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Theories of Social Change

I have known that I wanted to work with younger children in some capacity for almost my entire life. While I was never a babysitter, as soon as I was old enough, I started volunteering at my local public library in the children's section. I then got a job as an assistant teacher at a nearby preschool/daycare and realized that I really wanted to do this long term. However, I knew that I wanted my life to be different from my older co-workers. Many of them worked multiple jobs to make ends meet and very few had formal schooling regarding child development.

I spoke with my aunt, who is currently a sixth grade science teacher in my hometown, and asked her how she achieved her goals. She told me to get the broadest certification I could (i.e. not only being certified to teach one age, but many) so I would be more appealing to schools so if they wished I could teach first grade or fifth without needing much additional training. She also said that as soon as she could, she joined a teacher's union. I knew that this was not an option for my coworkers because there is no universal Pre-K in the United States and Pre-K and daycare programs are not required in public schools; they are simply a bonus if they do exist.

After realizing what I wanted to address (enhancing student's ability to engage in healthy helping behaviors between peers and their teacher), with the help of Holly Dolan in Clark University's Education Department, I reached out to Jacob Hiatt Magnet School (an elementary school in Worcester). I was connected with a new third grade teacher, Ms. Cyr, who I will work

with to create mini-lessons based on my observations and field notes each week. The students and the teacher will act out short scenarios that I have witnessed. After, we will discuss what each student noticed and how each scenario made them feel. During this semester-long process, I hope that each student in this third grade classroom will gain the confidence, if they did not before I intervened, to ask for help from both their teacher and their peers while in the classroom.

Most teachers are underpaid and overworked. They are expected to achieve too many long term goals in a very short amount of time. These goals are even more unattainable because they are expected to be done with little support from administration and families. Whenever I have spoken with teachers who have experienced positive relationships with administration (it has been very rare) it has been presented as a plus, not an expectation. While I cannot fix this problem, I can try to help from the bottom.

By teaching students to appropriately ask each other for help in the classroom, it might make the teachers job a little bit easier because they are usually stretched very thin. They are expected to be able to help over twenty students who all have different questions about different topics during the day. It can be exhausting and make them feel like they are not doing enough, when in reality they are doing so much. If students can feel confident asking their peers for help instead of always relying on the one teacher, this teacher may be able to spend some of the time helping everyone answer similar questions on other important aspects of the job.

It is unrealistic to assume that with the use of one intervention teachers will be able to magically solve all their problems. However, we cannot be paralyzed by the exorbitant amount of work that needs to be done. Small actions can still make a difference. If I can create an intervention to help alleviate some of this stress for even just one teacher during the academic year, I will have achieved my goal. While whatever intervention I create will need to be altered

depending on the students and the teachers involved, this flexibility is built into the project. No two interventions should look identical; they should be able to change as the participants change.