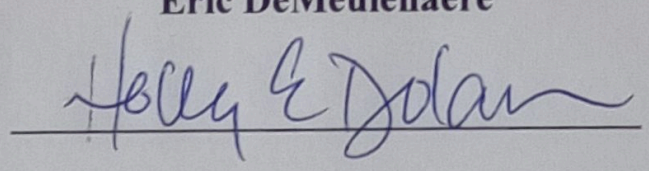
Prompting as a Tool for Students and Teachers to Get Help in the Classroom

Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Community, Youth, and Education Studies Major at Clark University

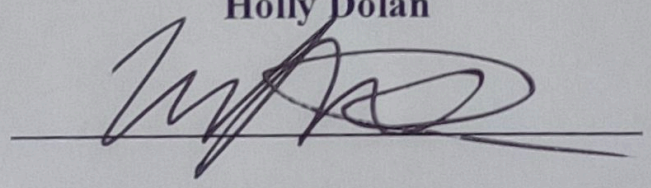
Xea Kirkland

Committee Signatures:

Eric DeMeulenaere



Holly Dolan



Madeline Cyr

Worcester, MA

Table of Contents

Abstract

This practitioner inquiry study explored how and when participants in a third grade classroom learned how to ask for help from other people, how to positively identify when others need help, and how to go about providing help. During the study, participants were observed in their classroom and notes were written about their helping behaviors. This data was then used to develop mini-lessons using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework that showed the participants how to appropriately ask for and give help to others in different ways. As a result, the teacher had more time to work on the activities with students because they were more able to help one another independently. By participating in this study, the students and their teacher were able to create a more cooperative learning environment where the teacher was not the only one the students asked for help.

Acknowledgements

So many people helped me with this project. All of my readers for this thesis had a large impact on what I could accomplish. Eric met with me countless times to help me finalize what I wanted to research. After meeting with Holly when I barely knew what I wanted, she placed me in the third grade classroom. Madi welcomed me into her classroom every week. She let me lead my lessons and gave me great feedback. I cannot thank you all enough for all you have done for me over this long process. My mom and grandma also pushed me to pick a topic that would help me in my future as a teacher. They have helped me every single step of the way. They have always been there when I needed them to read parts of my work or even just talk through an idea I was grappling with. I could not have finished this thesis without their unconditional support and guidance. My accountability group was also a huge help. Since Lily's project was very similar to mine, we were able to bond over the strategies we used. Ezra always listened to my complaints and offered helpful suggestions. Thanks to everyone for allowing me the vulnerability to take my own advice and ask for help.

Introduction: Vignette

I was labeled a “smart kid” pretty early on in my academic career. However, I was constantly told that some kids “just didn’t get math” and that I had other strengths so it did not matter as much. Even though I still did well in my math classes, I was average, and not placed in honors (as I was for all my other classes). I was not excelling as I was in my other classes, and while I was lucky in that none of my classmates or teacher made me feel dumb for my math placement and performance, I still felt like I was behind and would never catch up. Why then from elementary all the way to high school, especially in math, did I struggle to ask for help? I did not want to admit to others that I did not understand a topic as well as they thought I did. I was embarrassed.

My mother and grandmother pushed me to stay after school for extra help, but I did not know how to tell them that I did not want to take up space in my math classes. I knew my teachers were struggling to help the students who were barely passing or failing, so I tried my best to be as small as possible to make it easier on them, even though when I stayed after, I also had questions for them. While I am not sure if what I did had any benefit to my teachers, I know that it had many downsides. These included believing that I did not deserve to take up the space to ask for help. This also made it much more difficult to build the relationships with my teachers and peers that would have made asking for help a more positive experience for all of those involved.

However, now, as a behavior technician at a center for people with autism, I know that asking for help is a learned skill that can be successfully taught. My weekly client, an eleven-year-old girl, has a goal that is “Asks for help when needed.” We have worked using indirect verbal, direct verbal, gestural, and modeling prompts to increase her independence and

agency through asking others for help. Instead of struggling in silence and getting mad at herself, after a few months, she can now, with a little reminding, independently ask either myself or a family member for help with a simple task. This goal has now been put into maintenance, which means it is not something that we take data on during every session. Now data on this maintained goal is taken once every week. She often struggled to zip up her coat or properly use the bathroom so it was essential that I took the time to slowly model the appropriate behaviors. With these two examples in particular, she has learned to try it a few times by herself before asking someone nearby, both speaking and nonspeaking, to help her with the task. Together, we have been able to address the challenges of asking for help and realizing that the outcomes of not asking are far more negative than having to wait when receiving the help that she asked for.

From this experience, I wanted to see if some of the strategies I taught this eleven year old girl could be used to help an entire class in a public elementary school. I observed third graders and their teacher and created four mini-lessons based on what I had seen. Then, after the mini-lessons, I continued observing to see if there were any changes to the helping behaviors that I could attribute to my lessons.

Questions and Goals

While creating this project, I created many questions that I hope to answer by the conclusion of my research. For the purposes of collaborating on my research I have chosen to focus on three main questions. My research questions are as follows:

1. How do students communicate their need for help in the classroom?
2. How do students respond appropriately to help requests and denials?

3. What are effective strategies for teachers to foster greater helpfulness between students?

An important goal of mine during this project was to work with the teacher to create a safe space for the students. This allowed everyone to feel comfortable being vulnerable. Vulnerability is a necessary component in this project and is needed when failure and challenges are part of the process. If I had been more comfortable sitting in my vulnerability in middle and high school, I may have been more willing to ask questions. This could have made me more confident in my math abilities. Throughout this project, the participants learned that asking for help is a skill they will use for the rest of their lives. I encouraged them to both give and receive help from others who they trust in their classroom environment.

Rationale

Through my work as both a student and teacher, I have realized people are often not taught how to ask for help even though it is an important, teachable skill. Sadly, this lack of teaching is mostly likely due to the fact that teachers in many public schools do not have time or funds to focus on skills that the students will not be tested on during the school year. This is also something that requires a curriculum that teachers may not feel they have the skills to create. SEL curriculums already exist and have been used in schools, but they require funding. If a teacher wants to do this in a school that does not have this type of curriculum, districts need to pay for and implement a curriculum so that teachers can use already made materials to better their classroom. They cannot afford to take time out of their already busy days to teach their students another skill. While some people, like myself, were fortunate enough to learn it at home, many others are not so lucky. The only time they can learn skills such as this one is at school, but

since teachers are often cramming their days already, it is almost impossible when SEL skills are not deemed as important by administration as excelling at standardized tests.

Also, since teachers are so busy and SEL skills are not emphasized on standardized testing, why would they add more work for themselves? If they taught students how to engage in positive helping behaviors, this would likely lead to more questions in their classroom; questions they may not have the time to answer or even know the answer to. If we can move away from teachers being the only ones in the classroom who have something to bestow upon their students, some of this burden may be lifted because other students may have expertise that the teacher does not have.

I worked with a third grade public school teacher to create a space where students and teachers felt comfortable asking for and giving help in a healthy way. They learned this skill and applied it in other aspects of their lives. To help solve this problem, I created, and have modified throughout this process, a project that consisted of observations that were conducted during the Fall 2023 and beginning of Spring 2024 semesters. In order for this project to be a success, the teacher and at least a majority of the students were able to independently engage in positive helping behaviors while present in the classroom.

Review of the Literature

There are many research articles that highlight the need for teaching students how to ask for help. I noticed two main ways these articles were grouped: focusing on academics and peer to peer helping. These valuable research topics shed much needed light on why students benefit from being taught this vital skill.

A Focus on Academic Achievement

Much of the research that has been conducted regarding helping behaviors does so by looking at the students' academic success to measure if the intervention was successful or not. Bar-Tal and Raviv (1979) focused on using students' achievement on tests as a way to determine if the students benefited from the helping behavior intervention after a period of two years. Similarly, Nattiv (1994) highlighted that the type of help that was given by teachers made a big difference in how much their students succeeded on standardized tests. The way Nattiv coded this was "'gives help other than explanation' and 'receives help other than explanation'" (p. 289). The example Nattiv outlined is "a student who asks for help with '2/3 minus ½' and is told 'the answer is ⅙'" (p. 289). The teacher did not explain to the student how they arrived at that answer, they simply told the student what the correct answer was. Similar to asking for help, when a student does successfully ask for help, when they receive the help, either from their teacher or a peer, if they are given a thorough explanation of the answer, instead of being told, "The answer is …" they will be more likely to independently figure out the answer by themselves the next time a similar question arises.

While I agree that an explanation in the response is vital by whoever is responding to the helping request and time should ideally be given in between interventions, I do not agree that the only way to measure if the interventions were successful is to compare standardized tests scores of the students before and after the interventions. It is unreasonable to assume that helping behaviors alone are responsible for higher achievement gains on standardized tests when there are so many other variables that should be considered if given the time and funding. Indeed, there is a lot to be learned from a qualitative investigation of such helping interactions, which is the focus of this study.

Peer to Peer Helping

Klingner and Vaughn's, (2000) study highlights what communication is "missing" from the Multilingual (ML) students and their intervention aims to fix the problem of communication in this classroom. Also, Webb and Mastergeorge (2003) focused on child peers in a classroom and only mentioned the teacher in relation to these helping behaviors when they needed to step in for help . Similarly, Harari et al. (2022) included adults who were currently working: the researchers took surveys of their participants to collect the data. While all of these studies did also put an emphasis on peer to peer helping behaviors, there was no mention of teacher or boss to peer helping. While I think it is important to address and research peer to peer helping behaviors, we cannot ignore teacher to student helping and student to teacher helping, as so much of the research does.

Looking to the Future

Researchers must be more inclusive. During my interactive observations, I learned more than just the basic demographics of each student who consented to being a part of my research project. Context plays a key role in analyzing data collected from any environment. We need to have a better understanding of what students and teachers bring from outside the classroom, so when researchers make generalizable claims, they are not doing so to the detriment of their participants and anyone else who may be influenced by the research methods and findings.

My project seeks to address many of the aspects missing in the literature on classroom help. These included peer to peer helping and looking at the types of responses given to the person who is receiving help. There is still a lack of connection between these two important

areas and too much of the focus is placed on if the students succeed on standardized tests as a measure of if the helping behaviors interventions worked or not.

Everyone in the classroom can benefit from interventions that have been implemented by these well-meaning researchers. While I understand that for the purposes of their research they could not have a large scope, many did make generalizable claims regarding the outcomes of teaching helping behaviors in the classroom.

During my review of existing literature on the topic of helping behaviors in a classroom setting, I recognized a lack of understanding between researchers and students. None of these studies included that the researchers explained to the students what was happening and why. This study works to rectify some of these gaps. In most of the articles and studies I found, there was a heavy focus on how helping behaviors impact academic success. Also, I noticed a disconnect between teachers and students and their relationships in the existing research. While I am concerned with students' academic success, I am also deeply concerned about the learning culture created in the classroom and the ways that we nurture students to not only make short-term academic gains, but also how they develop their academic and, importantly, their social identities and the ways they are nurtured to become lifelong learners and generous and helpful humans.

From the existing pool of research regarding helping behaviors in the classroom, I found two main areas that were lacking: learning for social emotional development and students helping students. There were several articles written that centered around teaching healthy helping behaviors and then measuring the students' standardized test scores to show that there was an improvement after they could communicate their needs for help. Additionally, this research looked at the type of help given to students, without addressing if and how they asked

for it. Also, there was a strong focus on teachers helping their students in standard classroom settings that often use the Socratic method. The Socratic method is an educational strategy that involves the cross-examination of students by their teacher (Kruse, 2022).

Conceptual Framework

While looking through articles and studies that have focused on helping behaviors, I came to realize that many did not treat the participants like people. They did not account for growth outside of the classroom and other influences. Also, as mentioned previously, while they did look at the helping behaviors in the classroom, they focused on how they helped to improve academic success. Not everything should revolve around how the students succeed academically. Attention must be paid to improve their general communication and relational practices, especially since others have shown that this is a learned skill (Webb and Mastergeorge, 2003).

Since much of the current research is focused on what the student's were lacking, it has a deficit lens. I wanted to come from a different perspective and have an asset lens instead. Since I have worked with kids in this age group before, I knew going in that I could rely on them to highlight the major themes of the mini-lessons after we had gone over them as a group. They were also very capable of teaching one another these concepts by modeling them even if they did not know all the terminology.

CASEL's framework provides an approach to Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and highlights five core competence areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). For the purposes of this project, I focused mainly on self-awareness, social awareness, and responsible decision-making

because I found that while all these areas were important, these three came up more frequently when looking into my research questions.

Figure 1 (CASEL, 2020, p.1)

As shown by the concentric circles in Figure 1, all of these areas of competence are interrelated and it is imperative that they are not only highlighted in the classroom, but also in the larger school community, among families and caregivers, and within their communities outside of school. However, for the purposes of this study I focused on what happens in the classroom. When these SEL skills are repeatedly taught in many areas of their lives, it is easier to apply them to anything they experience. This encourages students to be empathetic towards one another and build a healthy community among themselves.

Self-Awareness

One area of the CASEL five that I focused on was self-awareness. It is the starting point for this research. It is defined by the CASEL Framework as "[t]he ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior" ("What Is the CASEL Framework?," 2020, para. 1). If people do not know themselves, it can create obstacles to understanding and helping others. In order to have healthy communication with others, you

must first understand yourself. If you are not at least partly self-aware, this process will fail. It will be very difficult for others to help you, and for you to help others in a healthy and productive manner.

While working with the eleven-year-old girl discussed in my vignette, we usually went over strategies regarding how to ask for help multiple times before moving on. Since this was part of her plan, it made it easier for me to carve out the needed time to work on this skill with her during each of our sessions. Recognizing when she needed help was a sophisticated component of her knowing how to seek help. I know this is a skill that many children are expected to know without being formally taught. Anyone at any age can benefit from learning how to ask for help in appropriate ways and often the first step is learning how they exist in the space.

Communication

Asking for help requires strong communication skills. People need to be able to understand and interpret both speaking and nonspeaking forms of communication in order to successfully ask for and give help. There are social boundaries in place that people need to be taught. This requires students to have social awareness and responsible decision-making skills because they cannot be expected to make good choices when they do not know how to appropriately express what they need. People need to be able to accept and decline help from others in a developmentally appropriate way that is respectful to all of those involved in the interaction (Claro et al., 2016, p. 8665). Without this respect, arguments are more prone to happen when they could be easily avoided. In a classroom, time is precious. There may not be time to properly resolve conflicts that can arise during these situations. If students and teachers

can both learn how to have healthy conversations about helping behaviors in the classroom, it may save a lot of time that can then be used to learn other important skills.

I also helped the eleven-year-old girl identify how people look when they are able to help her. This consisted of practicing with her parents and role playing. They would start a conversation and she would practice appropriately communicating to them her needs. This consisted of her using not only her voice, but also her body language to let them know what she needed help with. Since I was able to work on this with her, I knew these strategies could be used to help other students who need help, but are not sure how to ask for help.

Growth Mindset

If we cannot accept that making mistakes and encountering failure are a part of life, succeeding, both academically and in "the real world" will be next to impossible. Instead of having a fixed mindset, where the students "believe that their intellectual abilities are immutable" (Claro et al., 2016, p. 8664), growth mindset is defined as "the belief that intellectual ability can be developed" (Yeager and Dweck, 2021, p. 2). This ideology is key when learning new skills such as how to engage in helping behaviors. We must be comfortable putting in the work and asking for help when we face challenges. "Students need to try new strategies and seek input from others when they're stuck" (Dweck, 2015, para. 5), but how can they be expected to do this, if they have never been taught how to appropriately ask for help?

While engaging in growth mindsets, teachers and students must also follow the supportive principle that Alexander outlines in "Developing Dialogic Teaching: Genesis, Process, Trial." When everyone is supportive of others in the space, it becomes easier for us to feel vulnerable and comfortable enough to ask others we trust for assistance in whatever area we

need. According to Alexander, classrooms need to be flexible places where students are excited to speak up. In order for this space to be created, they must be taught how to ask questions and feel confident and supported when learning. Furthermore, students and teachers need to be allowed to be vulnerable without fear of severe consequences. Without this fear, they will be more likely to ask for what they need because they will not be scared of what others will think. While embarrassment and fear cannot be completely stripped from all classrooms, everyone involved can work together to create environments that are supportive so fear does not become the dominant emotion.

Self-awareness is a prerequisite to having a growth mindset. People need to understand themselves (their wants and needs) and how they present to others around them. This introspection helps them realize what they are looking for in settings that they are struggling in. Again, this is not something that is inherent. This is also a learned skill. Students need to have spaces where they can practice their self-awareness and social awareness (how their actions impact those around them). This can build a sense of community in the classroom because they feel safe and respected by one another on a daily basis.

Methods

For this research project, I used qualitative methods to interact with and gather data from my participants. I asked them questions during the interactive observations and took observational field notes of their speaking and non-speaking responses. I identified common themes to highlight important aspects of the data I collected during the sessions. I also engaged with Practitioner Inquiry Research during my project. By using this method, I strategized to create a systemic change that led to better educational experiences for the participants.

Methodology

Practitioner inquiry is a common practice among teacher researchers because it has a "rich history of raising teachers' voices in discussions of educational research as well as creating opportunity for teachers to better understand the complexity of teaching and learning" (Dana, 2016, p. 1). I wanted to uphold this tradition, even though I am not yet a teacher in a classroom, but have worked with kids for many years and have seen amazing techniques, as well as ones that need much improvement.

Unlike other methodologies, practitioner inquiry emphasizes the teacher's role in studying their own practices. When I decided that I wanted to research helping behaviors in a classroom, I knew that this would be a needed component of my project, especially since this was something the teacher would already be engaging in, but was just not highlighting, possibly due to a lack of time or prioritization. The goal of this research was to enhance the learning experiences of the students, so hopefully, the teacher would be able to take time to focus on other important aspects of the classroom environment or a topic she was teaching.

The methodology also inherently uses a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to meet participants where they currently are instead of assuming they have already met certain goals. This allows for necessary flexibility during observations and the corresponding mini-lessons to account for differing mindsets and levels of understanding. For example, I started this project knowing that "SEL conversations, practices, and curricula are too often based on white, cisgender, patriarchal norms and values" (Community for Just Schools Fund, 2020, para. 2). Since the majority of the students I was working with are Black and

Hispanic, I took this into account when modifying my lessons to better help them learn about the importance of self-awareness and communication when asking others for help.

Site

My project took place in an elementary school in Worcester. This school is a Pre-K through grade six elementary school that is mostly composed of BIPOC, low-income students. 65.3% of the students' first language is not English, and 28% of the students are currently classified as English Language Learners. In the 22-23 school year, this school had 372 Pre-K through grade six students, with an average student-teacher ratio of 14 to 1. The school has produced higher average Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment scores (MCAS) than the average scores of the district, and surpassed the average scores of all of Massachusetts schools in Science.

The school's mission statement says that: "students will achieve their highest academic potential by actively engaging in learning across all areas of a standards-based curriculum. We use a variety of performance and standards based assessments to identify student specific instructional needs, to inform effectiveness of instruction, and to modify instruction to better meet student needs. Students will be empowered to problem solve, think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively."

Based on my theory of change, I, with the help of Holly Dolan in Clark University's Education Department, reached out to this elementary school in Worcester. I was connected with a third grade teacher (T3) who was a Master of Arts in Teaching student at Clark a few years ago. I was very excited for my placement because this is the age group I intend to work with as a certified teacher in a public school.

For my interactive observations and mini-lessons, I worked with T3 and her students. There were eighteen students in this classroom and eight of them fully consented to participate in this project. By the end of my project, there were fifteen students in this class. Of the total students, there were eight who predominantly speak Spanish at home. During part of the day, there is a multilingual teacher who co-teaches with the third grade teacher, but this did not happen while I was present.

The seating chart changed about four times during my three months observing. When I asked T3 about the changes, she told me that the dynamics frequently change among the kids (friendships) and they needed change to stay focused because they would either talk when it was not appropriate and/or argue about inconsequential tasks. All the students were in desk clumps of three to four during each change.

Participants

This class is very enthusiastic and eager to participate. Many were excited to have me in their classroom for an extended time, and were not shy when I asked for their opinions.

I chose to give each of my participants numbers because assigning each person a pseudonym did not seem right to me. I did not feel comfortable changing their names and I knew in doing so I would unintentionally give more meaning to those new names. By assigning each person a random number, I was taking my bias out of it, while still making it possible to distinguish between the participants.

81 - He is stubborn and loves to hang out with his friends in the class. He can get off topic easily and needs subtle encouragement to feel praised because over the top exclamations make him uncomfortable. He also strongly advocates for himself.

67 - She is very curious and talkative. She loves answering peer questions in an assertive way. She desires a leadership role in the classroom.

75 - She is very curious and eager to ask questions. She is friends with 42 and frequently talks to anyone who will listen. She also enjoys drawing and showing adults her ideas.

36 - She is very quiet and did not interact with me while I was in the classroom unless I initiated the conversation. She is very willing to help her peers, but usually needs verbal prompting to do so, either by a teacher or a different peer.

42 - She is talkative and friends with 75. She often prefers to do work either on the carpet (with friends) or by T3.

98 - He is very expressive and prefers to work at his own pace. He is more quiet about his feelings.

24 - He is kind of shy and takes a little longer to be vocal with outsiders in the class. Once given permission to talk he will excitedly continue. Many of his peers go to him with questions when doing worksheets.

53 - He is very curious and excited to ask questions. He enjoys participating and sharing opinions, even when they are negative.

My Positionality

It is imperative that I reflect on my positionality and how it has influenced my experiences going into this project. I am a twenty-one year old white woman who comes from a

lower middle class family and only speaks English. My mother's side of the family has always put a strong emphasis on education and learning. I also spent my kindergarten through high school academic career enrolled in my local public schools. My age, race, and language all positioned me as an outsider in this site and I recognize that this may have put me at a disadvantage when collecting data, especially since I know that many of the students spoke Spanish during my time in their classroom.

I have been working with children in a volunteer capacity since I was twelve years old and as a paid job since I was sixteen. My volunteer experience was in the children's section of my local library leading children's crafts each week. My paid work experience has included working as an assistant teacher in my local daycare/preschool with children ages one and a half to twelve years old, a substitute teacher at a school for children with autism with children ages three to twelve, and most recently as a behavior technician at a center for people with autism where I worked primarily with a seven year old girl and an eleven-year-old girl. Even though I am still young, my volunteer and work experiences give me the unique lens of understanding the importance of prompting strategies with regard to helping behaviors and being able to accurately identify them.

Data Collection

I decided to use qualitative methods, specifically Practitioner Inquiry, as a form of data collection. I started with a question about how lessons are taught regarding promoting healthy helping behaviors using an SEL framework. There were five main phases of this project: observations, developing the lessons, the lessons, right after the lessons, a few weeks after the lessons. During each hour-long interactive observation and directly after the fifteen minute

mini-lessons, I took written field notes while walking around the room as the students worked and sitting with different groups of students. I used my tablet and stylus to take these notes and labeled each note with the date I was observing. This ensured that I had data that includes both speaking and non-speaking forms of communication. Any accounts of nodding, eye contact, pointing, confused and understanding looks were noted in my field notes, which I had practice taking as a behavior technician. I included the questions I asked the participants during each session and their individual responses.

Data Analysis

After being in the classroom for two weeks, I noticed a lot of helping behaviors among the students and their teacher. During this starting time, I did not take an active role in the classroom; I sat back and took extensive field notes of what I witnessed because I wanted to see how they acted without my input. For the first session, my notes consisted primarily of classroom management techniques and how the students reacted to them. I did not see a lot of the students independently asking for help verbally from their teacher or peers. However, after more sessions, many more students were speaking up in healthy ways.

While analyzing my notes, I created folders to group them based on common themes. I soon realized that many of the days included instances that overlapped. I then modified the folders to accommodate this change and added notes that were single interactions instead of the entire hour of observation. I put my field notes into five categories: general requests for help, denying/accepting help, asking for help in groups, verbal/nonverbal cues for help, and other. After realizing that there were four main categories, it helped me figure out what my

mini-lessons needed to focus on (discussed further during my section titled “Conversations Before the Mini-Lessons”) and what would most help these students.

During the mini-lessons, I did not take field notes because I was leading the lesson. All of the students were sitting on the rug with me sitting either in the rocking chair beside them or in another chair with them all facing me. However, I did take the time to reflect on what happened during the lesson directly after the lesson finished while I was still in the classroom. This helped me clarify my thoughts and remember key things that specific students brought up. I did not want to take myself out of the moment to start writing while they were talking because I knew they would start to lose interest in what their peers were saying and focus more on what I was writing.

Findings

Starting in November, I observed one to three times per week for up to one hour in my collaborating third-grade teacher’s classroom. I went into this classroom from 1:05 pm to 2:05 pm (during their ELA block), mostly on Mondays and Wednesdays. During these interactive observations, I wrote participant-observation field notes, so I could get a better understanding of how the students interact with each other and their teacher. In particular, I paid attention to the ways that students asked for help, avoided asking for help, gave help, and/or refused to give help when asked.

After capturing these observations. I gathered examples from the data to form lesson plans that involved re-enactments and discussions of different forms of help requests and responses. The observation examples included the following:

1. Student needing help but not asking anyone for the help

2. Student requesting help from another student in a very positive way
3. Student requesting help from another student in a negative way (for instance with anger or in a bossy tone)
4. Student requesting help from their teacher in a very positive way
5. Student requesting help from their teacher in a negative way
6. Students being asked to give help to another student and they give the help as requested.
7. Students being asked to give help to another student and they refuse the request but in a mean or negative way.
8. Students being asked to give help to another student and they refuse the request but in a polite and kind way
9. Teacher being asked to give help by a student and they give the help
10. Teacher being asked to give help by a student and they refuse the request but in a polite and kind way

Each of these captured scenarios was re-written as a de-identified script. Each mini-lesson invited a couple students to enact some of the scenes from the scripts. We then engaged in a discussion about each of the scenes as groups together in the following categories:

Category 1: Why is it important to learn how to ask for help? (observation examples 1)

Category 2: How do you positively ask for help from a classmate? (Observation Examples 2 -3)

Category 3: How do you positively ask for help from your teacher? (Observation Examples 4-5)

Category 4: How to respond to requests for help in a kind way? (Observation Examples 6-8)

Category 5: What to do when you ask for help and the person you ask does not or is not able to provide the help you requested? (Observation Examples 8-10)

During the mini-lessons, students were invited to come up and act out/role play the short captured (and de-identified) scenes. Before we started, I explained to them that these were based on interactions I had seen in the classroom. These enacted scenes led to brief conversations about the topic. Some of the prompting questions were as follows:

1. What did you see happen in each of the scenes?
2. What was different about the scenes?
3. Why do you think I shared these scenes with us? What do these scenes help us think about?
4. What can we learn here about the ways to ask for help/respond to requests for help/respond when no help is provided?

I asked the following questions during the interactive observations to students:

1. Do you ever help your friends?
2. Do you ever help your classmates?
3. Do you ever help your teacher?
4. How do you know when they need help?
    a. Do they ask you?
    b. Do they look at you a certain way?

    c. Do they use gestures (body language) to get your attention?

5. Do you like helping others?
    a. Why or why not?
6. Have you ever said no to helping someone?
7. Has someone ever said no to helping you?

I asked the following questions during the interactive observations to the teacher:

1. Do your students have to raise their hand when they have a question?
2. Do you ever ask students to help one another?
3. Have you ever shown a student how to help another student?
4. What do you look for when trying to decide if a student needs help?

Depending on the responses of the student/teacher (i.e. if they gave one word answers or, on the other hand, if they had a lot to say in response to a given question), additional prompting questions were asked (such as: "Can you say more?" if a student gave one word answers, or, if a student/teacher had a lot to say in response to a question, I asked the participant questions relating to their answer.

This small discussion got the students thinking about when to ask for help, how to ask for help, how to give help, how to decline giving help, and how to deal with help refusals all in ways that are positive and build and foster a healthy community.

I also engaged in interactive observations after the mini-lessons. I continued to gather field notes in the classroom sessions to see if there was evidence that the mini-lessons (described

below) led to greater requests for help and positive experiences for both getting, giving, and not giving help in the classroom. These interactive observations ended on February 29th, 2024.

All of the examples included in this section show patterns that I witnessed in the classroom; they were not single occurrences. I decided to pick an excerpt from my field notes that exemplified each type of interaction that helped me create my mini-lessons. This allowed me to more clearly group my findings.

Initial Noticings

During my first few times observing in the third grade classroom, I mostly stayed on the sidelines. I wanted to see how the students acted towards one another and their teacher without me heavily influencing their actions. During this time, I took notes on classroom management styles, friend groups, and attitudes toward helping behaviors.

One thing that immediately grabbed my attention was that the students knew the classroom expectations: for example, how to ask for a water bottle or to use the bathroom. They also (for the most part) knew when it was appropriate for them to take their work to the carpet. This helped T3 focus her attention on the students who could solve their questions by moving locations in the classroom. These students were practicing engaging with responsible decision making by "[i]dentifying solutions for personal and social problems" (CASEL, 2020, p. 2).

They also knew that they needed to wait their turn when they had questions. However, there was not a lot of peer to peer helping. If a student had a question, they usually waited for T3 to be available. Even though I told them on my first day that they could also ask me questions, it took them a few sessions of me being in their space before they started to trust me. I know that since I was not sitting amongst them, I was more separate and even more of an outsider. As I

started to sit with them and walk around them, they started to get more used to me being there and a few students asked me questions.

T3 did a great job fielding questions when the students were doing independent or group work. She would frequently walk around the students and ask them if they needed help. During this time, I did not observe any of the students disrespectfully accept a denial of help from T3. This did lead me to wonder if the reason why few students were going out of their way to ask a peer for help was because they knew T3 would offer it to them eventually.

Conversations Before the Mini-Lessons

The interactions discussed below reinforced many of my research questions at the same time (particularly my first question: "How do students communicate their need for help in the classroom?" and my second question: "How do students respond appropriately to help requests and denials?"). This is because the students who participated in my project are complex people capable of expressing multiple things at the same time. Based on these interactions, I was able to extrapolate an answer to my third research question: "What are effective strategies for teachers to foster greater helpfulness between students?" to focus on what T3 was already during to promote these strategies and what else she could be doing.

Non-Speaking Way of Asking for Help

On 12/20/23 students were tasked with writing about their favorite ELA lesson so far. All the choices were written on the whiteboard for the students to choose from. All students were doing this individually either at their desks or on the carpet. Some students finished

this assignment and have their chromebooks out doing a different activity (fieldnotes, 2023).

81	*Head down on their desk loudly sighing.*
Xea	"What are you working on?"
81	*Lifts head from their desk.* "Well I'm supposed to be reading what I already wrote, but I don't want to."
Xea	"Can I read it?"
81	"Yeah sure" *Puts head back down on their desk.* "I just don't know what else to write!" (He wrote three of the five required sentences about his favorite lesson so far.)
Xea	"Do you want to ask someone for help with this?"
81	*Keeping their head on the desk, but tilted their head toward me.* "Well you're here so can you do it?"
Xea	"I won't just do it, but I can help you with some ideas." *After reading the sentences* "I really like this topic too. Maybe you could describe your favorite god. You say who it is here" *points to the paper* "but you could explain why.
81	"Ok." *Picks up their pencil and adds a sentence.* "I need a break now."
Xea	"Ok. Let me know if you want to brainstorm anything else."

A few minutes later, 81 is still sitting with their head down and has not added anything else to their paragraph. The teacher goes over to him:

T3	"Do you need help?"
81	"No, I'm just taking a break."
T3	*Looking at 81's paper.* "Well, it's been a few minutes and you still don't have five sentences. Can I help you think of something else to add?" *Kneels down to make eye contact with 81 while speaking softly.*
81	*Lifts head up.* "I'm just thinking about it some more."
T3	"What are you thinking about?"

81	"I don't know." *Looks over to me.* "I guess that I liked Freya, but I can't find her in the book!" *Threw hands in the air.*
T3	"That's perfect! Have you checked the table of contents? Let me know if you have a question."
81	"Ok I'll look there." *Teacher goes to another student who is raising their hand.*
67	*Sitting in the same desk clump (4 desks).* "Look at the table of contents! She is definitely in there."
81	"Ugh I know that and I looked there already!" *Opens the book again and then closes it angrily.*
67	"Well, I guess you didn't look hard enough."
81	"Stop talking to me!" *Walks over to the teacher to tell them 67 is bothering them.*
T3	"Why don't you sit in this empty seat instead." *Points to a nearby desk that is not near 67.*
81	"Ok." *Sits down and opens their book again. Then they start writing the last sentence independently.*

During the first encounter between myself and 81, he was very vulnerable. While he was hopeful that I would just do his assignment for him, when I denied his request, his frustration did not grow. He accepted my response and then asked for a break. Based on our past interactions, he knew his request for a break would be accepted since I had modeled that response to many of the kids in this class including him while I was observing. This helped reinforce my first and second research questions because 81 struggled to communicate his need for help, but he did respond appropriately when I denied his help request.

When T3 came to check on him, she was not being pushy, she just noticed that he was behind in his work. She too accepted his need for a break, but also knew that if he did not continue doing the assignment, he would fall behind and possibly lose time in something he

enjoyed as a result. T3 noticed the tension between 81 and 67 and decided it would be best to move 81 to the desk closest to her desk (which was on the opposite side of the room and facing the opposite direction).

81 and 67 have a preexisting relationship. They often don't get along and T3 purposefully separates them in class to avoid further arguments. During this interaction, 67 had moved to sit next to 42, who was in the same desk clump as 81. While 67 may have been trying to help 81 find what he was looking for in his reader, her tone and facial expressions provoked 81 to get more frustrated and focus on his lack of work instead of what he had already accomplished and should have been proud of. Unfortunately, 67 was not using positive social awareness when "showing concern for the feelings of others" (CASEL, 2020, p. 2). She was not taking 81's perspective when offering advice.

In the exchange between 81 and 67, I saw a denial of help, which related to my second research question. This is because 81 was already hesitant to accept help, as shown by him asking for a break when I asked him what he needed. Even though he denied my help, he was self aware and understood my intentions. Whether or not he was trying to escape and avoid completing his assignment when asking for a break, he still got his work done after this interaction when he moved seats to be closer to T3 and farther from 67. The fact that he was self aware enough to appropriately tell me he needed a break and continued to work once his needs were met (by changing location) shows that he was able to work on his assignment despite what happened with 67. While he may have taken her response personally, he accepted T3's redirection. He also did not continue engaging with 67. After moving seats, they did not talk for the rest of my time in their class, instead choosing to focus on their work and the other people they were sitting with.

I modeled parts of mini-lessons 1 and 4 after this interaction. From my conceptual framework, communication guided my intervention because 81 was able to portray his needs to me and T3. There was also a lack of helpful communication between 81 and 67 and I knew this was a common problem among third graders that I wanted to account for.

Denying a Request to Help

On 11/29/23 all the students were working either in pairs or independently on reading/writing activity. Their assignment was to answer a page of questions based on what they read as a group. All of the groups were working well together and there was a quiet hum in the classroom with everyone working (fieldnotes, 2023).

42	*Looks confused and turns to peer* "Do you get this?"
98	*Overheard what was said (sitting in the same table group.)* "I do! Can I help you with it?"
42	"No, I want to try it myself first."
98	"Oh, ok." *Looks confused, but doesn't ask more questions and turns back at paper and continues to work independently.*

After this short interaction, 42 continued to stare at his workbook page. He then started to write and then went to T3 to get his work checked. She prompted him to review his work for any mistakes. He trudged back to his desk and looked it over again before going back to T3, who deemed his work acceptable. He then got his chromebook and started the next activity, which was an independent, online game (fieldnotes, 2023).

42 shows a high level of self awareness in this interaction. Even though these students only go back and forth twice, a lot is said and understood. When 42 says "Do you get this?" to 98, he is not asking for help as 98 assumes. 42 is wondering if he is not alone. Since 98 does not

also express confusion, 42 does not explicitly ask for help, instead he tells 98 that he wants to try it himself. He recognizes that he can still try by himself and knows that 98 will not take it personally. This struggle is a very important step to asking for help. Before asking for help from someone else, people must first recognize that they have to try to figure it out themselves. If they tried and cannot do it themselves, then it is time to ask someone else for their input.

When I saw 42 engage in this vital step of self awareness and 98 accept his response, I knew I wanted one of my mini-lessons to focus on what to do when an offer to help is denied. While in this interaction, it went well, and everyone remained calm, there were other times that it did not go as well. For example, other students reacted negatively to rejections of help because they took it as a personal rejection. I wanted to incorporate this into my lessons and show the students how to be socially aware because while sometimes tone can have a lot to do with how people react, the words they are saying need to be accepted in a healthy way. 98 was so excited at the chance to help his peer, but did accept when 42 politely turned down his offer. When I later asked 98 why he just continued with his work, he told me that 42 had said no so he stopped and left him alone. This shows that 98 is socially aware enough to recognize that 42 denial was not a personal attack; sometimes people just want to try by themselves first, but still know that others may be struggling with similar questions. It also showed that 98 had the decision-making skills to not push 42 for more of an answer.

I modeled parts of mini-lessons 2, 3, and 4 after this interaction. From my conceptual framework, communication guided my intervention because 42 was able to successfully communicate his needs with 98. I wanted to recognize 98 acceptable of 42's denial that shows strong decision-making and social awareness skills.

Helping in Groups

On 1/3/24, the teacher just gave an instruction to take out their chromebooks and open the slideshow. Once the slideshow was open the students had to pick a slide with a quote they liked and write about it. About one minute after the instruction, most students had opened the slideshow and were clicking through the slides. However, some students had trouble finding the slideshow on their google classroom page. One instance of this struggle is accounted for below:

> 42 told 75 that they could not find the slideshow needed for the assignment they were working on. Since they were sitting next to each other, 75 moved 42's chromebook to see it better. 75 scrolled through the google classroom page, but could not find it. 75 then scrolled on their chromebook, but said they accidentally closed the page and couldn't find it again. 75 raised their hand and the teacher came over to help. 42 remained quiet and was looking for something inside their desk. After 75 was helped by the teacher, 75 helped 42 find the slideshow (fieldnotes, 2024).

After I wrote down this observation, I walked over to the students and sat at an empty desk next to them:

Xea	"Did your question get answered?"
75	"Yeah"
Xea	"Who answered it?"
42	"The teacher did."
75	"And me!"
Xea	"That's awesome!" *Nodding to 42* "Could you have asked the teacher too?"
42	"I guess, but 75 already did so [they] just told me what the teacher said after."
75	"And I wanted to share with [them] so it's fine."

Xea	*Making eye contact with 42* "I'm glad you felt comfortable asking [75] for help." *looking at 75* "and I'm glad that you wanted to help [42]."

After this, both students looked through the slideshow on their individual chromebooks, but shared slides they liked with each other by turning their chromebooks and tapping the other on the shoulder (fieldnotes, 2024).

From the short conversation I had with 42 and 75, I wanted to see if they both got what they needed out of that interaction. Even though they told me they did (very enthusiastically I might add) I was curious as to why 42 did not ask for help with 75. What would have happened if 75 misunderstood T3's explanation of the directions? In this case, T3 was walking around the desk clumps answering questions as they came up, so it would not have been difficult for them to ask together. 42 and 75 were also sitting right next to one another, but when T3 was explaining what needed to be done to 75, 42 was not paying attention. To respect the space, T3 and 75 were also whispering since many students were working alone and silently.

While 42 and 75 did get the help they needed, after my short discussion with them, they did not see the benefit. I knew I wanted to have one of the mini-lessons focus on asking for help in groups. I wanted all the students in this class to value working together to reach a common goal and make use of their social awareness in this classroom by demonstrating "recognizing strengths in others and situational demands and opportunities" (CASEL, 2020, p. 2).

I modeled parts of mini-lessons 3 and 4 after this interaction. From my conceptual framework, communication guided my intervention because 42 and 75 were able to talk about what they needed in a healthy way. Growth mindset also played a role because I realized that they did not see the benefit in going to T3 together with their question. I wanted to see how

incorporating this idea would help them gain an understanding of how important it is to know that they can improve beyond what they are currently doing.

Mini-Lessons

After talking with T3, I decided to keep my four mini-lesson structure. However, I modified the scripts to better reflect what I was not seeing happen in the classroom. I took what I observed in the previous month to write short scripts for the student volunteers. Once volunteers were chosen, I pulled them aside and gave them each a small piece of paper with the script typed on it. I had them practice the script using their loud voices and body language. We practiced at least twice each time and I gave them space to ask questions about the script. For example, they asked about pronunciation and how loud they really could be.

After the volunteers read the script in front of their classmates, we had a discussion about what happened. For the first lesson, I did not have a lot of preset questions. I thought the discussion would flow on its own. Instead, the students stared at me and I did my best to hold their attention. This resulted in me asking the students many yes/no questions (with very enthusiastic responses, but quick ones nonetheless). Once I had a short conversation with T3, I decided to change how I asked my questions during the discussion with the students. I wrote a more detailed list of questions to ask to make sure I had a script for myself to help guide the conversation. This led to the students being engaged because they had to think more about their answers.

Since the mini-lessons were only 15 minutes long, there was time directly after to make further observations. There were about 30 minutes after that I was able to sit with the students and take more notes about their helping behaviors (related to class work or just general

questions). After each lesson, I observed at least one instance of one or more students implementing what was just taught.

Mini-Lesson 1 "The Basics of Asking for Help"

Script given to student volunteers:

> Student A: *Looks confused and turns to the student sitting next to them who is done with the work.* "I don't get this. Can you help me please?"
>
> Student B: *Turns to student A in their seat.* "Which one do you not understand?"
>
> Student A: *Points to paper.* "This one."
>
> Student B: "Yeah, I can help you!"
>
> *Both students will then look at the paper.*

Questions asked during mini-lesson:

- What did you notice?
- Did student A get help?

Discussion during mini-lesson:

Based on the students' yes response to the second question I asked them, I went into more detail. I wanted them to practice self-awareness when trying to decide how and who to ask for help from. This, in turn, required them to practice responsible decision-making because they needed to know how to make good choices when deciding if it was time to seek help and who to seek it from. We went through the questions below and repeated them during the sequential mini-lessons informally.

Questions the students can ask themselves before approaching someone:

- Is the person helping someone else?
- Is the person doing their own work?
- Has this person previously told me they want to be left alone or are they welcoming of questions/conversation?

These questions helped them decide who may be more willing to help them. It is often assumed that children are being disrespectful when they interrupt conversations, but this is a learned skill. They need to be taught how a person or group of people look when they are busy and when they are more likely to be available. By modeling this by having them practice making certain facial expressions and body movements, I was able to model how these people may look. My hope was to have this checklist of questions decrease the amount of disrespectful denials of help because they would understand the social dynamic of their classroom. I also hoped that these questions would encourage them to think before asking for help from certain people. If they noticed T3 had a bunch of other students surrounding them with questions, maybe they can look for another person near them who may be able to help.

Interaction directly after mini-lesson:

> Many of the students asked me questions about their math assignment. Even though they all still had to get their work checked by T3, they still went to where I was sitting to ask me for help with their math questions (fieldnotes, 2024).

I thought I had given them permission to ask me questions about their work before this lesson, but apparently they needed the extra reminder because after the lesson was over, 53 was

the first to come to me asking me to check his work and others quickly followed suit. They split themselves into groups based on if I or T3 had more of their peers around us. This was the first time 24 and 36 spoke to me about their work. Before this, 24 only asked me personal questions (how old I am, if I had siblings, etc. and 36 did not really talk to me unless I initiated the conversation). This shows that when I explicitly told them I was available to answer some of their questions, combined with the fact that I had been in their classroom for the past few weeks, they were comfortable asking me. This shows that my mini-lessons helped the students increase their comfort in asking for help. I knew I wanted my first lessons to focus on the basics and I was surprised that I would see such a shift in so many students' behavior right away.

Mini-Lesson 2 "Accepting Denials of Help"

Script given to student volunteers:

> Student A: *Looks confused and turns to the student sitting next to them who is done with the work.* "I don't get this. Can you help me please?"
>
> Student B: *Turns to student A in their seat.* "Which one do you not understand?"
>
> Student A: *Points to paper.* "This one."
>
> Student B: "No, I don't want to." *Looks back at their own work.*
>
> Student A: "Okay." *Turns to the teacher and raises hand calmly.*
>
> *The teacher comes over and helps Student A.*

Questions:

- What did you notice Student A doing? Student B? The teacher?

- How did Student A get help?
- What could be some reasons why Student B said no?
    - Is it ok to say no?
- What if Student B said yes?
- How did Student A react to being told no?
- How can you tell who to ask for help from?
- How do people look when they are willing to give help?

Interaction directly after mini-lesson:

> 75 and 42 were sitting next to one another and 42 asked for help spelling a word. 75 told her she didn't want to help her at that moment. 42 asked 24 instead and was able to get her question answered by him instead (fieldnotes, 2024).

42 accepted 75's no during this interaction which was in direct relation to our lesson that day. We had discussed that no can be a complete sentence and in cases like this, elaboration is not necessarily needed. There was also no reluctance to seek help elsewhere. 24 was at a different point in the assignment, so he was more able to take the time to spell the word for 42. This shows that 42 and 75 were internalizing what I was teaching. For whatever reason, 75 did not want to answer 42's question and was able to be self aware by recognizing that in herself. 42 respected 75's decision and turned to a different student (24) who was nearby. She identified that he was more willing to help her and proceeded to ask him her question. This interaction highlights these student's ability to be socially aware by "[r]ecognizing strengths in others" (CASEL, 2020, p. 2).

Mini-Lesson 3 "Asking for Help in Groups"

Script given to student volunteers:

> Student A: *Looks confused and turns to the student next to them who is still working.* "I don't get this. Can you help me?"
>
> Student B: *Turns to student A.* "No, I'm confused too."
>
> Student A: *Points to paper.* "Do you want to ask the teacher together?"
>
> Student B: "Yeah!"
>
> *Both students raise their hands and the teacher comes over.*

Questions during mini-lesson:

- What did you notice Student A doing? Student B? The teacher?
- How did Student A get help? Student B?
- Could they still have gotten help from asking someone else (other than the teacher) together?
- Could they have asked their questions separately?
    - What would have been different?
    - Would they have gotten the same type of help?
- What would have happened if Student A asked the teacher without student B?
    - Would Student B have gotten help?
    - What if Student A told Student B what they learned?
    - Would there be more room for error?
- Why is it sometimes better to ask questions together?

Interaction directly after mini-lesson:

> While doing an independent assignment, 24 asked a nearby student, 53, how to spell a word. Talking to peers was allowed as long as it didn't get too loud in the classroom. 53 didn't know how to so he suggested they both ask me (I was sitting one table group over from them). 53 raised his hand and called my name softly. I went over and suggested they work together to sound it out. They spelled it correctly together (fieldnotes, 2024).

I congratulated these students for working together to ask me for help, especially since this is what we had just gone over together in the mini-lesson about ten minutes ago. 24 and 53 used self-awareness, specifically, "[i]dentifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets [and] [h]aving a growth mindset" (CASEL, 2020, p. 2). Both 24 and 53 were self-aware and used their decision making skills to identify that they had the same question. When deciding who to go to for their question, they noticed that I was near them and was not talking to another person. After both of them quietly called me over to where they were sitting, they looked at each other and 53 asked me their question. After 53 was finished talking, 24 added that they both were confused and had tried to do it by themselves before calling me over. This further shows that they were both using their self-awareness and critical thinking skills to admit they both needed help.

Mini-Lesson 4 "Identifying Non-speaking and Speaking Ways of Asking for Help"

Scripts given to student volunteers:

> Student A: *Looks confused and sighs loudly.*
>
> Student B: *Turns to student A.* "Do you need help with something?"
>
> Student A: *Points to paper.* "This one is hard."
>
> Student B: "I don't get it either. Maybe we can ask the teacher together?"

Student A: “Ok!”

Both students raise their hands.

Student A: *Looks confused.* “This is hard!”

Student B: *Turns to student A.* “Do you need help with something?”

Student A: *Points to paper.* “I don’t get this one.”

Student B: “Yeah, I can help you!”

Both students will then look at the paper.

Questions asked during mini-lesson:

- What did you notice Student A doing? Student B?
- How did Student A get help?
- What was the difference between the two scenarios?
- How did Student B know that Student A needed help?
    - In each script

Interaction directly after mini-lesson:

After this lesson, the students had indoor recess time because of the weather. 98 was setting up Connect Four with 53. 98 looked confused and kept trying to fit the pieces together, so they could start playing. 53 asked if 98 needed help and 98 accepted by nodding his head “yes”, handing the pieces to 53. He then explained how to put the pieces together and they started playing the game (fieldnotes, 2024).

98 did not explicitly ask 53 for help setting up the game. 53 assumed 98 needed help because he was sighing and had tried to put the game together, but it did not seem to be working.

When 53 offered help, 98 did not make direct eye contact, but accepted using his body language (he shrugged and pushed the pieces closer to 53 on the desk). Both of these students remained calm throughout the interaction.

53 engaged with CASEL's fifth area of competence which is responsible decision making. He "learned to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, facts" (CASEL, 2020, p. 2). This shows that 53 used his critical thinking skills to understand how to respond to 98. 53 did not laugh or make a big deal out of 98 not knowing how to put the pieces together to play the game. 53 knew 98 was embarrassed and quietly assembled the game after 98 let go of all the pieces. 98 did not have to use his voice to tell 53 what he needed. 53 recognized his body language and was able to offer help before 98 asked for it. This self-awareness from both students highlights that young students are capable of understanding the complex idea that sometimes it is not necessary for people to use their voices to get a point across.

Follow-Up Questions

I emailed T3 some follow up questions a couple weeks after finishing my in class observations. I asked three questions:

1. Have you noticed an increase in your students asking for help in groups?
    1.1. If yes, any particular students?
2. Have you noticed your students asking their peers if they need help?
    2.1. If yes, any particular students?
3. Have there been any students arguing about asking for help?
    3.1. ie. student A didn't want help and another (student B) asked on student A's behalf and student A didn't like it

3.2. If yes, any particular students/situations?

T3's response:

> I have not noticed more students asking for help in groups about the same thing. I have seen students offering help, especially with ST Math and when we are working on the Chromebooks--students who know how to do something on the Chromebooks will show others how to do the same (we've been using Canva the past couple of weeks and I've seen this happen a few times). I haven't been looking to particular students for this, but [67] did ask me yesterday if, when she finished ST Math, she could use her ST Math time to go around and help other people. I haven't seen students arguing about help outside of ongoing conflicts--for example, I have two students who are just generally not getting along and one sort of rudely rejected the other's offer for help this week (T3, personal communication, March 22, 2024).

While my lessons did not seem to have a strong impact on the students asking for help in groups that may be because it was not reinforced. Modeling during a controlled environment, like the mini-lessons, can only go so far. At some point, students need to be allowed to practice the skills we went over. I tried to make this space as stress free as possible. In giving them the opportunity to practice these skills in a genuine way, my hope was that it would allow them to gain confidence engaging in these skills during their normal class time.

67's willingness to support her classmates shows that her initial desire for a leadership role is being fulfilled, even if it's just a small role. 67 frequently asked me for help during my observations and was quick to volunteer during the mini-lessons. She was eager to put the

lessons into practice. It is heartwarming to hear that she continues to do this in my absence and shows that she was receptive to my teaching about helping behaviors.

67 was showing all three of the CASEL areas of competence that I focused on: self-awareness, positive decision making skills, and social awareness. 67 knew that she was finished with her assignment and knew her strengths. 67 put herself out there and offered help to her classmates during ST Math time. She also knew to ask T3 first because 67 was supposed to be reading or going on BOOST during this time. She knew the expectations of the classroom, but wanted to see if her peers needed help with something she had already done and offer her expertise. While I don't know how the sequential interactions played out, I can assume no major argument erupted because T3 did not mention them. 67 demonstrated a growth mindset during this interaction because she wanted to help her peers improve. She understood that by helping her classmates, they could boost their skills.

T3 also reinforced my third research question. When 67 asked if she could help her classmates, T3 allowed it and included it in her response to my follow-up questions. This shows that she was thinking about and taking note of her students helping behaviors even when I was not there. She wanted to foster greater helpfulness between her students and she knew that encouraging the students (67 in this situation) to share information was a vital step in cultivating an environment where her students feel comfortable and confident in their ability to ask for and give help.

Conclusion

Summary

Even though asking for help is a basic skill that most people know is important, it is not a skill that many are explicitly taught. My goal for this project was to decrease the stigma of asking for help in a third grade classroom in Worcester. Through my mini-lessons and observations, I brought to light many behaviors the students were already engaging in and praised their effort and commitment to each other.

Based on my first research question, I found that students need to be taught how to communicate their need for help. Regarding my second research question, I found that students also need to be taught how to appropriately respond to help requests and denials. For my third and final research question, I discovered that it takes a lot for teachers to foster greater helpfulness between students. While it seems like a simple skill on the surface, it requires students to be knowledgeable about self-awareness, social awareness, and responsible decision-making. Without continued mastery of all three of these skills, students will have more difficulty engaging in healthy helping behaviors with their peers and teachers.

Collective Analysis

These students all wanted to do well and many were not terrified of making mistakes in public which shows strong growth mindset skills. They valued their teachers' insights, as well as the opinions of their peers. Many of them were comfortable being opinionated and expressive about their emotions. As I spent more time in this classroom, more of the students were willing to sit with me and ask me questions, sometimes to the point that they needed to be reminded to stay on task.

I wanted the students to look inward before asking for or offering help to others. This was included in every lesson's discussion. I wanted them to first ask themselves, "Can I figure this out on my own?" If they could not, they needed to be able to recognize who was available to help them by asking themselves some simple questions. This initial step of being self-aware was vital when conducting my lessons. These students needed to be taught that it is ok to challenge themselves by trying independently before going to someone who is available to them. This skill highlighted that these students needed to have a growth mindset. They needed to have confidence in themselves to believe that they could improve, either on their own by trying it independently or asking someone else for help.

These kids did amazing during the lessons. There was a lot of participation and as the lessons continued, I had heard from all of the students at least once because they volunteered to answer a question I posed or a question that was asked by another student during the discussions. They were also not afraid to raise their hands and be wrong. There were many instances where a student raised their hand, I called on them, and then they didn't know what to say. When this happened, I always gave them a few moments to ponder and if they were still struggling, I offered for them to pick one of their classmates to answer. This shows the T3 has built a strong classroom community. It is not seen as an attack for the adult to ask them to pick someone else. It is ok to put themselves out there and be vulnerable in not fully knowing.

All of the interactions after the mini-lessons showed that with direct instruction, the students could apply their skills of helping one another in the classroom. While I did see some crossover with the lessons, it was minimal, showing these students would need more constant prompting to use the strategies we talked about during the lessons. Most of these students

displayed strong self-awareness and communication skills and used this to their advantage whenever engaging in activities independently, in pairs, and in groups.

This also shows that these students were comfortable admitting they did not know things. Even though we did not use the term growth mindset, these students were allowed, if not encouraged, to be vulnerable and admit when they did not know things. This requires them to build social awareness and decision making skills (CASEL, 2020). They need to know how a person looks when they may be available to help. They also need to know how a person looks when they may need help and how to properly offer it. This requires them to build relationship skills with their peers, teacher and anyone else who is in their classroom by communicating effectively with others.

Since I was able to observe at least one interaction directly after each of my mini-lessons that showed these students using the strategies we had just discussed, I am hopeful that this inner questioning was also taking place and enhancing their self-awareness skills. Even though T3 constantly modeled independent work and self review - the students were often given checklists so they could go through their writing independently to check for mistakes or necessary modifications - most kids of this age group need constant reminders and prompting before they are able to use these strategies automatically (which is developmentally appropriate). Since I cannot be in each child's head during my observations, I relied solely on my questions after the fact to fill in the gaps in my understanding of what I had witnessed. This skewed my data because while many students were upfront about their thought process, others were not so transparent and willing to share their inner monologues with me.

Theoretical Implications

If given more time, this process of observing, making lessons to fit the needs of the classroom, and observing again with modeling, would have a positive impact on a classroom environment. The existing research has not taken the time to show this as fact, but modeling empathy and vulnerability can result in more empathetic and open-minded students. What I observed 67 doing and what was revealed when I asked my follow up questions to T3 shows that further research should highlight the social hierarchies that exist within the classroom.

I did not focus on these students' academics. I looked solely at their interactions between peers, T3, and/or myself. I did not want the center of attention to be their work, I wanted it to be on the people themselves. Even though I decided to use numbers to distinguish them for this paper (using pseudonyms brought another layer of bias that I did not want to emphasize), they are far more than that. These students have rich lives and often expose themselves to fascinating insights. Only looking to see if their grades changed based on my lessons would do them a huge disservice and invalidate all the work I did to build relationships with them during my time in their classroom. While the research that has previously been done that did highlight student academics as a measure of success is helpful and important, it cannot be the sole metric that is used to validate the positive impact teaching helping behaviors can have on a classroom. For this project, I wanted to foster an environment that helped them be more empathetic towards themselves and one another. Having a strong classroom community where the five tenets of CASEL's Framework are incorporated is vital when learning how to be a person in our society, especially since these students were in school for six hours five days a week.

Implications for Practice

Teachers have a lot to do everyday. It is impossible to do everything that is expected and often required during the school day. Based on my findings, my lessons did help encourage at least one student to ease this burden of solely relying on the teacher when asking for help. 67's willingness to put herself in a role of offering help to her classmates in an appropriate setting (she had already finished her work and asked T3 if it was okay) shows that she understands that T3 could not always answer every question promptly because there was so much she had to focus on during the school day. If more students are taught that they can ask for and offer help from other students, it can make the teacher's day go a little more smoothly.

It took a lot for me to create these mini-lessons and these four mini-lessons were the only lessons I was teaching during this time. Other teachers, T3 included, must create/ modify almost six hours worth of lessons each school day. If teachers are given a more structured SEL curriculum that highlights asking for help as a learned skill, more teachers may find it easier to teach such lessons and incorporate them into their daily schedules. Having a more structured curriculum would also give these teachers more confidence in this subject area because there are a lot of buzz words that are used and there are so many different avenues to go down when researching asking for help. It can feel daunting, especially when it is not the only thing that must be focused on.

I plan to implement mini-lessons like these in my future classroom. I will make sure to carve out time to teach SEL skills separately and teach my students the specific terminology (including self awareness and growth mindset). However, these skills need to be incorporated in all aspects of the students' lives, as outlined by the concentric circles CASEL model as shown by Figure 1. Once they have learned the terminology, it can be used during any activities we engage

in. Learning how to communicate in a healthy way and be self aware are vital aspects to a growth mindset. Maintaining a growth mindset ensures that students and their teachers will have an open mind when engaging in classroom activities. When everyone in the classroom has a growth mindset, they are more likely to try new things and be vulnerable with one another.

I also focused mostly on peer to peer interactions, which is another area that has not been researched as much as I hoped when I first started this project. The teacher has a lot going on all day and if some students can ease their load by turning to a friend or even turning to themselves and letting themselves struggle, it can help the teacher to build more coherent relationships with more students.

While reflecting on my third research question: "What are effective strategies for teachers to foster greater helpfulness between students?" I learned that it really depends on the people involved. I found that talking to the students one on one helped me to learn as much as I could about their preferences and relationships in the classroom. I used this information to build my mini-lessons to fit their needs. I knew T3 had taken the relationships of her students into account when creating seating charts for the desk clumps, so I followed her lead and mentioned some of the relationships in my findings. Even though the volunteers were not necessarily best friends, they all got along while participating. When the student volunteers stood in front of their peers and read the short scripts, they had to be vulnerable and trust that their peers would appreciate the work they were doing. This shows that they were all excited to be involved and willing to put themselves out there by performing in front of all their classmates. After the mini-lessons, I referred back to what we talked about whenever I asked the students questions. I was also sure to praise them in the ways they felt comfortable when they either with my prompting or

independently engaged in healthy helping behaviors. The role-playing aspect of the mini-lessons served the purpose of building trust and confidence in one another.

Limitations

Even though I was permitted by the Clark IRB to audio record, while going through the WPS IRB, this was the only part of my application that was denied. As a result, I relied solely on written field notes during my observations. This made collecting data difficult at times, especially when I had a student asking me a question while I was writing field notes about other students in the room. Luckily, I have had practice taking notes about events that have already happened from working as a behavior technician for children with autism. A big part of my job was to record data about the kids, but often they required my attention so I had to use shorthand so I could give them what they needed in the moment while still accurately recording the data about their behaviors at a later time.

I also did my best to be as honest with the students as I could. Many asked me what I was writing about and tried to read over my shoulders. I told them I was writing about some of them, but did not give specific names or events. 36, 24, and 98 usually accepted this and continued with whatever class work they were doing. 53, 81, 67, 75, and 42 usually did not and I had to switch screens to show them something else on my tablet. This subdued them and they then continued with their class work.

I was also only in this classroom from November to February. This is a short time to see change. It also makes it hard to determine whether the changes I did observe would be long-lasting. While I was hopeful, I did not expect these students to have no conflict directly after my mini-lessons were complete; that would not be developmentally appropriate. Their

progress fell in line with what I was expecting based on their ages and how the initial observations went.

I also only had eight of the fifteen student consent to participate. While I was able to take notes of many conversations and interactions that supported my research, there were many that I could not because one or all of the students involved did not consent to me including them in my data. This unfortunately limited the conversations I could include in my data, which skewed my results.

Final Thoughts

I learned so much from doing this semester-long research project. While I have worked with children in this age group for many years, it was never in a research capacity. I have always been a teacher to the kids (required to discipline the students and take data for medical purposes), never just a visitor. This brought to light the fact that teachers are constantly collecting data and modifying based on that data. Even though it may not be as formal as what I was doing, they are still engaging in a valuable form of research to help their students engage in course material and build healthy classroom communities. It was a new experience sitting with them and writing on my tablet about specific events that I witnessed for a project I created. My experience collecting data as a behavior technician for children with autism greatly helped me gather more accurate and detailed accounts of what was happening in this third grade classroom. Even though I am uncertain if I will continue to do research like this, I will definitely use the strategies I have learned from past experiences and this project to build a supportive classroom community.

References

Alexander, R. (2018). Developing dialogic teaching: Genesis, process, trial. *Research Papers in Education,* 33(5), 561–598. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2018.1481140

Bar-Tal, D., & Raviv, A. (December 1979). Consistency of helping-behavior measures. *Child Development,* 50(4). 1235-1238.

Claro, S., Paunesku, D., & Dweck, C. S. (2016). Growth mindset tempers the effects of poverty on academic achievement. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(31), 8664–8668. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1608207113

Dweck, C. (2015) Carol Dweck revisits the "Growth Mindset". *Education Week.* https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-carol-dweck-revisits-the-growth-mindset/2015/09

Communities for Just Schools Fund. (2020, May 12). When SEL is Used as Another Form of Policing. *Medium*. https://medium.com/@justschools/when-sel-is-used-as-another-form-of-policing-fa53cf85dce4

Harari, D., Parke, M. R., & Marr, J. C. (2022). When Helping Hurts Helpers: Anticipatory versus Reactive Helping, Helper's Relative Status, and Recipient Self-Threat. *Academy of Management Journal*, 65(6), 1954–1983. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2019.0049

Klingner, J. K., & Vaughn, S. (2000). The helping behaviors of fifth graders while using collaborative strategic reading during ESL content classes. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(1), 69–98. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588097

Kruse, S. (2022, April 13). The Socratic method: fostering critical thinking. *The Institute for Learning and Teaching.* https://tilt.colostate.edu/the-socratic-method/

Nattiv, A. (1994). Helping behaviors and math achievement gain of students using cooperative learning. *The Elementary School Journal*, 94(3), 285–297. https://doi.org/10.1086/461767

Fichtman Dana, N. (2016). The relevancy and importance of practitioner research in contemporary times. *Journal of Practitioner Research*, 1(1). https://doi.org/10.5038/2379-9951.1.1.1034

Webb, N. M., & Mastergeorge, A. (2003). Promoting effective helping behavior in peer-directed groups. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 39(1–2), 73–97. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-0355(03)00074-0

CASEL. (2020). What Is the CASEL Framework? Retrieved December 15, 2023, from https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/

Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2020). What can be learned from growth mindset controversies? *American Psychologist*, *75*(9), 1269–1284. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000794