared through an interview process created the foundation of the study.

Little information was available in the literature in the form of substantial research addressing the incorporation of celebration in classroom community building. The research conducted for this study was designed to provide useful information to teachers, administrators, and teacher preparation programs. Through developing an awareness of current teachers' perceptions and practices regarding the celebration dimension of classroom community building, school systems might be able to improve their overall abilities to build effective classroom and

school communities. Because of changing American demographics, multicultural classroom populations, inclusive classrooms, increased teachers' accountability, and other factors, teachers need creative and effective methods to craft strong classroom-learning communities. The researcher viewed this study as having potential applicability to administrative and instructional practice in a variety of school settings and systems to improve classroom communities.

Findings in this study were organized into three categories related to teachers' perceptions about what celebrations accomplish for teachers, students, and the class in regard to building and maintaining effective classroom-learning communities. Themes that emerged supported key components of previous research. The theme areas identified from the data analysis process included classroom connections, collaboration, awareness of others, social development, cognitive development, affective development, academic achievement, equality of social status, decrease in discipline problems, teachers' enjoyment of students, and teachers' finding joy and personal meaning in teaching. Findings for themes were presented within the context of reviewed literature. Findings were directly related to one or more basic conclusions as well as recommendations for further research or future practice.

### *General Findings*

#### *Professional Literature Context*

Researchers viewed interpersonal relationships, a sense of fellowship, and sharing to be basic building blocks of an effective classroom (Bridges, 1995; Holdaway, 1979; Peterson, 1992). Bridges asserted that celebrations help to define the classroom as a bonded group by creating a shared experience and a shared history.

*Finding 1.* Cox (1998) cited 10 benefits that celebrations generate for children. Data gathered from the interviews included substantial references to 9 of the 10 characteristics summarized by Cox. Benefits tied to celebration by Cox included, but were not limited to,

“sense of identity, teaching practical skills, teaching values, solving problems, helping navigate change, providing comfort and security, creating meaningful memories, imparting joy, and cultivating knowledge of cultural or religious heritage” (p. 16).

*Finding 2.* There were many commonalities of perceptions and practices regarding what classroom celebrations accomplish among the 20 teachers interviewed. Each teacher, however, came to the interview with his or her own unique perspective on what celebrations achieve and how he or she incorporated them into the classroom setting.

### *The Impact of Classroom Celebration for Teachers*

#### *Professional Literature Context*

Researchers found that how students experience and perceive their classroom environment is significantly related to their academic and psychosocial development and to their school adjustment and performance outcomes (Garmezy, 1989; Haynes et al., 1996).

*Finding 3.* Throughout the interview process, teachers consistently listed academic achievement as a top reason they chose to practice celebration. The ways in which celebration furthers learning, invites risk-taking, creates shared responsibility, and increases time spent on academics were major patterns of thought throughout the interviews.

#### *Professional Literature Context*

Cooperative learning has been viewed as an important strategy for increasing a sense of community in the classroom (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Slavin, 1990). One of the main reasons given for using cooperative learning was to help offset much of the competitive and individual seatwork so prevalent in many American classrooms.

*Finding 4.* Repeatedly in the interview's dialogue, teachers spoke of celebrations as a way to enhance cooperation and to downplay differences among students. According to many of the teachers interviewed, celebration was a tool used with the intention of equalizing social status and preventing individual differences from becoming variables that separate students from each other. Celebrations were seen as a way to avoid social cliques and give all students status.

#### *Professional Literature Context*

Researchers have viewed the connection between classroom environment and motivation to be of paramount importance (Kessler, 2000; Oldfather, 1993; Peterson, 1992). The role that classroom interactions and group dynamics play in learning and class participation has been viewed as far reaching and powerful. Oldfather found by building a classroom community marked by members caring for one another, that motivational and discipline struggles were greatly decreased.

*Finding 5.* Teachers repeatedly referenced the use of celebration as a means to shape students' behavior in a positive way. Teachers spoke about the ways in which celebrations promote conflict resolution, increase classroom safety, and encourage socially responsive behavior in students. Teachers frequently described their use of celebration as a motivational tool for encouraging cooperative and prosocial behavior among students in their classes. A decrease in discipline problems was one of the most frequently cited reasons that teachers in this study gave for incorporating celebrations into their classroom communities.

#### *Professional Literature Context*

Dalton and Watson (1997) noted students' acknowledgement that their classrooms were friendly places had many advantages. These educational researchers found that students who perceived their classrooms to be friendly places had increased trust and respect for teachers,

enjoyment for challenging learning opportunities, conflict resolution skills, and concern for the well-being of others in the classroom. Peterson (1992) referred to teachers who build classroom communities as cultural engineers who work to establish values of trust, caring, integrity, and belonging. He viewed the classroom in this context as something that teachers and students actively construct together with the teacher acting as facilitator.

*Finding 6.* The teachers' responses in their interviews were literally filled with comments and emotional descriptions of how celebrating with students profoundly impacts the quality of the teacher's relationship and bond with students. The teachers' ability to know, understand, and relate to students was a constant thread weaving in and out of all interviews. The enjoyment of students seemed to be closely tied to being able to share one's self and one's own life with students. Celebration was described as allowing a break from routine to accommodate and sanction this silliness, fun, and informality. Several teachers mentioned that when students saw them as "real people," it actually resulted in students having heightened respect for them.

### *Professional Literature Context*

Researchers viewed empathic understanding of, and response to, children's thinking and feeling as forming the basis for a nurturing classroom environment that fosters and maintains caring (Belenky et al., 1986). Noddings (1984) argued that the student is immeasurably more important than the academic subject. She asserted that the most important goal of every educational institution must be the production of caring students and a caring environment.

*Finding 7.* Interviewed teachers suggested that celebrating with students was directly linked to finding joy and personal meaning in their work of teaching. Because celebrations furthered a nurturing and supportive environment, the teachers interviewed spoke of looking

forward to going to school and feeling cared for by students. Celebrations were viewed as a time when teachers could truly express themselves, to “be real,” and to relax with students. This change of pace, within an environment where students valued caring, was described by teachers as making a real difference in their own motivation and in their ability to find joy and personal meaning in teaching.

### *The Impact of Classroom Celebration for the Class*

#### *Professional Literature Context*

In regard to interpersonal relationship, research indicates that effective cooperative experiences tend to promote stronger development of caring relationships than do competitive or individualistic efforts (Ellis & Fouts, 1993; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Slavin, 1983). In reference to psychological health, numerous studies indicated that working cooperatively with peers and valuing cooperation results in greater social competency than does competing with peers or working independently (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Jordan & Le Metais, 1997; Slavin, 1999).

*Finding 8.* Teachers emphasized that celebrations in the class draw children together, increase their connections to each other, and foster friendships. Teachers viewed celebration as a powerful way to help children work together toward common goals that frequently led to strong friendship connections between a wide variety of students who may not have otherwise had a desire or opportunity to interact.

#### *Professional Literature Context*

Williams and Sternberg (1988) found that the single most important determinant for maximizing the productivity of a group was the extent to which members were able to create



harmony within the group. This internal harmony allowed the group to take full advantage of the talents existing among all group members. The abilities to constructively resolve conflicts and to downplay personality clashes were integral pieces of the internal harmony, which produced the highest functioning groups.

*Finding 9.* Teachers viewed celebrations as a way to offer students the opportunity to acquire and practice social skills such as conflict resolution, giving and receiving constructive feedback, and showing consideration for others. Celebrations were described as being a creative and informal time where students developed meaningful relationships and experimented with a variety of social interactions. The classroom community celebrations were also viewed as a context in which students learned how to balance being an individual with fitting into and contributing to a group.

### *The Impact of Celebration for the Student*

#### *Professional Literature Context*

Brown and Campione (1994) referred to learning communities as groups in which “each participant makes significant contributions to the emergent understanding of all members, despite having unequal knowledge regarding the topic under study” (p. 43).

*Finding 10.* Celebrations within the context of the classroom learning community were seen by teachers interviewed as a means to create excitement about learning, increase motivation for learning, and enhance students’ abilities to take responsibility for their own learning while contributing to the learning of their fellow classmates. Increased ability in the area of setting goals, improved retention, and recall of learned material were also seen as benefits that students derived from classroom celebrations.

### *Professional Literature Context*

A growing number of educators have taken the position that the classroom plays an enormous role in influencing a student's social and emotional growth (Bocchino, 1999; Saarni, 1999; Strahan, 1997). The classroom provides children with an important opportunity to develop and test the social skills that elicit caring and support from others. For example, fostering students' abilities to form and maintain mutually supportive relationships has been found to greatly reduce social, emotional, physical, and academic problems (Parker & Asher, 1993; Rutter, 1985).

*Finding 11.* Interviewed teachers suggested that celebrations offered certain commodities to the emotional life of students including a sense of belonging within the classroom community, acceptance and affirmation by one's peers, increased tolerance for delayed gratification, opportunities to practice impulse control, and self-regulation of one's emotions and behavior. Many of the teachers interviewed described their use of celebration as an intervention for socializing at-risk children who come from chaotic or abusive home situations.

### *Conclusions*

There were many similarities in teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of celebration for teacher, class, and student in reference to building classroom communities. The teachers interviewed voiced common concerns and hopes for their students. They also described the goals for their classroom environments similarly. Consistently, it emerged that the teachers were not simply completing the parameters of their role as a classroom teacher but were going well beyond it in trying to reach each student individually, as well as successfully bring every student into the aggregate or the collective classroom. The interviewed teachers endorsed teaching students the value of effort, discipline, self-control, and kindness by using celebration as a

process to achieve those ends. The teachers spoke of wanting to prepare their students for successful adult lives and seeing their teaching role as actually being a mentoring role as well.

Teachers designed many types of celebrations for their students as a way to achieve academic goals, create emotional safety, decrease discipline problems, and equalize social status by giving each child ranking and importance. A major theme emerging from interviews was the connection teachers made between celebrating with their students and how much this impacted their enjoyment of the students. It seemed that many celebrations were moments deliberately set apart from routine to interact with students in a relaxed manner. Thus, celebrations were also described as impacting teachers' capacity to find joy and personal meaning in their work of teaching.

Celebrations were also described by the teachers interviewed as having important outcomes for the class as a whole. A sense of group solidarity was described as being a major benefit for the class. This included meaningful student friendships, ability to collaborate, and sensitivity for the needs and rights of others. Celebrating together was viewed as a way to generate trust and reinforce the notion that students are expected to help and support one another.

Interviewed teachers suggested that much is to be gained in celebrating for the individual student as well as for the class. Teachers viewed celebrations as resulting in enhanced social, cognitive, and affective development. Sherry captured it well when she explained that celebrations help students to gain a deeper understanding of just what makes them, as an individual, so special and then using that knowledge to fit into the dynamic of the group.

With these conclusions in mind, recommendations for further research and future practice were suggested.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research and Future Practice*

Although socialization has historically occurred within the context of the family, today schools often shoulder the task of being the primary agent of socialization. There are increasing

demands on teachers to meet the social and emotional needs of their students in addition to helping them meet academic goals. Teachers are challenged to design creative and effective learning communities within their classrooms in order to move their students toward increased interpersonal understanding, academic growth, and cooperation. Celebration is one strategy that teachers might use to achieve these goals.

Effective, inclusive celebrations seemed to be particularly important for students coming from chaotic or deprived backgrounds. Further qualitative and quantitative research should be conducted to determine how to best plan and implement celebrations for diverse classroom populations. Celebration designed for the purpose of heightened retention and recall of academic learning is also an area of inquiry for future qualitative research. In addition, a survey to capture ideas more broadly related to successful celebrations for a variety of age groups might be useful to practitioners. As celebration practices are further studied, the experience of classroom celebration from the perspective of the student should be examined to ensure a comprehensive understanding.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### Letter to Principals

October 23, 2002

Principal  
Elementary School  
East Tennessee

Dear Principal:

Hello. I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University. My doctoral dissertation will focus on elementary schools in the East Tennessee region. This study will examine fourth-and fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of what the practice of classroom celebration accomplishes for the teacher, the student, and the class in reference to building and maintaining a classroom community.

Interviews with teachers will be used to achieve a more comprehensive, in-depth understanding of their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes on the subject of classroom community. Teacher interviews will be conducted at the school during the time when teachers will not be missing class.

I would appreciate your approval to conduct this study at your school. If granted, I will need the names of any fourth and fifth grade teacher whom you feel would be appropriate for my study, based on your impression that the teacher incorporates celebration into classroom community building on a regular basis.

Please feel free to contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. Russell Mays, or me if you have any questions or would like to discuss the study further. My telephone number is 423-914-8140 and Dr. May's telephone number is 423-439-7629. I will be contacting you by telephone in approximately one week to ensure that you received this letter and to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Virginia Farr  
Doctoral Student  
East Tennessee State University

## APPENDIX B

### Letter to Teachers

October 23, 2002

Teacher  
Elementary School  
East Tennessee

Dear Teacher:

Hello. I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University. My doctoral dissertation entails the study of several elementary schools in the East Tennessee region. This study will examine teachers' perceptions of what the practice of celebration accomplishes for the teacher, the student, and the class in reference to building and maintaining a classroom community.

My interview with you will be used to achieve an in-depth and more comprehensive understanding of your perceptions, experiences, and attitudes regarding classroom celebrations in classroom community building. The interview would be conducted at your school during a time when you would not be missing class.

Your principal has identified you as a teacher having expertise in this area of study and I would like to interview you. Your identity will be kept confidential. With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded, but no identification of you will be included on the tape. Following the interview, the tapes will be transcribed, checked for accuracy, and then erased when I have presented my dissertation to the dissertation committee. No one other than my doctoral advisor and I will have access to the tapes or transcriptions. Only aggregate results will be reported. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes.

If you have any questions about the research or would agree to participate, please write to me at e-mail address: [vsfarr@aol.com](mailto:vsfarr@aol.com).

Sincerely,

Virginia Farr  
Doctoral Student  
East Tennessee State University

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

**East Tennessee State University**

**10/23/2002**

Page 1 of 3

**Principal Investigator:** Virginia Farr

**Title of Project:** *The Role of Celebration in Building Classroom-Learning Communities*

This Informed Consent form will explain about a research project in which I would appreciate your participation. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer. By no means is there any pressure for you to participate in this research.

**PURPOSE**

The purposes of this research study are to learn more about the perceptions of teachers regarding what the practice of celebration accomplishes for the teacher, the student and the class in reference to building and maintaining a classroom community. This study will also examine what approaches teachers have found to be most successful in creating classroom celebrations.

**DURATION**

Those teachers participating in this study will be asked to respond verbally to a ten-item interview guide. Each teacher will receive a copy of the ten questions one week in advance of the interview. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. By mail, each teacher will also be sent a copy and asked to review a typed manuscript for the accuracy of its content approximately one week after the interview. As material from the interview is being analyzed, each teacher will be mailed various questions and asked to comment on the interpretations being made and to make suggestions if needed. This may take an additional 45 minutes.

**PROCEDURES**

In this study, data will be gathered by interviewing teachers. The interviews will take place at each participant's school at the convenience of the participant. With the permission of those interviewed, an audiotape will be used to record the interviews so that the maximum amount of information can be gained from each interview. The tapes will not identify the participant by name, but an identification number will be assigned to each audiotape in order to link it to the corresponding transcript for auditing purposes.

**Principal Investigator:** Virginia Farr

**Title of Project:** *The Role of Celebration in Building Classroom-Learning Communities*

**POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

No known risks or discomforts should be associated with this research, nor is there any direct benefit or compensation to the volunteer participants.

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS AND/OR COMPENSATION**

There will be no monetary compensation offered to volunteer participants in this study. Any potential benefit to the participant would arise from that individual's reflection upon the items contained in the interview guide and his or her personal reactions to those questions. The participants will receive no direct benefit from their participation in this study.

**CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions, problems, or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call Virginia Farr at (423) 914-8140 or Dr. Russell Mays at (423) 439- 7629 or Dr. Nancy Dishner at (423) 439- 7618. You may also call the Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at (423) 439-6134 for any questions you have about your rights as a research participant. I can also be contacted at vsfarr@aol.com.

**PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE**

In order to gather data on the use of celebrations to build classroom communities, the researcher will seek your permission to tape record the interview for later transcription. If you choose not to give this permission, the interview will not be recorded. This decision will not influence your participation in the study in any way.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every attempt will be made to see that my study records are kept confidential. A copy of all tapes and records from this study will be stored in a locked file at my residence (712 North Hills Drive, Johnson City, TN) for at least 10 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the East Tennessee State University/V.A. Medical Center Institutional Review Board, and the ETSU College of Education have access to the study records. My records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

**Principal Investigator:** Virginia Farr

**Title of Project:** *The Role of Celebration in Building Classroom-Learning Communities*

**COMPENSATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT**

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any injury, which may happen as a result of your being in this study. They will not pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 9-8-307. For more information about these claims, call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at (423) 439-6134. You understand that in the event you sustain physical injury as a result of participating in this study, humanitarian treatment will be provided. You may call the Johnson City Medical Center Hospital Institutional Review Board at (423) 431-5463 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

The nature, demands, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me as well as are known and available. I understand what my participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask any questions and withdraw from the study, at any time, without penalty.

I have read, or have had read to me, the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me. Your study record will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

I voluntarily agree to participant in the study. \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

I voluntarily agree to be tape-recorded \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Guide

1. Why do you incorporate celebration into your classroom community? What are you hoping to accomplish?
2. Give me specific examples where you've attempted to incorporate celebration into your classroom community.
  - What impact did it have or not have on your classroom community?
  - What were the anticipated or unanticipated impacts?
  - Positive and/or negative impacts?
3. Tell me about one or two of your most successful celebrations in terms of building a classroom community.
  - What about these celebrations made them a success in your opinion?
  - What short-term and/or long-term effects did you observe?
4. Tell me about one or two of your least successful celebrations in terms of building a classroom community.
  - What about these celebrations made them unsuccessful in your opinion?
  - What short-term and/or long-term effects did you observe?
5. Tell me about how you perceive celebration to be used by other teachers you observe.
  - What similarities or differences to these other teachers have with your own style of incorporating celebration into your classroom community?
6. Are there things that you would like to learn more about related to celebration in the classroom?
7. What impact has the incorporation of celebration had on your overall teaching?
  - Are there some advantages for you as a teacher in having classroom celebrations?
  - Have your overall experiences with celebration changed over time? If so, how?
8. If you had a student teacher, what advice related to the celebration might you pass on or specifically tell them to avoid?

9. Does celebration seem to influence students' feelings of connection to the classroom community? If so, how?

- Are there other ways that classroom celebrations impact on the individual student?

10. After spending some time talking about celebration with you, I am wondering what you could tell me about celebration and building a classroom community that I haven't asked.

## APPENDIX E

### Audit of Tapes and Transcriptions

This is to certify that I, Carolyn McCracken, have conducted an audit of *The Role of Celebration in Building Classroom-Learning Communities* study with recorded audiotapes concerning interviews with teachers in elementary schools in East Tennessee.

Likewise, I do hereby confirm that to the best of my ability the transcriptions are accurate representations of those audiotapes, unless otherwise indicated.

I pledge to keep this information confidential.

Carolyn McCracken



APPENDIX F

Auditor's Report

MEMO

Date; March 24, 2003  
To: Virginia Farr  
From: Carolyn McCracken

This is to confirm that an audit of Virginia Farr's dissertation, *The Role of Celebration in Building Classroom-Learning Communities*, was completed on March 24, 2003. The audit entailed an inspection of all documentation of correspondence, informed consent materials, notes from interviews, field notes, reflections, transcriptions, and analysis of data. In addition, there were random checks of audiotapes for the purpose of accuracy of transcription. The necessary research materials and documentation were found to be organized, complete, and consistent with valid qualitative research protocol.

VITA  
VIRGINIA FARR

Personal Data:                   Date of Birth: February 10, 1963  
                                  Place of Birth: Memphis, Tennessee  
                                  Marital Status: Married to Brian Bonfardin  
                                  Children:       Margaret and Stephen, ages 12 and 8 respectively

Education:                      University of Tennessee  
                                  Bachelors degree in Psychology  
                                  1985  
  
                                  East Tennessee State University, Johnson City  
                                  Masters degree in Education  
                                  1987  
  
                                  East Tennessee State University, Johnson City  
                                  Masters degree in Psychology  
                                  1993  
  
                                  East Tennessee State University, Johnson City  
                                  Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Ed.D.  
                                  2003

Professional  
Experience:                      Therapist at Watauga Mental Health Center  
                                  1986-1990  
  
                                  Psychological Examiner for Johnson City Schools  
                                  1990-1996  
  
                                  Early Intervention Specialist for Tennessee's Early Intervention  
                                  System  
                                  1992-1996  
  
                                  Substitute Teacher  
                                  1996-2003  
  
                                  Private Tutor  
                                  1996-2003