Adapting Morning Meeting: Speech and Anxiety Needs

Morning Meeting is a powerful way to start the day. It meets students’ needs for belonging, significance, and fun; provides students with an opportunity to practice social and emotional skills; and prepares students for the days’ learning. As a classroom teacher I enjoyed Morning Meeting with my students and looked forward to it every day!

Even though I cherished Morning Meetings with my students, it didn’t come without challenges. A challenge I embraced was helping students with selective mutism find success during the very social components of Morning Meeting. I recall two students in particular: Harris and Ada. While Harris and Ada each had selective mutism, they were very different in their personalities, needs, and the strategies we used to successfully support them.

When we have students in our classrooms with specific speech or anxiety needs, it can feel challenging to help them feel successful during Morning Meeting. If you have a student in your classroom who needs support with speaking during Morning Meeting, try one of these ideas that I and other teachers have found helpful:

- Assign them a buddy, someone who will speak for the student. This strategy worked really well for Harris. Harris had come into my classroom with a buddy already assigned and we slowly built his support system to include two other trusted classmates.
- Invite the student to draw what they will share about during Morning Meeting. The drawing can serve as their way of participating in an around the circle or dialogue share. As the student becomes more comfortable holding their drawing during share, encourage them to add a word to their drawing and continue to build on that as they become more comfortable sharing in this way.
- Record the student sharing using video or audio. This can be done at home with the help and support of the parents or at school; wherever the student is most comfortable. This strategy worked well for Harris later in the school year when we would use audio recordings as a means for his voice to be heard.
- Use a social story as a strategy to prepare the student for greeting others or sharing during Morning Meetings. Speech and Language Therapists and school psychologists are an excellent resource for these!
- Help the student plan their share – meet with them, ask open-ended questions, and jot down their ideas for sharing. This strategy worked really well for Ada. She would bring her plan to Morning Meeting and sit next to me to provide her with additional support while she verbally shared.

When choosing a strategy to support students, it is key to know them as individuals and observe them to gather data about their interests and strengths to provide guidance in choosing a strategy that will work best for them. Because Morning Meeting is an opportunity for
students to practice social and academic skills, the strategies used during Morning Meeting can also be used during academic times when students may be reflecting upon their learning.