Opening the Door to Math

As you envision the Morning Meetings you’ll be holding with students this year, what do you see? Do you see math games? Counting? Measuring and graphing activities? It may not be common for teachers to use Morning Meeting to support math, yet Morning Meetings offer many opportunities for math infusion—for lively skills practice or conversations demonstrating ways in which math skills apply to all aspects of our daily lives.

Morning Meeting activities can provide a confidence-building environment for math review, and Morning Meeting messages can be used to pique students’ curiosity about a math lesson that will take place later in the day. Furthermore, by building math work into the relaxed atmosphere of Morning Meeting, you ensure that students have positive experiences doing math, and you show them that doing math is a part of everyday life.

Here are more reasons to start infusing math into Morning Meetings:

Morning Meeting is a natural place for children to apply their math learning to “real life” interests and concerns.

Morning Meeting draws its content from the life of the class and therefore provides opportunities for pondering math-related questions such as: How many pets does our class have? How much trash do we discard in a day? Opportunities abound to count, order, collect and analyze data in ways that help the class learn about themselves and their larger community.

Morning Meeting allows practice in explaining one’s thinking.

Morning Meeting is filled with opportunities for students to share ideas and observations. When such talk is math-related, students are stretched to organize their mathematical thinking and coherently unpack their ideas for others.

Morning Meeting is a safe time for risk-taking.

Morning Meetings emphasize teaching the skills of respectful conversation. The habits of respectful discourse students learn and practice during Morning Meeting sharing apply also to listening and responding to a classmate’s explanation about math thinking, such as how she solved a math riddle or estimated the perimeter of the classroom.

Morning Meeting links math with pleasure and fun.

Many students associate Morning Meetings with fun activities. In Morning Meetings, math activities do not have to be labeled as “math.” The interest and enthusiasm of the group can be contagious, and consciously or subconsciously, children learn to associate math with pleasure.

At Morning Meeting, everyone can do math.
Different students shine at different kinds of math, and Morning Meeting activities make this visible. The student who has the best idea for how to depict data about how far from school class members live may not be the student who comes up with the longest, trickiest number sentence for “27.” The teacher’s respectful reception of the many different ideas that emerge during Morning Meeting reinforces that everyone is a mathematician.

Opening Doors to Math

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics states, “In this changing world, those who understand and can do mathematics will have significantly enhanced opportunities and options for shaping their futures. Mathematical competence opens doors to productive futures. A lack of mathematical competence keeps those doors closed.” (Principles and Standards for School Mathematics, 2000.) Elementary teachers are, by their very nature, door openers for their students. Providing our students with a positive outlook on math learning may be one of the greatest doors we can open for them.

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