Self-Advocacy; The Importance of Building Interpersonal-Communication and Help-Seeking Skills in Elementary School Children

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

May 2014

Signature Sheet

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the chair of the master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge all the truly incredible people who contributed, supported and inspired this thesis. Thank you to the extraordinarily helpful and supportive staff at Dominican University of California. First and foremost, thank you to Dr. Madalienne Peters for her deep knowledge and expertise in the research field. Dr. Peters' contagious passion for research, determination, and sometimes unrelenting drive greatly contributed to the successful completion of this research project. Thanks due to both Dr. Peters and Dr. Elizabeth Truesdell for empowering me to be the change I would like to see in education. Thank you to Mr. Dave for his mentorship, time, and insight into explicitly teaching effective communication skills through collaborative learning. Relationships, relationships, relationships.

I would also like to thank my fellow colleagues. Thank you to my teaching partners and team, Julie, Nicole and Nancy, Ann Marie, and Rick for their ideal modeling of what effective, compassionate teaching looks like. Their persistent encouragement has supported this process and I appreciate all of their assistance.

Finally, I would like to thank all of my family and friends; especially my wife Lexie, who has been a steadfast companion and proof-reader since the very beginning. Without her selfless support this project would not have come to fruition. Thank you bunches, Lexie. And, of course, thank you to my endearing family: Kele, George, Drew, Kasie, Chloe, Janice, Megan, Zia, Zio, Noni, Gabby, and Sal who instilled in me the confidence to pursue my passions and to always give my personal best. All the above mentioned individuals aided and assisted me with the most incredible support system and a foundation upon which to ground myself. My dearest and deepest thanks to you all.

Table of Contents

TITLE PAGE 1
SIGNATURE SHEET 2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 4
TABLE OF CONTENTS 5
ABSTRACT 7
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION 8
STATEMENT OF PROBLEM 10
PURPOSE STATEMENT 10
RESEARCH QUESTION 10
THEORETICAL RATIONALE: 11
ASSUMPTIONS 12
BACKGROUND AND NEED 12
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 15
INTRODUCTION 15
HISTORICAL CONTEXT 15
DEFINITIONS OF HELP-SEEKING VARIETIES 17
HELP-SEEKING: A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE 19
TEACHER'S ROLE IN FOSTERING RESPONSIBLE HELP-SEEKING 23
PEER'S ROLE IN FOSTERING RESPONSIBLE HELP-SEEKING 30
SUMMARY 31
CHAPTER 3 METHOD 32
ETHICAL STANDARDS 32
SAMPLE AND SITE 32
ACCESS AND PERMISSIONS 34
DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH 34
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS 36
SURVEY RESULTS; HELP-SEEKING MODELING: PARENTS AND STUDENTS 36
SURVEY RESULTS; TYPES OF HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR 42
SURVEY RESULTS; INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION 48
INTERVIEWS: GLASSER'S CHOICE THEORY 52
INTERVIEWS: ESTABLISHING A CLASSROOM OF TRUST 54
INTERVIEWS: ESTABLISHING TEACHER TRUST- LOWERING THE STUDENT SHIELDS 59
INTERVIEWS: FOSTERING INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND HELP-SEEKING IN THE CLASSROOM 61
INTERVIEWS: BUILDING COMMUNICATION AND HELP-SEEKING SKILLS THROUGH ACADEMICS 66
INTERVIEWS: THE NAIL CHALLENGE; NEXT STEPS WITH "I GIVE UP" 68
INTERVIEWS: THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUDING COMMUNICATION AND HELP-SEEKING IN THE CLASSROOM 70

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION /ANALYSIS 72
SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS 72
COMPARISON OF FINDINGS TO THE LITERATURE 72
LIMITATIONS/GAPS IN THE RESEARCH 73
IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH 73
OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY 74
ABOUT THE AUTHOR 74
REFERENCES 75

Abstract

Now, more so than in the past, children have been deprived of the opportunity to learn and exercise effective interpersonal communication skills. Interpersonal communication skills, for elementary students, are important in the development of a student's ability to self-advocate. The purpose of this study is to identify techniques in which teachers may support interpersonal communication and self-advocacy skills among school-aged children.

The literature reveals the importance of self-advocacy and help-seeking strategies on students' academic success. Unfortunately, as students approach the upper-elementary grades, they are bombarded with competing interests that can inhibit their help-seeking ability.

Research methods used followed teacher action research carried out in a California public school. Surveys were examined for correlations and themes. Initial interviews were conducted with experts in the field and communication techniques were gathered from the literature. The results indicated that students' help-seeking ability depended on a vast array of factors, including, but not limited to: gender, genetic factors, subject, classroom environment, teacher trust, agency, autonomy, competing academic and social goals, and peer comparison. These findings also aligned developmentally with prior research and mirrored parent/guardian help-seeking ability.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Three hundred forty one emails. This quantity represents the number of emails a fellow teacher received from one parent within the first three months of fall semester. Each email was important and furthered a strong relationship between the teacher and parent; however, the parent's child could have just as easily communicated the information conveyed in most of the emails.

Each individual email represented a teachable moment lost. Every email was an opportunity to build interpersonal communication skills between a student and his/her teacher misplaced, a chance to practice the skill of self-advocacy. A parent's ability to communicate with their student's teacher has become increasingly easier and evermore frequent. What a student could quickly communicate to his or her teacher has become the work of tech savvy mom or dad. This progressively veiled and impersonal ability for a parent to communicate with his or her child's teacher is just one of the many contributing factors impeding a student's ability to develop effective communication skills.

Other factors include the replacement of interpersonal social interactions with virtual communication: social networking, video game messaging, text messaging, and so on. These new technologies obstruct the development of effective interpersonal communication skills; necessary skills essential to advocating for one's self and learning. (Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008)

Additionally, most screen technology allows a child to anonymously communicate increasing uninhibited looseness and decreasing censorship. Personal technologies such as cell phones often fly under the radar of parental supervision, prohibiting the chance for parental support, guidance and teaching opportunities.

Data collected from the March Current Population Surveys (as cited in Fox, Han, Ruhm & Waldfogel, 2013), indicates that approximately two-thirds of children have all parents working between a range of 6 a.m. through 6 p.m. “All parents” refers to either both parents of a child’s household or the sole parent of a single parent household (Fox et. al., 2013). This data implies that parents are investing less time into their children and therefore less time in modeling appropriate communication strategies (Fox, et al., 2013). Time that could be spent observing and practicing interpersonal communication skills with parents, friends, peers, afterschool activity staff, etc. is spent in front of a screen. The most obvious place for children to observe and practice communication skills is within the classroom. Nevertheless, teachers are feeling the “time-pinch” as instructional minutes are allocated to core academics: reading, math and science.

In classrooms across the country, academic standards, more often than personal/social standards, are perceived as more important by teachers, students and parents alike (Barna & Brott, 2011). Teacher evaluations are administered through standardized academic testing of core academic subjects, therefore the amount of time for social and emotional learning is typically limited (Durso, 2012). Limited as it may be, the importance of these skills is crucial to the development of 21st century skills (Hilton & National Research Council, 2010) and successful students.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2013) finds, according to a national survey of 400 employers, oral communication skills are ranked among the top four sought after traits in potential employees. Just allowing students the chance to communicate is not enough. Teachers must provide a structure and explicit teaching/modeling of effective communication in addition to establishing a safe environment where students can be mindful communicators. Modeling,

teaching, and offering structured, scaffolded instruction of interpersonal communication skills not only improves a student's collaboration skills, but also builds confidence in self-advocacy.

Statement of Problem

Students have been bombarded by a number of competing interests thereby impeding their ability to foster and develop communication and self-advocacy skills. Without these skills students are less likely to work collaboratively, proactively seek out assistance/support and/or express themselves.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to identify techniques for school aged children to improve their interpersonal communication and self-advocacy skills. This study is a teacher action research conducted to examine specific techniques and practices used to bolster student interpersonal communication and self-advocacy skills. In investigating and documenting specific communication and self-advocacy lessons, this study seeks to determine if a student's ability to communicate relates to academic achievement and/or a student's capacity to advocate for him/herself.

Research Questions

What is the impact of explicitly teaching students how to communicate with others such as peers, teachers, and so on? Is there a relationship between teaching interpersonal communication skills and student ability to self-advocate? Is there a relationship between self-advocacy and student achievement? What are the proven techniques that foster a student's communication and self-advocacy skills?

Theoretical Rationale

Theoretical rational for this study is embedded in the work of Bandura, Davidson and Davidson (2003) and Vygotsky's (1978) work. Bandura describes that a person's self development, growth and change occur through interactions with his or her environment. Bandura describes child self-efficacy as a student's belief in his or her ability to be successful in specific situations. A child's sense of self-efficacy has great impact on how he or she may approach goals, tasks and challenges.

Bandura describes one of the major concepts of his social-cognitive theory, "that an individual's actions and reactions, including social behaviors and cognitive processes, in almost every situation are influenced by the actions that individual has observed in others" (Bandura, Davidson & Davidson, 2013). Providing a positive model and environment for effective communication influences a child's ability to communicate and interact with others positively. Bandura describes environment as "[including] social interactions such as instructions, modeling, and persuasion [that] can alter personal characteristics" (Bandura, Davidson & Davidson, 2013).

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) is a term that describes the spectrum of responsibilities that a child can complete. The lower limit of ZPD describes tasks that a student can complete independently free of instructor or teacher support. The higher limit of ZPD describes the potential skill that a child is able to achieve with assistance and support from a teacher or instructor. Scaffolding may include modeling a task, providing support or advice, or coaching. This allows the teacher the gradual release of responsibility; as a child makes progress toward a specified task, the teacher may provide less modeling, support, advice or coaching. An understanding of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, scaffolding instruction through the gradual release of responsibility, and Bandura's Social-Cognitive theory,

are pivotal in creating a foundation for interpersonal communication and self-advocacy in the classroom.

Assumptions

This study assumes that there is a decline in a student's ability to effectively communicate with their teachers. As a 21st century goal, students are expected to be able to communicate, to explain their ideas and thinking, and to collaborate with peers and teachers. However, without scaffolded modeling, explicit demonstration, and opportunity for practice, students cannot be expected to, and do not, meet these goals. Teaching students to communicate will not only increase a student's ability to work collaboratively with others, it will also foster a confidence wherein students may self-advocate for their learning.

Background and Need

Social and Emotional Learning is defined by The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (Payton, et al., 2008) as the practice through which children attain the skills to:

- Recognize and manage their emotions
- Set and achieve positive goals
- Demonstrate caring and concern for others
- Establish and maintain positive relationships
- Make responsible decisions
- Handle interpersonal situations effectively

CASEL emphasizes five groups of integrated, core social and emotional abilities that Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum should address: self-awareness, self-management, social-

awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Most important to this study is relationship skills, which CASEL describes as, "establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; and seeking help when needed…" (Payton, et al., 2008, p.6).

According to Payton, et al, (2008) SEL instruction yields a number of social-emotional and academic benefits. The reported benefits had an impact on students across grades K-8 and for ethnically/racially diverse students from different socio-economic settings. The study found extraordinary results:

> SEL programs improved students' social-emotional skills, attitudes about self and others, connection to school, positive social behavior, and academic performance; they also reduced students' conduct problems and emotional distress…. SEL programming improved students' achievement test scores by 11 to 17 percentile points, indicating that they offer students a practical educational benefit (Payton, et al., 2008, p.3).

The study reports six major findings regarding an implementation of the SEL curriculum. 1) Students who participated in SEL programs showed positive improvements in social-emotional abilities, self-worth, attitude toward school and academic gains as measured by achievement test scores. 2) SEL programs were effective across: grade ranges K-8, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and setting. 3) The effects where long lasting. 4) SEL interventions can be incorporated into routine educational practice, as reported by participating teachers. 5) SEL programs that adhere to the following guidelines were most effective:

- *Sequenced:* Does the program apply a planned set of activities to develop skills sequentially in a step-by-step fashion?

- *Active:* Does the program use active forms of learning such as role-plays and behavioral rehearsal with feedback?
- *Focused:* Does the program devote sufficient time exclusively to developing social and emotional skills?
- *Explicit:* Does the program target specific social and emotional skills?

  (Payton, J., et al., 2008, p. 8).

6) Reviews and results obtained suggests that SEL programs are among the most successful interventions ever offered to school-aged youth.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

This section is an examination of the research literature on self-advocacy and interpersonal communication. Information was gathered from academic library searches using online resources yielding academic, peer reviewed journals. Research information is organized in the following categories: Historical Context, Definitions of Help-Seeking Varieties, Help-Seeking: A Developmental Perspective, Teacher's Role in Fostering Responsible Help-Seeking, and Peer's Role in Fostering Responsible Help-Seeking.

Historical Context

This study's historical perspective is rooted in three basic theories: Bandura's social-cognitive theory (2003), Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), and Connell's self system theory (1990). Each theory contributes to an understanding of fundamental elements involved in the teaching and efficacy of interpersonal communication skills, self-advocacy and help-seeking.

First, this study draws on the idea set forth by Vygotsky, where social experience is interdependently linked to a child's cognitive growth (Newman, 2000). A child is not simply the passive "receiver of information"; rather, Newman describes the child as an active participant in the development of his or her cognitive ability. Additionally, a child's environment, peers, teachers, and the interactions the child engages in will also influence their cognitive ability (Newman, 2000). Critical to the researcher's study of self-advocacy and help-seeking is the

understanding of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development mentioned in Chapter 1 Theoretical Rationale.

Bandura's social learning theory, also mentioned in Chapter 1 Theoretical Rationale, is essential in establishing a foundation for understanding modeling interpersonal communication skills as a means to develop a child's adaptive, autonomous help-seeking ability. Bandura's social-cognitive theory emphasizes learning based on observation, modeling and imitation. Bandura's social-cognitive theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory are both related through the concept of learning by observations of one's environment, peers, teachers, parents, and so on.

Finally, this study draws on concepts from Connell's self-system theory. Self-system process is defined as an evaluation of one's self in relation to an ongoing activity (Connell, 1990). Connell's notion of self-evaluation is born out of three specific, fundamental psychological needs: *competence*, *autonomy*, and *relatedness* (Connell, 1990).

Competence refers to a child's knowledge of how to achieve a specific outcome and a child's belief in their ability to carry through operations. For example, a child's competency to help-seek relies on knowing what it takes to accomplish a task and their capacity and belief that they can accomplish the task well (Connell, 1990).

Central to help-seeking, as a means to further a child's ability, is *autonomy*. Connell describes autonomy as a child's self-regulation process, citing four main processes involved: initiation, inhibition, maintenance, and redirection of an activity (Connell, 1990). Autonomy can be viewed as a child's independence as demonstrated in the regulation of an activity. Children who exhibit autonomy want to do well because it is important to them personally; they are able to regulate themselves and can carry out actions independently. Newman (2000) describes

autonomy as, “a sense of agency or volition, i.e., that they [children] are in charge of their own actions” (Newman, 2000, p. 353).

Relatedness describes the evaluated safety of one’s relationships with significant others (Connell, 1990). In this study, significant others will refer to a child’s parent(s), peer(s) and teacher(s). “…children have a need to feel a sense of connectedness to individuals who are important to them and are part of their learning environment. They must be free to think independently and participate in decisions regarding their own learning” (Newman, 2000, p. 353).

Definitions of Help-Seeking Varieties

Just as important to the components of this study is an understanding of the different types of help-seeking behaviors. Butler (1998) categorizes child help-seeking and help-avoidant behaviors into seven different classifications. It is important to note that a child may identify themselves and be characterized as a combination of the classifications. Additionally, a child’s identity within a classification may change over time based on child development, genetic-factors, gender, parental involvement, subject, peers, social goals, etc.

- *Adaptive help-seeking*: is initiated when a child cannot overcome a difficulty alone (outside of Vygotsky’s ZPD), describes children who seek help when it is necessary.
- *Autonomous help-seeking*: is identified as help-seeking behavior that is a) initiated after a child has spent time attempting to solve a problem on their own, b) a child has requested hints and/or strategies from a teacher, peer, parent, etc., c) help-seeking results in a child’s ability to solve similar problems in the future. Autonomous help-seeking is typically attributed to striving for independent mastery.

- *Executive help-seeking*: refers to children who request help often when they do not need it. These children typically seek out answers over hints and/or strategies and would rather have someone else solve the problem for them.
- *Avoidant-covert help-seeking*: describes students who copy, cheat, or look for short-cuts as a means to expedite the task (see *Expedient help-seeking*) or mask incompetence.
- *Expedient help-seeking*: is identified as children who are reluctant to seek help due to the perception that seeking help will not expedite the task. These students often believe that asking for help will result in extensive explanations or re-teaching.

One can make connections between the different types of help-seeking and how they may be related. For example, students who exhibit adaptive help-seeking will typically start to solve a problem through autonomous help-seeking techniques. It is also important to note that with some children there is an internal conflict between competing goals (i.e. social, emotional, academic goals) and help-seeking techniques.

This internal conflict is especially present in the transition between elementary and middle school (Berndt & Keefe, 1995). For example, the child who wants to learn but does not want to be perceived as incompetent or dependent must resolve these internal conflicts while at the same time weighing the cost and benefit. Beyond a child's competing goals and interests, a child's affiliation to one of the help-seeking/help-avoidant classifications can depend on a variety of other factors, including parental/caregiver involvement (beginning at infancy) and a child's developmental growth.

Help-Seeking: A Developmental Perspective

The establishment of help-seeking behavior can be traced to infancy and the relationship between infant and parent. Definitive qualities of parent-infant relationships provide opportunities for children to practice and develop their resources for help-seeking (Newman, 2000). An example of early-infant help-seeking is illustrated in the following interaction, documented by Tronick (1989):

> The six-month-old infant stretches his hands out toward the object. Because he cannot get hold of it, he becomes angry and distressed. He looks away for a moment and sucks on his thumb. Calmer, he looks back at the object and reaches for it once more. But this attempt fails too, and he gets angry again. The caretaker watches for a moment, then soothingly talks to him. The infant calms down and with a facial expression of interest gazes at the object and makes another attempt to reach for it. The caretaker brings the object just within the infant's reach. The infant successfully grasps the object, explores it, and smiles (Tronick, 1989, p. 113).

It is important to note that, in the situation described, the care-giver did not directly give the bottle to the infant. Instead the caregiver placed the bottle just within arm's length, within the infants "Zone of Proximal Development", reinforcing the concept of autonomy at an early age. Experiences like this one can be accumulated over time to build trust between child and caregiver such as parent, teacher, and so on, and foster the development of self-advocacy and help-seeking in future scenarios. Children, who have experienced support from parents or caregivers, when in need, are more likely to view others as supportive and helpful. Therefore, these children, are more willing to seek adaptive, autonomous help, as their self-advocacy

behavior has been proven to be productive and successful with caregivers in the past (Newman, 2000).

Newman emphasizes that continuing to provide conditions and opportunities for help-seeking and caregiver support within a child's Zone of Proximal Development, at the toddler age, encourages ability and confidence. These children tend to have the assurance to go outside of themselves to seek help from others when needed. Newman describes the significant importance of early help-seeking relationships, "…. [as] evidenced by the fact that the quality of the relationship is predictive, years later, of how parents respond to their children's needs and how children cope with challenging situations that might require assistance from others" (Newman, 2000, p. 357). For example, parents who proactively support their child's needs at the age of two are likely to be just as supportive (giving advice, modeling partial solutions within a child's ZPD, and providing support when needed, etc.) when their child is five. Mothers who exhibit warmth, responsiveness and sensitivity with their four-year-olds are likely to interact with their children similarly when their child is six-years-old. These children tend to be more likely to show social competence and confidence with adults.

In early-elementary aged students (pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first grade), the same affirming caregiver traits have a positive effect on a student's adaptive, autonomous help-seeking abilities. Early-elementary aged children who have had a secure relationship with their caregiver are confident to ask questions and actively seek out assistance from their teacher as long as their teacher show signs of, what Newman refers to as, "[the] global, affective traits of a teacher": niceness, compassion, kindness, approachability, etc. (Newman, 2002, p. 133). As children progress through the middle years of elementary school (second, third and fourth grades) self-reflected perceptions of social interactions, social goals, and comparisons between peers begin to

affect a student's help-seeking measures. Middle to upper- elementary school children are more aware of the types of resources a teacher may provide compared to children in the primary grades, second grade and younger. A child may seek adaptive help based on a teacher's competence, skill, and abilities. Children are aware of a teacher's willingness to help, aware of potential problems, and quality of guidance and support that can be provided. The consensus with most elementary aged children is the belief that asking the teacher questions when they do not understand will ultimately help them learn. This perception begins to wane as children begin to enter middle school. At this time students start to weigh the costs and benefits of asking questions and may be more selective in the type of help-seeking they pursue (Newman, 2002).

Newman (2002) defines "costs" as a negative consequence of help-seeking. For example, "The teacher might get mad, because (s)he just taught this concept", other students may think, "I am dumb", "It's embarrassing", and /or "If I ask a question, I may have to sit through an entire re-teaching lesson or drawn out explanation". "Benefits" are defined as positive effects of adaptive, autonomous help-seeking. For example, a student's understanding that asking questions can support the mastery or a concept of skill. Newman explains the development of help-seeking barriers that arise in elementary children: "As early as second grade, students fear negative reactions (e.g., 'I think she might think I am m dumb') if they ask for help…Perceived costs are heightened when students experience teachers they perceive as unwilling to help (e.g., 'If you had paid attention, you would not need to ask that question') (Newman, 2002, p. 3). These barriers can, in turn, influence a child's help-seeking behavior toward avoidance, avoidant-covert, and/or expedient help-seeking.

As students advance into upper-elementary and lower-middle school, children increasingly integrate and weigh the perceived costs and benefits of help-seeking. In a study

completed by Butler (1998), a sample made up of 1,029 fifth and sixth grade students found that most upper elementary students demonstrate help avoidance in mathematics. The students surveyed suggested a number of reasons why they were reluctant to seek help or were more willing to practice avoidant-covert, expedient help-seeking. Butler's findings are clear in the reflections from student surveys:

- *Help-seeking is perceived as dependent behavior that conflicts with personal needs for independence and autonomy, ideas that are valued at the upper-elementary level.*
- *Independent persistence is a more desirable coping strategy than asking for help.*
- *High achieving students typically do not ask for help as they feel it is perceived as evidence of incompetence.*
- *Students refrain from asking questions because the help does not expedite task completion, when expedient help is available.*
- *Once children become aware of self-esteem and the costs of social comparison, more covert-avoidant help-seeking is evident.*
- *Higher reports of help-seeking are present in instances where the teacher provides differentiated support and immediate feedback free of criticism.*

Butler's conclusions indicated avoidant help-seeking behavior influenced by social goals. The study indicated examples of help-seeking avoidance based on expedition of task time and student perceptions of academic goals. Most important for this study is the finding that higher reports of help-seeking were present when teacher help was differentiated and immediate.

Teacher's Role in Fostering Responsible Help-Seeking

As mentioned by Butler (1998), Newman (2000), and Newman (2002), a teacher's affective traits, character, academic goals and classroom environment have a large impact on a student's adaptive, autonomous help-seeking behavior. Ryan and Shim (2012) sought to identify characteristics of teachers that are associated with developmental growth toward adaptive help-seeking during early adolescence. The research indicates a number of beneficial teacher traits and practices that support student adaptive, autonomous help-seeking, including: academic and emotional support, contextual academic goals, and classroom environments.

One of the most important roles of a classroom teacher is to provide social-emotional teaching, modeling and support for children (Payton, et al., 2008). Emotionally supportive teachers can be defined as being perceived as:

> ….warm and kind, sensitive to the social and emotional needs of each child, and thoughtful about the way they respond to children. They offer gentle guidance to students, engage in positive communication with students, and demonstrate respect for children through eye contact, respectful language, and a warm calm voice (Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre as cited in, Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman, Cameron, & Peugh, 2012, p. 143).

In a study by Merritt, et al., (2012) data gathered over the course of a year from parent and teacher questionnaires as well as classroom observations (first-grade) indicated correlations between a teacher's social and emotional support in the classroom and a child's self-regulatory behavior and pro-social tendencies. *Self-regulatory* behavior, within the context of help-seeking, is demonstrated as a student's ability to self-reflect on their work and recognize areas where help may benefit the student's learning. *Prosocial behaviors*, as defined by Merritt, et al. (2012) is the proactive and positive response to the needs of others. In classrooms where teachers were

perceived by their students as being emotionally supportive, students demonstrated greater self-regulatory responsibility, prosocial behaviors, and positive interpersonal interactions (Merritt, et al., 2012). The analysis provided by Merritt et al. (2012) was matched by the research carried out by Barna and Brott (2011) which examined the correlation of social/emotional support on academic success. Evidence gathered in their study reinforces the importance of social and emotional support on academic enablers. Barna and Brott (2011) describe academic enablers as students' interpersonal communication skills, motivation, study habits, and engagement. Additionally, their study stresses the importance of students' self-efficacy and help-seeking on academic achievement. Their analysis from elementary-school counselor surveys found that "89% of elementary-school counselors agreed that students who received support, teaching and modeling of academic enablers, such as interpersonal communication skills, were more likely to use appropriate communication skills to seek out help when needed" (Barna & Brott, 2011, p. 5). 82.3% of the surveyed counselors were confident that students who possessed academic enablers could "identify resource people in the school and community and understand how to seek their help" (Barna & Brott, 2011, p. 5). In addition to academic enablers, self-system theory can further depict affective teacher traits, which promote beneficial help-seeking. Bandura (Newman, 2000) identifies three specific teacher taught, and modeled socializing agents that facilitate the development of prosocial student self-regulatory mechanisms, including self-advocacy and interpersonal communication skills. These teacher qualities include:

- *Involvement:* a teacher's willingness to dedicate time, resources, nurturance, and affective closeness.
- *Support for autonomy*: a teacher's ability to support student independence and mastery of goals, absence of nonessential tasks and punitive consequence.

- *Support for the development of competence*: a teacher's consistent expectations, rules, lessons that are within a student's ZPD, and an understanding of dependent connections between students' benefit and cost in relation to help-seeking.

Beyond the mentioned socializing agents, teachers who demonstrate appropriate levels of affection (appreciation of work, enjoyment of student, etc.), dedication of time and energy, dependability, and understanding of individual student needs are perceived by students as being personally involved. Students who perceive their teacher as "involved" demonstrate more emotional engagement, behavioral engagement, and academic achievement (Ames & Archer; Birch & Ladd; Covington, Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell; and Wentzel, as cited in Newman, 2000). Newman (2002) also provides some very applicable tools and techniques that can easily be implemented by any classroom teacher:

- Provide help to aid students' differentiation between adaptive and executive help-seeking. (See Chapter 4 Interviews: Building Interpersonal Communication and Help-Seeking Through Academics)
- Explicitly encouraging students to strategically use help that is given to them in order to provide practice in self-regulatory behaviors.
- Demonstrating that mistakes can lead to more information and that predicaments and insecurities can be tolerated and transformed into useful information. (See Chapter 4 Interviews: Fostering Interpersonal Communication and Help-seeking in the Classroom)
- Interpreting incorrect "guesses" and converting them into positive, "on the right track" ideas.

Teacher behavior can also, in some instances, reverse developmental trends toward expedient and/or avoidant-covert help-seeking. In a study by Ryan and Shim (2012), a survey of 685

middle school students, from a predominately lower socioeconomic background, found that teacher behavior that focuses explicitly on promoting supportive peer norms around learning in the classroom can increase a student's willingness to seek out adaptive, autonomous help. The research conducted by Ryan and Shim (2012) also illustrates a student's willingness to self-advocate as being influenced by types of student learning goals.

Ryan and Shim (2012), and Newman (2000) describe two key types of student learning goals, each with different impacts on students' help-seeking behavior. Mastery goals are viewed as being directly related to student effort (i.e. "the more effort I contribute to the goals, the more I will learn"). When teaching mastery goals, teachers emphasize the importance of independence and mastery of the concept. Teachers provide constructive performance feedback customized to and in support of the multiple intelligences of each student. In mastery goals, teachers explain that the understanding of the goals, growth toward the goals, and the fundamental value of the goals are primary reasons for necessary student involvement. Newman describes that students who are working towards mastery goals are "energized by [the] challenge, and when facing difficulty, often persevere and strategically attempt to overcome obstacles to learning" (Newman, 2000, p. 370). Additionally, when students perceive classroom tasks as mastery goals, they are more likely to feel successful about their work, more likely to use effective help-seeking strategies, and have a more positive outlook on school (Ryan & Shim, 2012).

While working toward mastery goals, students favor adaptive, autonomous help-seeking as it is more, "in line with the emphasis on effort, improvement, and learning" (Ryan & Shim, 2012, p. 1123). Classrooms that stress mastery goals tend to encourage students to seek adaptive, autonomous help when necessary. Research shows that early adolescents, when presented with a difficult concept or task, are more likely to seek out adaptive help when working within mastery

goals rather than performance goals (Butler, 1998). The second learning goal, as identified by Ryan and Shim (2012), and Newman (2000), are performance goals.

Performance goals are characterized as skills that are seen as dependent on one's natural ability (achieving success without much effort, i.e. "He is naturally good at math", "She just gets science"). Performance goals tend not to value student growth toward learning, but rather student achievement as measured by their grades or social comparison (students' ability as being perceived as better than others). Students who recognize learning tasks as performance-goal oriented tend to "avoid challenge and difficulty in order to maintain their self-perceptions of ability, relative to others" (Newman, 2000, p. 370). Students working within this context are more inclined to use expedient and/or avoidant-covert help-seeking as the focus is more on the outcome of earning higher grades rather than the process of learning (Ryan & Shim, 2012).

Teachers may have control over the types of help-seeking exhibited by their students through the kinds of learning goals presented in the classroom, however, students arrive to school with their own set of personal goals that can impact their self-advocacy skills (Newman, 2000).

Research has identified two core types of personal goal related character dispositions (trait-like orientations) that students bring to the classroom (Newman, 2002):

- *Intrinsic oriented dispositions*- children who a) strive toward autonomous mastery of concepts, b) proactively seek out academic challenges, and c) are actively inquisitive and engaged in their school work.
- *Extrinsic oriented dispositions*- children who a) are excessively dependent on others (especially teachers and caregivers), b) prefer remedial (easy) assignments, and c) complete their class work to satisfy the teacher and achieve higher grades.

Students' orientation can be directly linked to their cognitive achievement, engagement, and help-seeking preference. For example, students who demonstrate more intrinsic personal goals are more likely to request adaptive-autonomous help as a means to support their desire for long-term independence and mastery of the goals. It is important to keep in mind that a student may display different personal goal orientations based on their confidence, ability, and affinity for academic goals introduced. Also important, is the idea that a child's developmental ability might influence their personal goals. For example, research shows that the interaction, and sometimes conflict, between personal goals and environmental (academic) goals often influence a student's attitude about school, performance, and help-seeking kind (Newman, 2002).

The classroom environment and the types of activities that a teacher prepares for his or her students can give students the opportunity to practice (imitate) modeled adaptive help-seeking techniques. Furthermore, a variety of differentiated activities influence various kinds of help-seeking (Newman, 2000). For example, when teachers create a classroom environment based upon expectations with an emphasis on individual activities, older-elementary students are forced to weigh the cost benefit to their help-seeking: "Is asking for support worth disrupting my peers who are working quietly". In these types of classroom environments, help-seekers are more inclined to go directly to their teacher for support.

Conversely, during whole class instruction students are more inclined to ask questions aloud to the entire class. Newman (2000) describes one reason why this might be; whole class instruction is typically used to present new concepts to the entire class, therefore mastery of the concept is not yet expected, thus the help-seeking cost is lowered ("It is okay for me to ask a question, because the content is new for most students"). On the other hand, if a concept is being

reviewed/re-taught during whole class instruction, students are less likely to ask questions as they may be more likely to consider the cost benefits in relation to social comparisons.

Collaborative, small group activities, within the classroom environment, have the greatest influence on positive and adaptive help-seeking. Small, interactive groups of children directly encourage collaboration with one another. Newman describes that "Students working in small groups, in contrast to those working individually or in whole-class activity, are more likely to seek assistance from other students and – it has been suggested- from the teacher as well" (Newman, 2000, p. 374). Small group, collaborative class settings provide numerous advantages for adaptive help-seeking acquisition. First, collaborative work groups reduce peer-to-peer social comparisons thereby making a student feel less inhibited to ask for adaptive support. Second, small, cooperative learning groups provide students with a sense of self-determination, opportunities to seek out a multitude of goals (both social and academic), and increase in student engagement. Finally, students who are working collaboratively in small groups are typically encouraged to talk to each other, therefore naturally facilitating help-seeking.

> ….collaborative activity is designed to provide students a chance to "think in public" and to exchange with one another their thoughts, goals, strategies, hypotheses, and other sorts of "interpretive talk"…Importance is placed on students questioning one another. Built into many collaborative activities for example, in math and science class, are opportunities for children to ask – and be asked – questions for purposes of monitoring their own and others' understanding and for requesting information in order to resolve difficulties. (Newman, 2000, p. 386).

Moreover, the more practice a student has working in collaborative groups, the more awareness he or she will have for the types of effective peer helpers in the future. Nonetheless, there are

some potential downsides to collaborative group work, especially when students' social and academic goals become conflicted. For example, as students approach the transition to middle school, more emphasis is placed on the social goals, hence students may be less likely to ask questions and more likely to "goof-off" during collaborative group work. Requests for help may become socially and cognitively inappropriate (i.e. requesting executive help, asking "goofy", questions meant to impress, etc.).

Peer's Role in Fostering Responsible Help-Seeking

Bandura's social-cognitive theory describes relatedness as essential to a child's self-regulation. As a child approaches the upper-elementary grades, relationships with peers become increasingly more important and can impact the methods in which children self-advocate and seek support (Ryan & Shim, 2012). Newman (2000) refers to the significance of a child's relationship with his or her peers: peer relationships provide an interpersonal context for communication, collaboration, and development of questioning skills and help-seeking. Relationships with peers can lead to academic and social comparisons (performance goal traits). The general mechanism for a student's ability to seek adaptive help versus covert-avoidant and/or expedient help is social comparison (Newman, 2002).

Peer comparison, although a contributing factor for practice goal, extrinsic orientated traits does have some redeeming qualities and may have some positive impacts on help-seeking. Peer comparison allows students the chance to evaluate one another based on "help-effectiveness", one's competency and willingness to help. At the upper-elementary age, peer comparisons assist students as they make, "realistic judgments about whether they have tried hard enough on their own before turning to others" (Newman, 2002, p. 135). Additionally,

although upper-elementary grade students place a higher emphasis on peer comparisons, they are also more increasingly aware that it is normal to have academic difficulties. Still, Newman (2002) reiterates the teacher's role in influencing "whether students are- and feel- competent with regard to adaptive help-seeking…Teachers establish, and students internalize, patterns of discourse in the classroom" (Newman, 2002, p. 6).

Summary

There are a variety of competing factors that contribute to a student's ability to seek appropriate help. These factors are embedded in a student's developmental growth as well as their cognitive awareness of self, cost and benefit weight, affective teacher traits, classroom environment, academic and social goals, and peer influences. Most importantly is the student's opportunity to witness modeled behavior and to practice self-advocacy and interpersonal communication in a low threat environment.

Chapter 3 Method

Research Approach

This study explores the relationship of interpersonal communication and social-emotional learning on students' self-advocacy and help-seeking ability. The research relies on voluntary parent and student surveys designed to explore areas of interpersonal communication, self-advocacy, and help-seeking within the classroom environment and outside of the classroom environment (i.e. aftercare, home, sports, etc.). Surveys were examined for correlations and themes. Additional interviews were conducted with a number of expert educators with specific skills in the area of teaching communication and help-seeking techniques and strategies. Interview notes were accumulated and analyzed for themes, correlations, and specific best practices for teaching, modeling, and support of/for interpersonal communication and self-advocacy skills. Anecdotal, qualitative data was gathered through classroom observations of the researcher's students. This data was analyzed for themes, correlations and specific best practices for teaching, modeling and support of/for interpersonal communication and self-advocacy skills.

Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to ethical standards in the treatment of human subjects in research as articulated by the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally, the research proposal was reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved, and assigned number 10179.

Sample and Site

Participants form a sample of convenience. Target subjects include 29 California public

elementary school students and their parent(s)/caregiver(s)/guardian(s), from a mid-upper class suburb of San Francisco. 17 students are female; 12 students are male. Student race/ethnicity is as follows: 1 African American, 5 Asian, 23 White. Two of the students receive free or reduced lunch. Parent participation was contributed voluntarily using an online surveying medium. 17 students' parents/guardians contributed to this study through their voluntary and anonymous survey participation. It is important to note that due to the anonymity of the parent and student surveys, it is impossible for the researcher to identify the race, ethnicity, and/or socio-economic status of the survey samples completed.

The researcher contacted people who were likely to have knowledge related to the research topic. The researcher contacted D, a former classroom teacher, curriculum specialist, and administrator. D currently acts as an educator, consultant to parents and schools, and is the founder of a SEL classroom/teacher training program that provides teaching and modeling of effective communication and help-seeking practices and strategies. D also holds a master's degree in clinical psychology. Additionally, the researcher has interviewed R, an upper-elementary grade teacher in the East Bay who has been teaching for twenty-seven years. R holds a master's degree in education and exercises many of the strategies used in D's in-class program. His interview sheds light on SEL techniques from a teacher's perspective. The researcher conducted an interview with J, an upper-elementary grade teacher in the North Bay. J's areas of expertise are within interpersonal conflict resolution strategies and help-seeking techniques. J has extensive experience working mostly with early adolescent "elementary-middle school transition" students. Another teacher whose expertise in teaching interpersonal communication skills is shared in this study is AM. AM is the teacher of a middle-elementary school classroom in the North Bay. AM implements structures of Tribe Learning Communities in her teaching

practice. AM's interview offers another perspective into teaching help-seeking through interpersonal communication.

Access and Permissions

Observations were conducted during both explicit interpersonal communication teaching as well as informal interactions with students. Teachers involved in the interviews and observations received written and verbal explanations of the observations and interviews prior to their participation. Student surveys were administered as part of the typical 5th grade curriculum and parent surveys were completed voluntarily by parents/guardians of students enrolled in the researcher's 5th grade class.

Data Gathering Strategies

D's activities were observed and observational notes were taken. Data was obtained through anecdotal note-taking. Surveys from student and parent/guardian participants within the researcher's class were gathered anonymously through an online service and contributed to the data used in this study. Privately conducted interviews with each of the prior mentioned education experts about his or her experiences and best practices were gathered through the utilization of note taking.

Data Analysis Approach

Information was gathered using the data from the interviews and classroom observations. Notes were taken during observations and interviews. Recurring themes from student and parent surveys, student responses, and personal researcher observations were noted. Interview responses and observations were analyzed. Similarities and differences were identified and compared in

order to determine the effectiveness and best practices for advancement of students' interpersonal communication and self-advocacy skills.

Chapter 4 Findings

This section examines data collected through student surveys, parent surveys, expert interviews, and observations of social and emotional, classroom instruction. Survey data has been categorized into three response areas: Help-Seeking Modeling: Parents and Students; Types of Help-Seeking; and Interpersonal Communication. Within these categories are responses that reinforce, in no particular order, Bandura's (2003) social-cognitive theory, Connell's (1990) self-system theory, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, and Glasser's (1998) choice.

Furthermore, expert interviews were analyzed for specific relationships and themes. Interview responses have been categorized into seven response areas: Glasser's (1998) Choice Theory, Establishing a Classroom of Trust, Establishing Teacher Trust- "Lowering the Student Shields", Fostering Interpersonal Communication and Help-Seeking in the Classroom, Building Interpersonal Communication and Help-Seeking Skills through Academics, "The Nail Challenge": Next Steps with "I Give Up!", and The Importance of Including Interpersonal Communication and Help-Seeking in the Classroom.

Survey Results; Help-Seeking Modeling: Parents and Students

The most impressive correlations are those between parent/guardian and student survey responses. Wherein, both parent/guardian and student responses tend to reflect one another and can be interpreted as evidence and further support of Bandura's (2003) social cognitive theory, "that an individual's actions and reactions, including social behaviors and cognitive processes, in almost every situation are influenced by the actions that individual has observed in others" (Bandura, 2003). For example, responses for the parent/guardian survey question, "When I'm

not sure how to do something I seek help" (Table. 1), are exceedingly similar to the responses for the student survey question "If I don't understand a hard math problem I ask for help." (Table 2)

Table 1: When I'm not sure about how to do something I seek help. (Parent/Guardian Survey)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Always	31.3%	5
Often	50.0%	8
Sometimes	18.8%	3
Never	0.0%	0
answered question		16
skipped question		1

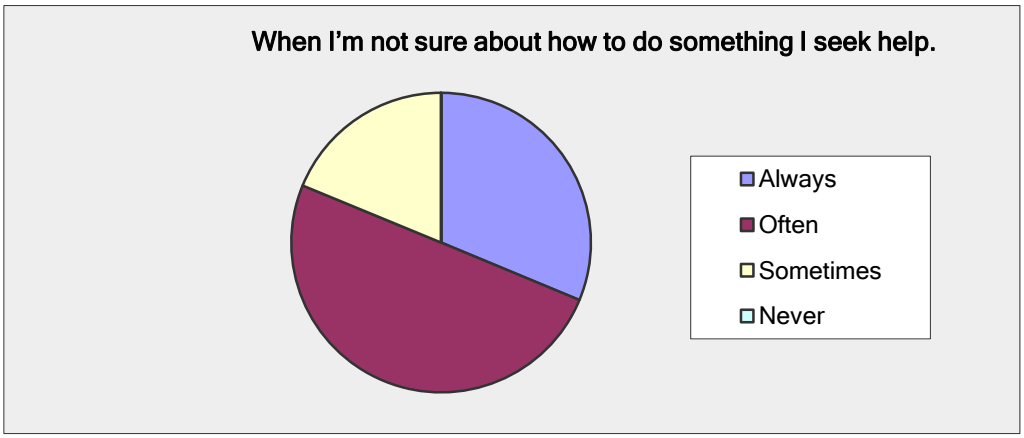
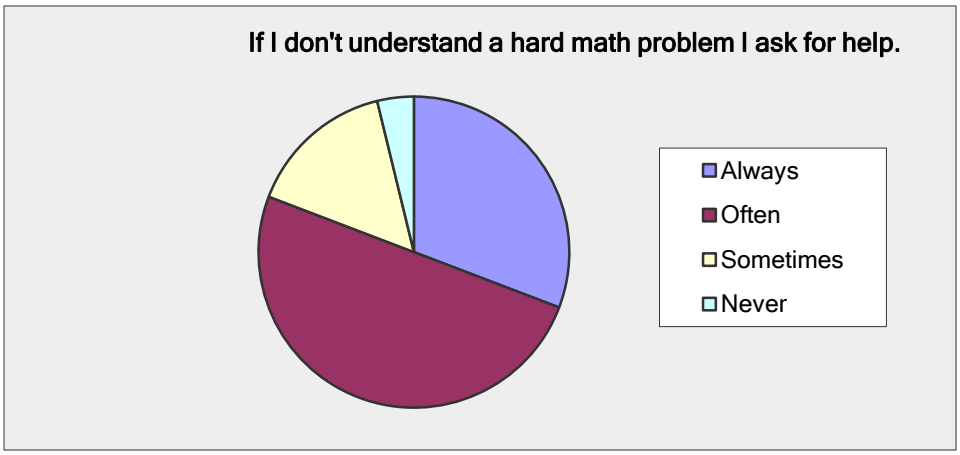


Table 2: If I don't understand a hard math problem I ask for help. (Student Survey)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Always	30.8%	8
Often	50.0%	13
Sometimes	15.4%	4
Never	3.8%	1
answered question		26
skipped question		3



Additionally, parents/guardians can be considered models for their student's growth. Of the parents/guardians surveyed 100% responded with either "Often" or "Sometimes" when responding to "My child witnesses me communicate with other adults" (Table 3).

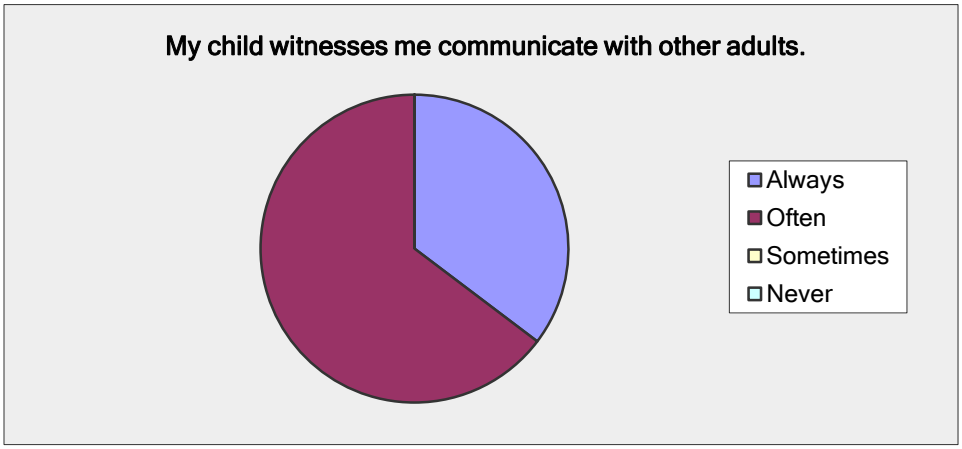
Table 3: My child is present when I seek help. (Parent/Guardian Survey)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Always	0.0%	0
Often	29.4%	5
Sometimes	70.6%	12
Never	0.0%	0
	answered question	17
	skipped question	0

Furthermore, 100% of the parents/guardians surveyed indicated that their child has been present, at one time or another, to witness modeled, help-seeking behavior (Table 4).

Table 4: My child witnesses me communicate with other adults. (Parent/Guardian Survey)

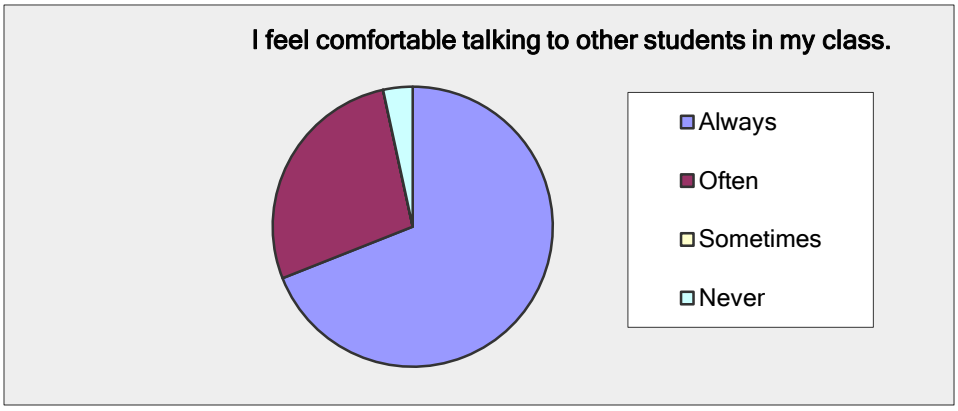
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Always	35.3%	6
Often	64.7%	11
Sometimes	0.0%	0
Never	0.0%	0
answered question		17
skipped question		0



Student responses, yet again, share a similarity with their parent/guardian responses, 28 out of the 29 responses indicated students' high comfort and ability to communicate with his or her peers (Table 5). A trait that can be directly related to parent/guardian exhibited traits (Table 4).

Table 5: I feel comfortable talking to other students in my class. (Student Survey)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Always	69.0%	20
Often	27.6%	8
Sometimes	0.0%	0
Never	3.4%	1
	answered question	29
	skipped question	0



Survey Results; Types of Help-Seeking Behavior

Although the researcher includes specific strategies to bolster appropriate, adaptive and autonomous help-seeking within his classroom, evidence of expedient, avoidant, and covert help-seeking (extrinsic oriented dispositions) are evident in some of the student responses. In most cases students feel comfortable asking for teacher help (Table 2, Table 6), parent/guardian help (Table 7 and Table 8), and for help from his or her peers (Table 5 and Table 9).

Table 6: I feel comfortable asking my teacher for help. (Student Survey)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Always	55.2%	16
Often	27.6%	8
Sometimes	13.8%	4
Never	3.4%	1
	answered question	29
	skipped question	0

Table 7: If I need help on my homework I ask my parent(s), family, babysitter, or guardian. (Student Survey)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Always	51.7%	15
Often	20.7%	6
Sometimes	21.4%	7
Never	3.4%	1
	answered question	29
	skipped question	0

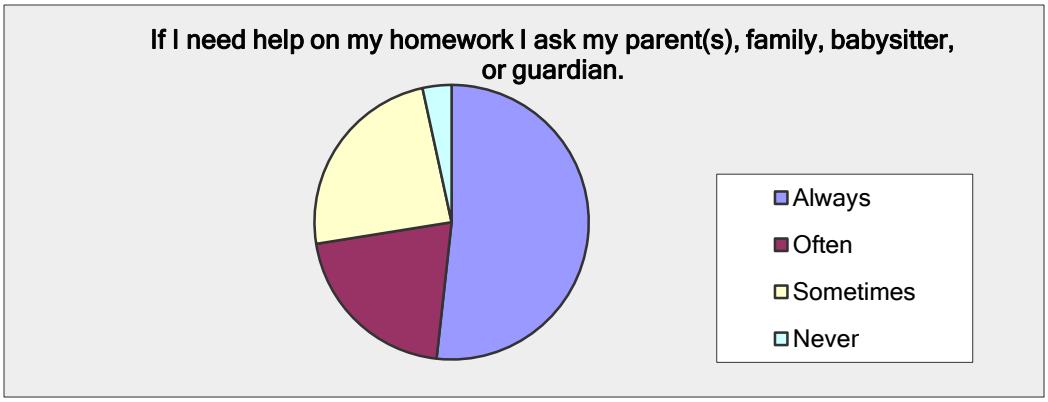


Table 8: My child asks for help on his or her homework. (Parent/Guardian Survey)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Always	6.3%	1
Often	31.3%	5
Sometimes	56.3%	9
Never	6.3%	1
	answered question	16
	skipped question	1

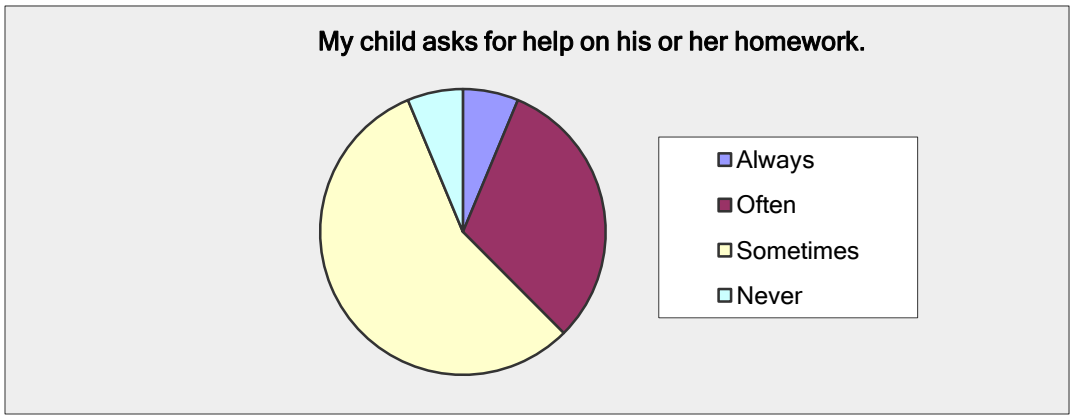
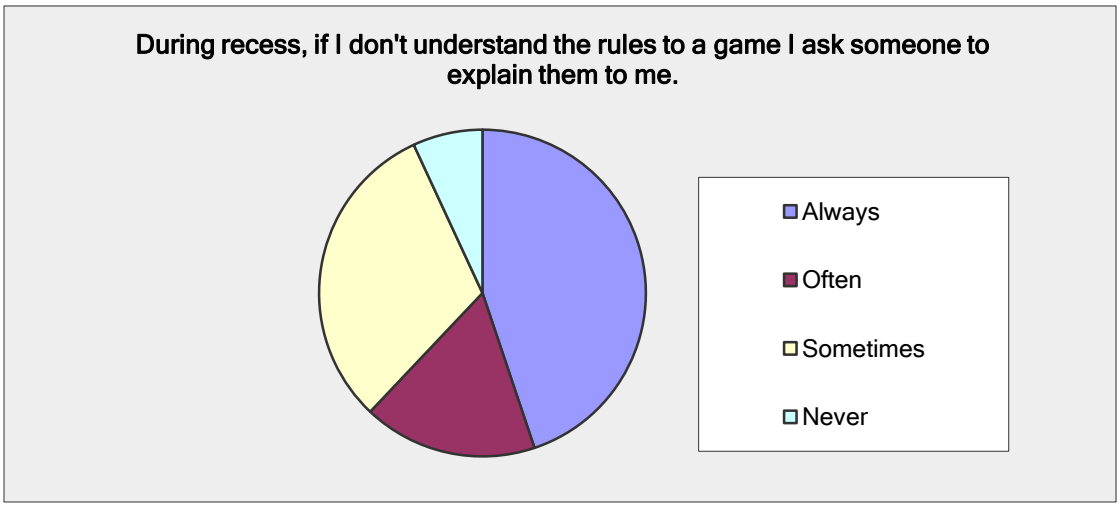


Table 9: During recess, if I don't understand the rules to a game I ask someone to explain them to me. (Student Survey)

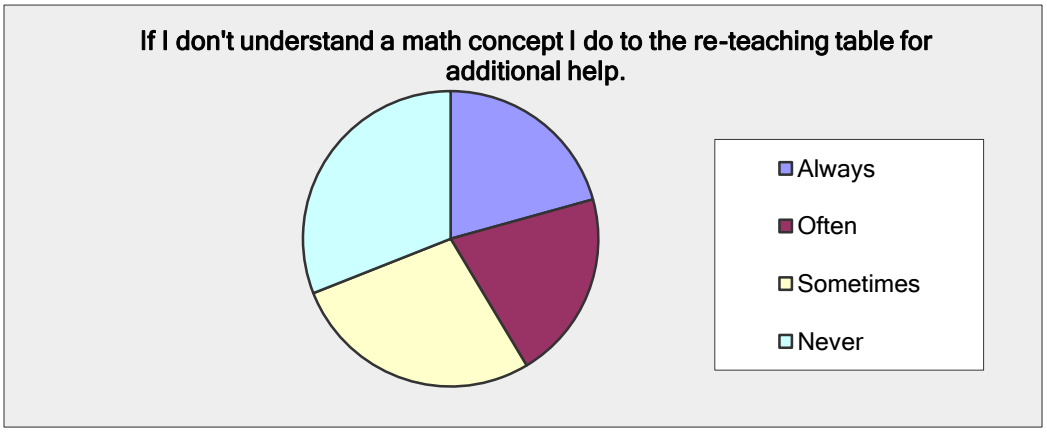
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Always	44.8%	13
Often	17.2%	5
Sometimes	31.0%	9
Never	6.9%	2
	answered question	29
	skipped question	0



However, when asked if students do not understand a math concept whether they would go to the re-teach table for additional help, nine students (nearly one-third of the class) responded with "Never" (Table 10). This indicates that most students are more comfortable asking questions than proactively participating in re-teaching instruction. Many assumptions and connections can be made regarding this data, including correlations between student feedback and Connell's (1990) "cost/benefit" aspect of the self-system theory, late elementary emphasis on belonging, and peer comparisons. Additionally, this data echoes findings conducted in Butler's (1998) study surrounding student help avoidance, specifically in the subject of mathematics.

Table 10: If I don't understand a math concept I go to the re-teaching table for additional help. (Student Survey)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Always	20.7%	6
Often	20.7%	6
Sometimes	27.6%	8
Never	31.0%	9
	answered question	29
	skipped question	0



The following tables further illustrate some of the types of help-seeking behaviors exhibited by students in the researcher's classroom. Although a majority of students favor autonomous, adaptive help-seeking behavior, i.e. asking peers for explanations to further their understanding of a difficult subject or asking the researcher/teacher. Still, 22.2% of students favor expedient or avoidant help-seeking (Table 11). These extrinsic oriented behaviors might be explained by Table 12, which includes data describing some instances why students typically do not ask for help (asking questions makes me feel uncomfortable).

Table 11: When I don't understand a difficult problem I .....(Student Survey)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Ask a friend for the answer.	3.7%	1
Ask a friend to explain how to get the answer.	29.6%	8
Ask my teacher for help.	48.1%	13
Guess or skip the problem.	18.5%	5
answered question		**27**
skipped question		**2**

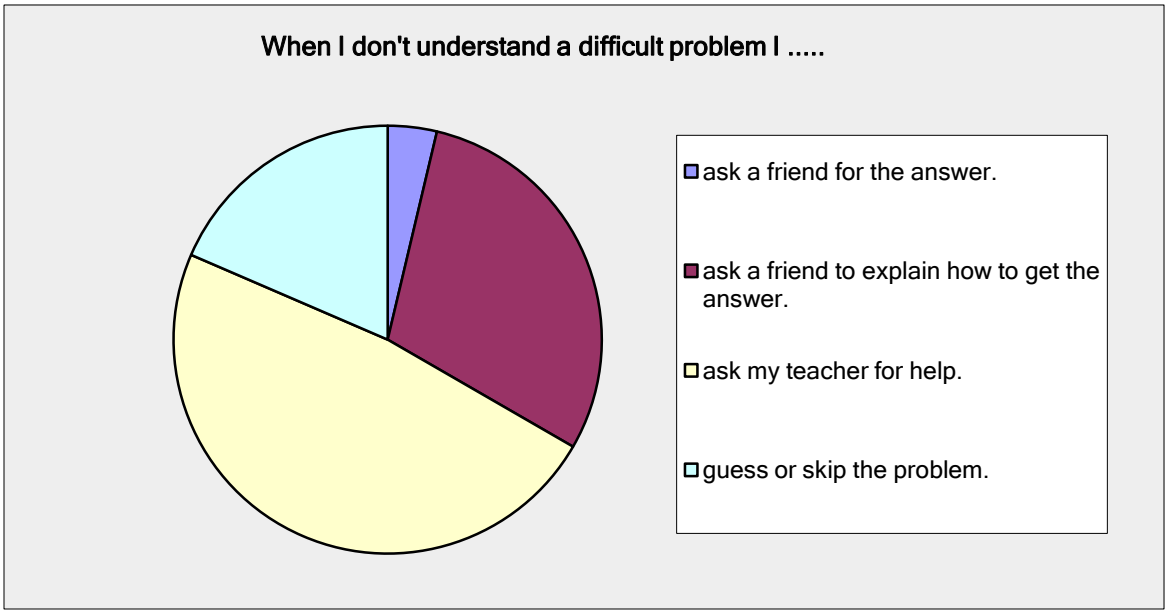
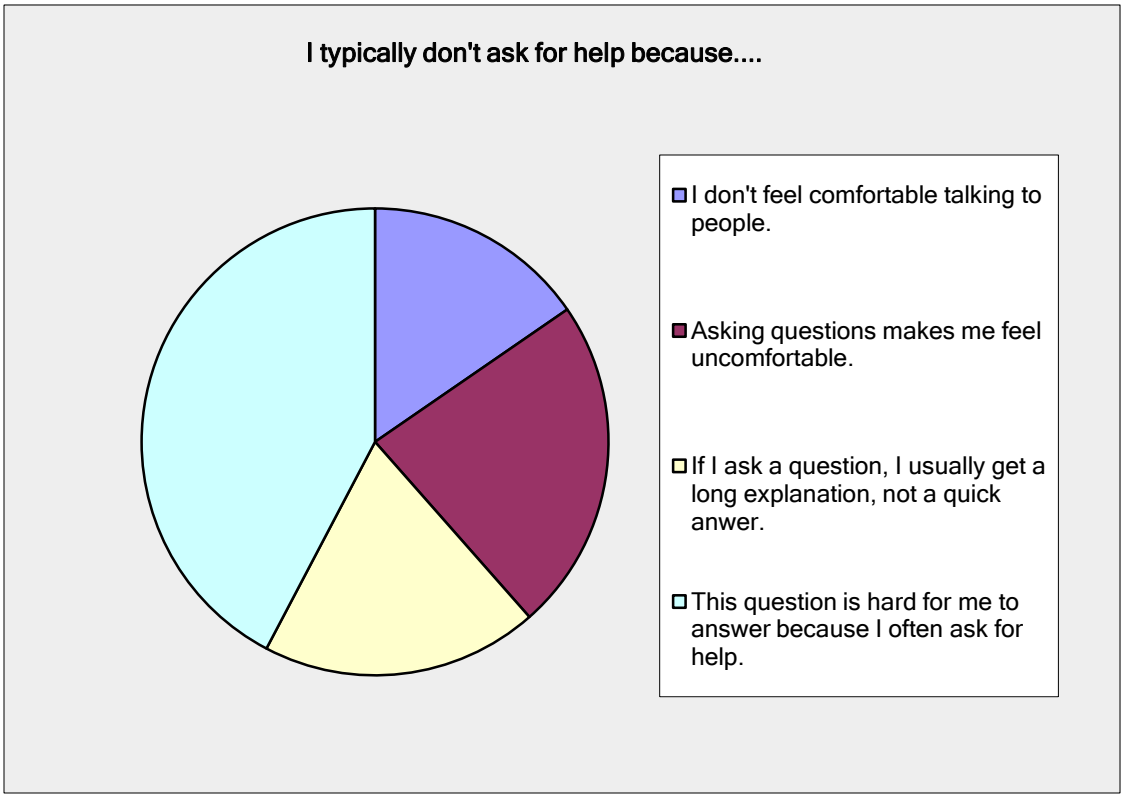


Table 12: I typically don't ask for help because.... (Student Survey)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
I don't feel comfortable talking to people.	15.4%	4
Asking questions makes me feel uncomfortable.	23.1%	6
If I ask a question, I usually get a long explanation, not a quick answer.	19.2%	5
This question is hard for me to answer because I often ask for help.	42.3%	11
	answered question	**26**
	skipped question	**3**

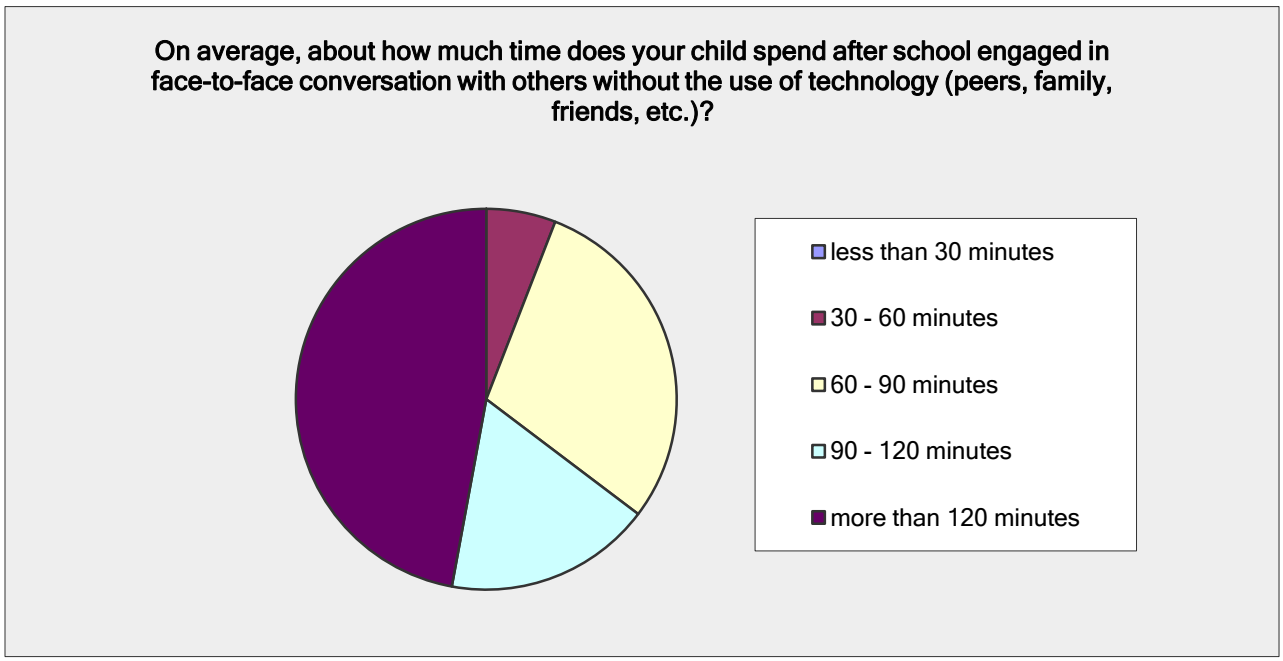


Survey Results; Interpersonal Communication

Data indicates that the sample of students has plenty of interpersonal communication experience and practice both inside and outside of the classroom. Connections between data regarding afterschool activities may provide evidence of factors that influence a child's ability to communicate. For instance, parent/guardian survey results indicate that most students spend at least 90 minutes a day engaged in interpersonal communication without the use of technology, i.e. face-to-face communication (Table13).

Table 13: On average, about how much time does your child spend after school engaged in face-to-face conversation with others without the use of technology (peers, family, friends, etc.)? (Parent/Guardian Survey)

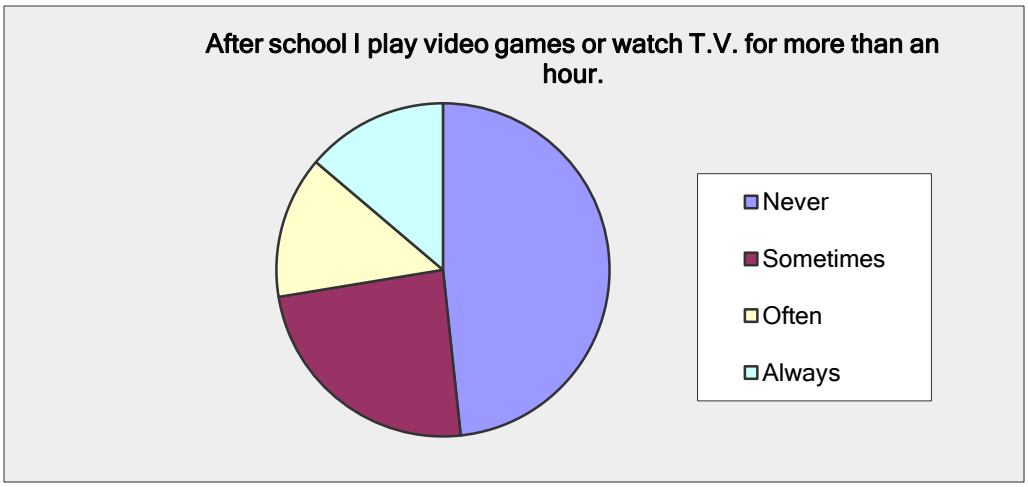
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
less than 30 minutes	0.0%	0
30 - 60 minutes	5.9%	1
60 - 90 minutes	29.4%	5
90 - 120 minutes	17.6%	3
more than 120 minutes	47.1%	8
	answered question	17
	skipped question	0



Additionally, student surveys reported that nearly half (48.3%) of the students never play video games or watch television for more than an hour (Table 14).

Table 14: After school I play video games or watch T.V. for more than an hour. (Student Survey)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Never	48.3%	14
Sometimes	24.1%	7
Often	13.8%	4
Always	13.8%	4
	answered question	29
	skipped question	0



Further evidence that supports the interpersonal communication ability within this sample group can be found when comparing the parity between responses that indicate a child's time spent communicating with friends and family after school (Table 15 and Table 16).

Table 15: My child spends time talking with friends and siblings. (Parent Survey)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Always	35.3%	6
Often	52.9%	9
Sometimes	11.8%	2
Never	0.0%	0
	answered question	17
	skipped question	0

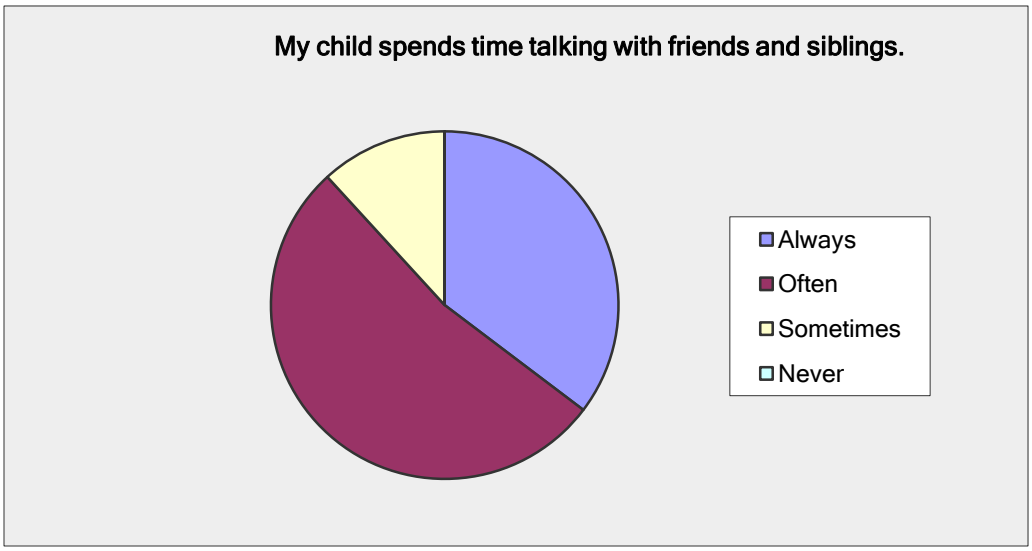
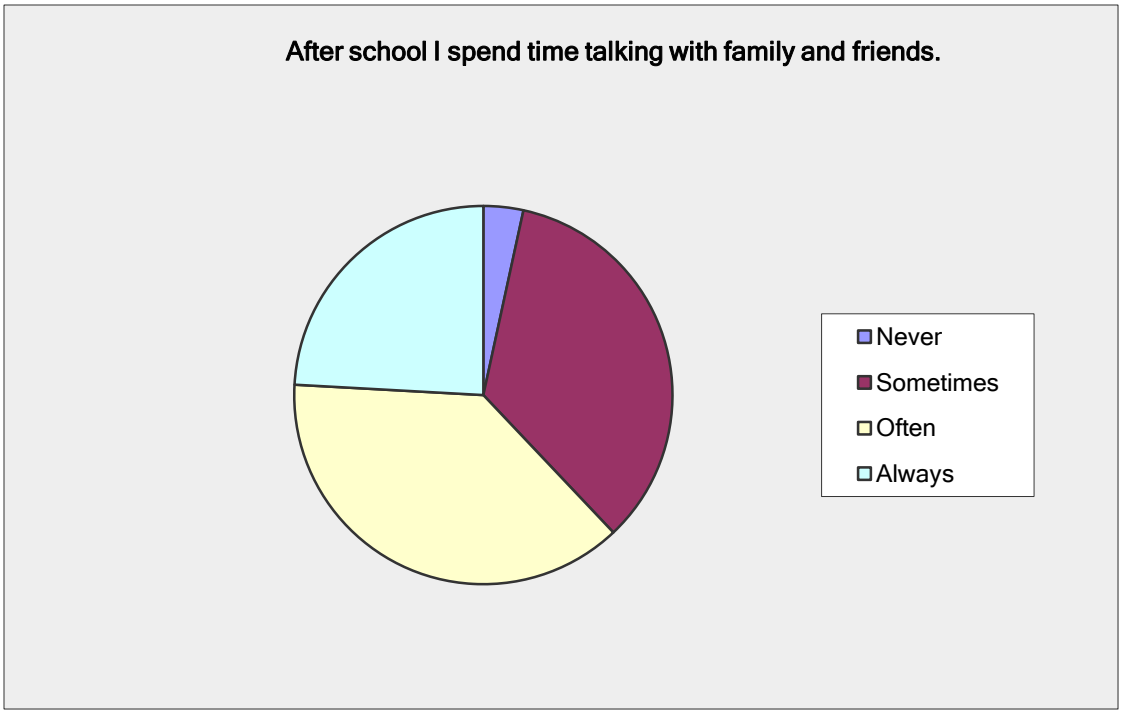


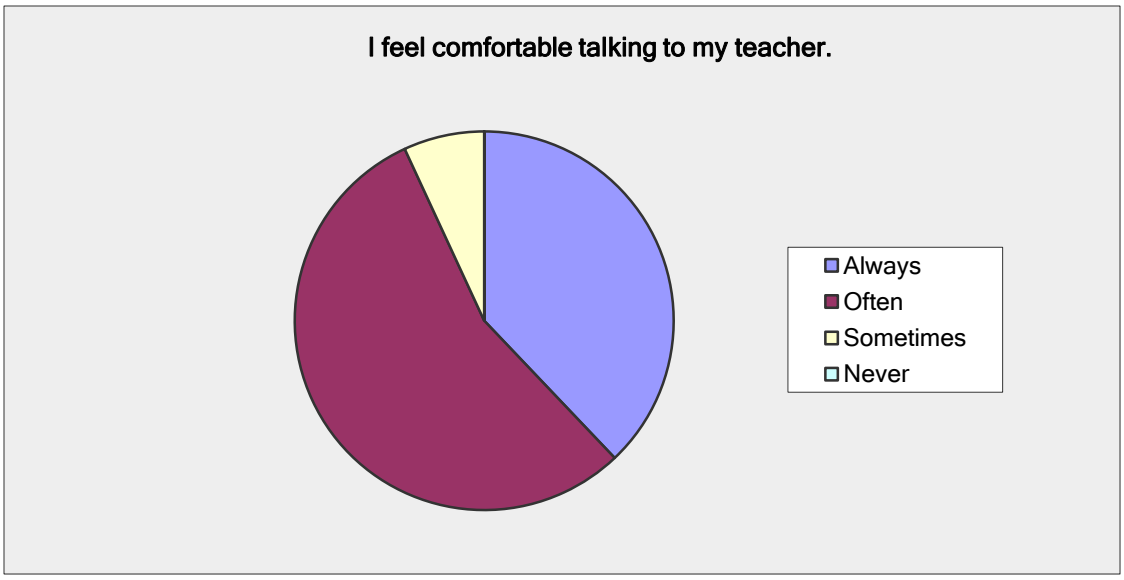
Table 16: After school I spend time talking with family and friends. (Student Survey)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Always	24.1%	7
Often	37.9%	11
Sometimes	34.5%	10
Never	3.4%	1
	answered question	**29**
	skipped question	**0**



Still, there is a discrepancy between students' comfort when asking the researcher/teacher for help versus merely "talking" to the researcher. When asked whether students "feel comfortable asking their teacher for help" (Table 6), 5 students or 17.2% of the students responded with "Sometimes" or "Never". When prompted whether they felt "comfortable talking to their teacher" (Table 17), only 2 students responded with "Sometimes" (6.9%) and no students responded with "Never". This may signify a child's comfort level being higher when engaged in non-academic conversation with the researcher/teacher over more formal, academic conversations.

Table 17: I feel comfortable talking to my teacher. (Student Survey)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Always	37.9%	11
Often	55.2%	16
Sometimes	6.9%	2
Never	0.0%	0
	answered question	29
	skipped question	0



Interviews: Glasser's Choice Theory

In every interview conducted by the researcher, either known or unknown, explicitly or intuitively to the interviewees, examples and best practices presented, all aligned with aspects of Glasser's (1998) choice theory. Glasser's theory has foundational roots in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. Again, Vygotsky argues that social interactions are imperative to social development. Therefore, if social interaction is ineffective or nonexistent, then cognitive development is mired. (Louis, 2009). Based on these "common sense" strategies and procedures, Glasser (1998) goes further to reason that all behaviors are consciously chosen as a means to meet one of five basic needs. The five needs, in no particular order or hierarchy, are: love and belonging, power, survival, fun, and freedom. Glasser (1998) states that children select behaviors that they believe will enable them to meet one or more of these five needs.

Love and belonging refer to a child's perception of themselves as a member of the group. This can refer to a circle of friends, their classroom, their baseball team, dance troupe, and so on. Power refers to a child's need for respect; to feel listened to and to have their ideas validated. Survival refers to a child's necessity for the resources essential for life: safety, security, shelter, food, water, space, and so on. Louis (2009) references that these resources are more easily obtained when carried out through effective relationships. Fun is one of Glasser's (1998) needs that rely most on others, as fun is achievable and longer-lasting when others are involved. The only of Glasser's (1998) needs that depend on some part of autonomy is freedom. Freedom can refer to a student's independent choice and drive toward specific activities and/or learning opportunities.

Both R and D explicitly support the significance of Glasser's (1998) choice theory in their teaching practice. R states that choice theory drives every practice he carries out in his

classroom. D backs this up by eradicating the perception of students as a stimulus response system. Students are not and should not be considered a stimulus response system; every choice human beings make is based on an analysis of cost versus benefit regarding one or more of the basic needs presented in Glasser's (1998) choice theory.

Interviews: Establishing a Classroom of Trust

Pivotal to a child's academic and social emotional growth in school is their classroom environment. A child's success depends on whether they feel comfortable within their classroom. Every interviewee in this study went to great lengths to describe the importance of a student's learning environment. R achieves a positive learning environment by establishing a class atmosphere founded in open communication with one another, establishing routines, and holding regular class meetings that are student run. R articulates that a successful classroom environment depends on students taking time away from academics to focus on building trustworthy relationships within the classroom. By agreeing to release responsibility to students so that they can create their classroom norms, R aids his students' creation and fulfillment of class expectations that are founded in the five choice theory needs. Although the role of the teacher at this point should remain "hands off", a successful educator may sparingly insert guiding questions or comments to facilitate the group's discussion toward expectations that fit within the five needs. For the most part upper elementary students are able and reflective enough to create norms autonomously.

Some examples of classroom norms and the basic need to which it corresponds are as follows:

- Power (respect)- listening attentively while someone else is talking.

- Love and Belonging- “telling at least one different person each day why you are glad (s)he is here” (Louis, 2009, p. 3).
- Survival (safety/security)- treating others as you would like to be treated.
- Freedom- the right to pass, choice in one’s learning.
- Fun- trying to create a space for positive learning every day.

In AM’s classroom, one of her primary goals is to create a comfortable family-like atmosphere, where students view themselves as a classroom community in which no one will judge them. AM creates what she refers to as community resiliency, where students feel, deep down, that they can rely and count on one another. AM describes her classroom as an environment where children feel heard and loved; a classroom that is forged through a teacher and student created culture of acknowledgement.

Part of the way that AM establishes this environment with her students is through the use of the TRIBES program. TRIBES is a set of teaching standards and practices that assure the healthy development of all children (Gibbs, 2001). Though AM will use TRIBES inspired activities throughout her day, and especially when specific instances can be addressed immediately through the use of TRIBES instruction, she also chooses to incorporate TRIBES into the beginning of every school day. Like R, AM believes in setting a classroom norm/routine. AM explains that giving clear expectations through norms heightens student comfort in her classroom. Additionally, AM’s students become accustomed and excited for the 30-40 minute morning rotation of activities, discussions, and routines. A sample of AM’s weekly TRIBES morning schedule and an explanation for some of the activities are as follows:

- Monday: Tribles- students take turns sharing out their present emotional state by indicating which Trible they are currently identifying with (Figure 1). This provides members of the classroom community with an awareness of each other's feelings and can encourage students to think more empathetically toward their peers. Additionally, AM mentions how this heightened awareness of each other prompts students to reflect on one another's emotions and how their interactions can impact peer emotions throughout the day.

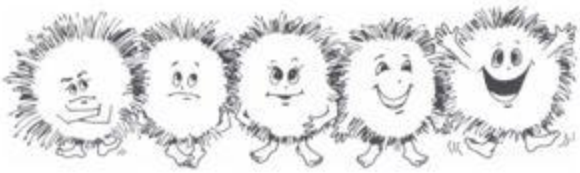


Figure 1
Jeanne Gibbs, 2001

- Tuesday/Thursday: Group discussion- Students are arranged randomly into groups and are given a topic or question to discuss in groups of three to four children. Discussion topics and questions can range from deep and reflective, to light-hearted and even silly. Examples might include: Describe the best part about yourself, or, "If you could have the power to be invisible or the power to fly which would you choose and why? Activities like these create a forum for students to practice their interpersonal communication skills in both "on the surface" and deep personal topics. Also, these morning "share outs" grant additional student-to-student insight about how others might be feeling. It is also important to note that AM actively participates in these discussions like a peer. This practice is exceptionally important as it levels the status between teacher and student and improves connectedness and teacher-to-student relationships; see Chapter 4 Interviews: Establishing Teacher Trust: Lowering the Shields.

- Wednesday: Team Challenge or Game- AM will include a group challenge or game for students to play. This non-academic activity inspires interpersonal communication skills and provides students with the chance to lower any barriers they may have with each other or their teacher. Additionally, this provides AM the chance to teach students how to play cooperatively with one another, a sometimes overlooked, but crucial life skill for any upper elementary child.
- Friday: Star Student/ Current Event- One student will present to the class about themselves, while another student presents a current event to the class. Each presentation represents an opportunity for students to highlight themselves via individual interests and topics in which they are engaged.

Similarly, J, a 5th grade, middle school teacher, explains some of the community and classroom building techniques she implements throughout her school year. Like AM's ritual classroom meetings, J incorporates social and emotional learning strategies in her class's Friday Free Time, where her students practice an appreciation circle. In this activity, students form a circle and practice giving student-to-student appreciations. J emphasizes eye contact and inclusion by asking students to think about who might need an appreciation or by posing the whole class with the question: "Who did we forget?" (personal communication, March 7, 2014)

Throughout the year, J's students will hear phrases which eventually evolve into rally cries for her students and her classroom: "We are one team. I am your person. You are my people." Lines like these further emphasize Glasser's (1998) love and belonging need. Most importantly, however, is J's availability to her students. J's students know that their classroom is available whenever they need it, further promoting an environment rooted in care. Additionally, J displays posters created by D in her classroom. Posters like "No Blurts" (Figure 2) provide some

obvious reminders about not shouting out, however, most of the displayed posters are more open to interpretation and J takes advantage of that. During an altercation between students J might refer to the poster displaying the words “Fix or Blame” (Figure 3). These three words are fuel for any number of deep and self reflective discussions that promote interpersonal communication and problem solving skills in the classroom.

Figure 2
Dave Nettell, 2014

D, creator of these posters, expresses the magnitude of providing students with a safe classroom. He describes that when there is any level of threat (real, potential, or perceived) in the classroom it impedes students’ ability to ask for help and learn. He goes on to state that mitigating that threat and creating a safe place for students is imperative for learning, being, and working together. When D visits a classroom he typically arrives hauling a large cart full of any number of team challenge materials. Some items might include a long length of climbing rope, a bucket of 927 dominoes, a boom-box and large black case with nearly one hundred laminated posters. Throughout D’s activities, he will pause team challenges to introduce a poster that positively reinforces pro-behaviors or reminds students about anti-behaviors. D matches students and classrooms with posters based on the students’ or classroom’s specific need. Additionally, the posters represent much more than a “straight line” or specified set of skills. The posters, which are kept in the classroom following D’s visit, serve as a universal tool and common language that teachers and classrooms can attach to, interpret, and use as a springboard for classroom discussions, behavior, strategies,

Figure 3
Dave Nettell, 2014

and so on. D's posters incorporate a language and construction that students can understand and in turn can be used as a way of determining how one might approach a mistake.

Interviews: Establishing Teacher Trust- Lowering the Student Shields

When asked what the most important aspect of education is, D's reply was, "The three 'R's. Relationships. Relationships. Relationships" (personal communication, February 21, 2013). An example of D's attachment to this truth is evidenced by his ritual when arriving to any classroom.

During D's first visit to the researcher's classroom, D had begun his interaction with the students by hand-writing each student's name on a piece of masking tape and having the student adhere it to themselves. Upon the second visit, the researcher took it upon himself to expedite this process by providing nametags to his students before D's visit. The researcher did so as most educators want to utilize every instructional moment of every school day.

Upon D's arrival, he was taken aback that the students had already been given nametags. During D and the researcher's debriefing, D requested not to provide students with nametags before his visit. To the researcher this seemed strange, like a waste of time. However, D explained the importance of the nametag practice; providing an opportunity to establish a D-to-student connection and relationship immediately.

Upon D's third visit, the researcher began to notice how D banters with the students as he gives each student his/her nametag: asking how they spell their name, making connections between common names, joking, retelling stories, celebrating interesting names, diverse spelling, et cetera.

The nametags provide D with the opportunity to make instantaneous connections with the students. He does this by sharing stories about himself and expressing genuine interests the students. D backs his actions up further, stating, “Teachers have to take time to establish relationships at the beginning of their year in order to demonstrate a deep caring for kids. This includes time for banter and for connections. This lowers a student’s ‘shield’”. Getting to know your students makes you more approachable and a better informant and leader. D stresses sincerity in an educator’s communication with his or her class. “Kids are experts in reading ‘real and fake’”, Dave says. “Kids need to believe what you say when you say it and teachers need to make sure that their responses are thought out, developed, and sincere.”

R establishes trust with his students in similar ways. Most importantly, R’s students understand his genuineness in everything he says and does. Additionally, R will go above and beyond the “teaching hours”; dedicating time outside of the classroom for informal communication and relationship building. R incorporates student over-night camping trips into his school year, he arranges pizza parties, and challenge days. He participates with his students in their environment; partaking in recess, joining his students for P.E., attending his student’s sports games and/or recitals. R involves himself so that his students can relate to him on a personal level, lowering the communication shield, and transforming the teacher from a “talking-box” into a relatable participant in a child’s growth. The techniques exhibited by R are traits described by Glasser as attributes of a quality school: an educator who “….greet[s] students enthusiastically, ask[s] about their interests and concerns, and attend[s] after school events” (Louis, 2009, p. 3). Furthermore, R reminds educators of the importance of expressing their own curiosities and questions as a leveling agent in the classroom. This teacher trait provides a critical life lesson, that no one has all the answers and we all have things we can learn.

J and AM both describe that by providing students with a safe environment to share/communicate with his/her teacher(s) builds teacher trust and can lower potential and/or perceived risk. Risk refers to potential costs that might prevent a student from purposefully pursuing his or her agency. J builds teacher-student trust by having readily available snacks for any student who may not have had breakfast or lunch. Similarly, AM maintains teacher-student trust and relationships with her prior students by hosting a monthly "Fifth Grade Lunch" in which students are invited to have lunch in her room. AM expresses, that these informal settings enable students to connect/stay connected with their teachers. It is through these teacher initiated actions that students are able to build relationships, practice interpersonal communication skills, and develop a more autonomous ability to request help.

Interviews: Fostering Interpersonal Communication and Help-Seeking in the Classroom

An important trait of teaching is being able to model behavior that one would like to see reflected in their students. When asked to address how to foster interpersonal communication and help-seeking skills in the classroom all interviewees responded with modeling positive behaviors. This includes asking questions, seeking help in front of students, asking for genuine help from students, staff, and parents, predicting and formulating hypotheses with students, and learning with students through shared experiences. In R's class he models this behavior by requesting student help with individual challenges he shares with his class. A representation of R's challenges is a monkey's fist knot necklace, which, if you were to walk into R's classroom you would notice that he and select other students would be displaying proudly on their person.

In R's class the monkey's fist necklace is a symbol that represents someone's challenges, their sense of agency, and their academic, social, and/or emotional goals. During the beginning

of the year, R describes why he wears his monkey fist necklace. He wears it as a reminder of his challenges. Also at the beginning of the year, R prompts students to develop a personal and academic goal for the rest of the year. Throughout the year, R will take anecdotal notes on each of his students and track their progress toward their goals. R expresses the importance of this classroom ritual as encouraging children to be more aware of one another's challenges and goals and by proactively assisting and supporting one another's progress toward their goals.

Additionally, the monkey's fist necklace is a means of getting students to more purposefully take risks. It is a method of encouraging students to build each other up, not break each other down, and to recognize that asking for help makes you stronger, not weaker. When R has gathered enough evidence to show that a student has truly met their goals, has purposefully taking risks, and demonstrated their agency for personal growth, they are awarded the monkey's fist. During this time, R will use the student's agency as a model for other students to aspire to. R will present the monkey's fist as he and the class celebrate some of the anecdotal evidence R has recorded over the course of the year.

As one could probably assume, the monkey's fist is a coveted item and it is important to note that R and his students take it very seriously. Only students who truly demonstrate their agency receive the necklace and as much as R would like to see positive agency exhibited by all his students, by the end of the year, inevitably there will be students who do not receive the monkey's fist necklace/symbol.

Providing students with peer modeling is an incredibly effective way of fostering behaviors like positive interpersonal communication and adaptive, autonomous help-seeking in students. Furthermore, peer modeling fulfills a number of Glasser's (1998) basic needs including power, love and belonging.

The most dramatic, recurring theme mentioned in the interviews was the importance of a student's sense of inclusion and the importance for teachers to highlight positive behaviors and redirect anti-behavior. In this study, anti-behavior refers to negative student reactions to positive behaviors. Examples include clearly noticeable comments, from, "What a dumb question" to "under the radar" interactions like scoffing at a student's attempt to autonomously help-seek.

D and R will positively reinforce modeled student behavior by celebrating student questions with comments like, "Thank you for the brave question", "Raise your hand if you helped a friend today. Raise your hand if you were helped by a friend. Congratulations!" "Asking for explanations, using your resources, these are traits of successful and intelligent students!" "Thank you for asking that question. You just asked a question that at least half the class had" (personal communication, March 1, 2014). Comments such as these reinforce a student's love and belonging need and encourage similar behaviors throughout the group.

Conversely, all interviewees described methods used for redirecting anti-behavior. Prior to any anti-behavior, D proactively addresses and facilitates discussions in which students deconstruct the roots of anti-behavior. D, describes media such as children's cartoons, internet videos, and video games through which students have been classically conditioned to interpret put downs as being humorous and entertaining. D describes an activity where students count the number of put-downs used in a segment of children's television programming.

Additionally, students are encouraged to analyze subsequent audio that follows such television put downs. Most students will recognize the addition of canned audio such as laugh tracks. D asks students, "Is it okay to laugh at a question or to put a person down?" Students discuss and D models responses to anti-behavior, responses that are kid friendly and that can easily be duplicated by students: "You are not allowed to say that [putdown] to him/her, because

I take care of my friends and you are not allowed to treat my friends that way." Additionally, D provides students with examples of how to successful communicate and problem solve with each other. D advocates that students practice using communication to problem solve interpersonal communication between students. D's poster "Say what you mean. Mean what you say. But don't say it mean." (Figure 4) encourages students to communicate with more of an empathetic awareness and guides them to do so without the use of anti-behaviors.

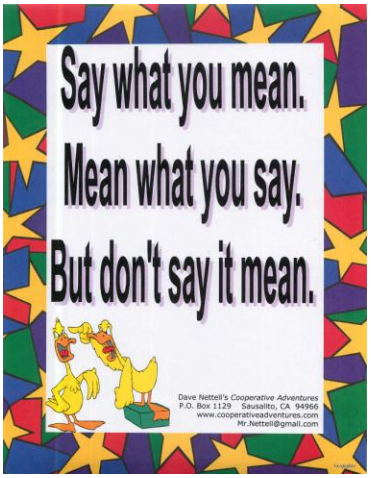


Figure 4
Dave Nettell, 2014

In a moment of anti-behavior R details how he would deal with it immediately. Let us say a student commented on a question being "dumb". The goal, as R describes it, is to not single out a student, not highlight the individual, but rather, address the whole class with questions like, "How did that action just make you feel?" "How many of you felt uncomfortable? Picked on? Bullied?" Providing this immediate feedback allows students to reflect and learn from a shared experience. AM will exhibit similar feedback, addressing the behavior with statements like, "I am not okay with [specific anti-behavior]….You are never allowed to be mean to one another in our classroom. You are going to need to earn our trust back" (personal communication, March 4). AM's students understand her expectations and know that, although AM does not put too much emphasis on the consequences, they are there and will always be followed through. In this instance, referring to "our classroom" and "our trust" emphasizes how the anti-behavior removes a student from the family or the belonging need.

D goes on to add that the key to dealing with anti-behavior is to be sure to circle back to the student who exhibited the behavior and to reinforce major concepts through shared, learned

experiences. For example, after a student scoffs at a question D may address it as R has, and will often follow up with phrases like, “We learn from our mistakes” (Figure 6), thus gradually allowing the student to reflect on their negative behavior, to own their mistake (Figure 5), and to flip their attitude to one of empowerment through appropriate modeling and teaching the class what not to do.

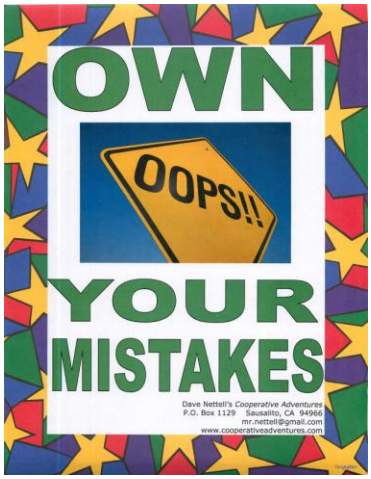


Figure 5
Dave Nettell, 2014

J prevents anti-behavior with explicit interpersonal communication and self-advocacy practice. In the event of an anti-behavior scenario, J will immediately facilitate a conversation between the students involved. J will ask probing questions like, “How did that comment make you feel?” J will then prompt the student to describe their feelings to each other. J will only act as a “fly on the wall” and will step in only if she deems it necessary. Additionally, J will take as long as it needs to resolve the conflict and her students know this. This forces students to be inherently more away of what they say. These opportunities provide positive, real-life practice in interpersonal communication.

It is important to note that for all interviewees, there is an understanding that the anti-behavior was a means to achieve one or more of the five basic needs described in Glasser’s (1990) choice theory. Good educators understand that a student’s anti-behavior usually fills one of the choice theory needs and that providing a positive alternative as a replacement to anti-behavior is essential for ongoing, changed behavior.

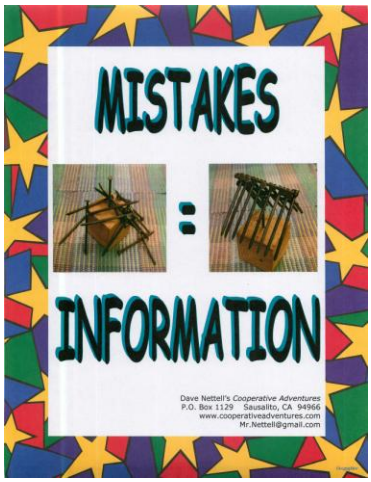


Figure 6
Dave Nettell, 2014

In some cases the anti-behavior is not exhibited as an interaction between students, but rather a demonstration of executive, expedient, and/or covert help-seeking. The stated help-seeking types all can be linked to a number of choice theory basic needs:

- Power: “I am the first one to turn in my paper, therefore, I am the smartest”.
- Belonging: “Most of the class understands this math and I do not. Therefore, if I ask a question for clarification, I am not part of the group”.
- Freedom/fun; “Getting my answers from the back of the book expedites this task so that I may choose a new and more fun activity”.

In the case of executive/expedient help-seeking both AM and J will incorporate best practices that involve shared experiences and language. Typically, when a student is demonstrating expedient help-seeking with AM, AM will tell students to “ask three before me.” In the same situation, J will ask students to reflect on whether the help they are seeking is “Dear Henry/Dear Liza” help. All students understand this reference, as J has students sing, “There’s a Hole in the Bucket”,(all twenty verses) during the beginning of the year. This example provides a universal classroom reminder to be resourceful and to reflect on whether the help a student is requesting is considered expedient or executive and therefore appropriate help to request.

Interviews: Building Communication and Help-Seeking Skills Through Academics

When reflecting on the responses of the expert interviewees, all participants considered help-seeking and interpersonal communication skills as being essential life skills that can easily be incorporated into academic work. In California, the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards requires student rigor, ability to communicate and critique ideas/points of view, and perseverance (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014)). As J points out, Common Core has everything to do with interpersonal communication and self-

advocacy skills. The cross-grade, key mathematics practices include constructing and communicating reasonable arguments, critiquing the reasoning of others, persevering and collaborating to problem solve. Asking questions and communicating effectively with peers is paramount to these core principals. J explains that incorporating strategies from the prior mentioned Chapter 4 Establishing a Classroom of Trust and Chapter 4 Teacher Trust: Lowering the Shields reinforces a safe zone where students can take risks, like asking for help. Expressing the belief that all students have ideas that are valid and that we are all in the same stage of the journey and learning together, levels the playing field and reinforces belonging.

AM will employ similar tactics to avert expedient and executive help-seeking. She does this by teaching students to struggle; keenly differentiating between students who really do not know what to do and students who" just have not figured it out yet". AM incorporates a procedure called STAR in her classroom. STAR stands for: Struggle, Talk it out, Analyze your work, and Revise your work. The STAR procedure begins when students are given a rigorous math problem and are encouraged to take seven minutes to struggle with the problem independently.

Subsequently, students are given a supervised opportunity to seek help and communicate from/with their peers. It is important to mention that AM precedes any STAR lesson by first having in-depth conversations deconstructing what struggling looks like, modeling what to do when you are stuck or need help, and recognizing what successful help-seeking and help providing looks like.

R uses similar strategies in his classroom. The adage, "working hard benefits you, struggling benefits you" is one that R's students know well. However, R also recognizes that most students know who the "smart kid" is. Therefore, the student who is learning and practicing

appropriate help-providing skills is the “smart kid”. The student who is learning and practicing appropriate help-seeking skills is comfortable and confident asking for help from the “smart kid”. This is what prompts R to promote the variety of student talents in his classroom. Creating abundant modalities for input, differentiated structures, and environments for learning places kids in situations where someone besides “the smart kid” is asked for help and/or where the “smart kid” is dependent on others for help. As R puts it, “Anything that scrambles up the pecking order will ultimately make students stronger”.

Interviews: The Nail Challenge; Next Steps with “I Give Up”

One of the most significant factors, described by interviewees, for the acquisition of autonomous, adaptive help-seeking is perseverance. In this case perseverance refers to a student’s attempt to complete a task multiple times on one’s own and asking for help in order to foster an understanding and/or mastery of a concept. But, what happens when a student’s perseverance has withered and they are no longer willing to attempt the task? How does one persevere after giving up?

D and R both use The Nail Challenge (Figure 6) in order to teacher perseverance (among many other things). The purpose of this section is to analyze two approaches used to rebound from students failing a high-frustration risk challenge.

The Nail Challenge consists of a nail that has been hammered into a cube of wood. The challenge asks a group of students to successfully balance thirteen nails on the head of the nail fixed to the wood cube. No nail may touch any other surface or object, sans the one affixed nail and any of the other nails. For the purposes of this paper, both D and R were asked to provide next steps when confronted with a student or group of students who have lost their perseverance

and are giving up and/or asking for expedient help. It is important to note that both experts describe their next steps as depending largely on the students involved, the classroom environment, time of day, day of the week, and an incredibly vast number of other factors.

D's response to this scenario would be to steer the student(s) away from asking for hints. D states that hints only hinder a student's perseverance and problem solving capabilities. Throughout the challenge, prior to the frustration level reaching "give up" level, D would listen for student contribution and highlight various thought processes and strategies. D would pause groups to magnify and peer model successful teamwork, collaboration, and problem solving skills. When faced with a student asking for expedient help, D would ask, "Do you want me to do this for you?" or "Do you want me to give you enough information for you to do it on your own." D chooses this language carefully. The first question challenges a student's needs for freedom and power, while the latter question supports adaptive, autonomous help-seeking by providing additional information that scaffolds the activity towards that student's zone of proximal development.

D's goal is to get students to feel comfortable asking for help that supports an independent mastery of the task. D also recognizes the importance for students to take risks and to push their limits and preserve. D describes how teachers should provide opportunities for students to stretch themselves outside of their comfort zone, but within, what D calls the panic zone. The middle ground, the growth zone, is where the most

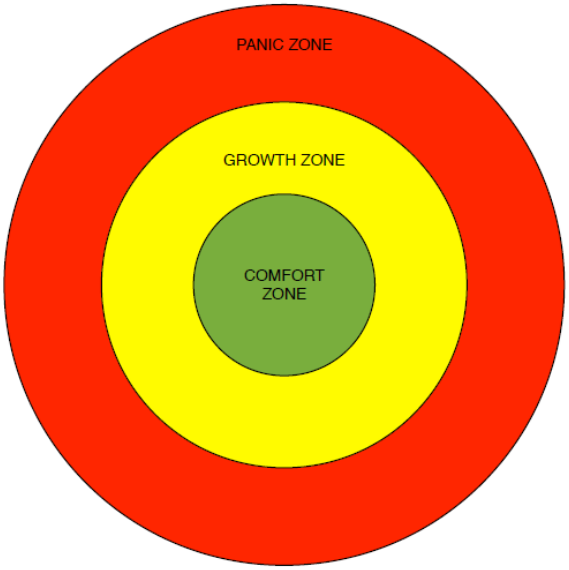


Figure 7

authentic, meaningful learning takes place (Figure 7).

When given the same scenario R responded by taking students out of the situation first and providing an opportunity for students to purge their complaints and frustrations. R wants his students to understand the value of feeling better versus accomplishment. Also, R recognizes that in this situation students might need to feel a sense of relief before attempting the challenge again. From there, R would facilitate a group discussion about the things that may have prevented the success of the nail challenge. He would mix up his students so that they first shared with a variety of partners and then with the whole group.

Of most importance to R is his students' ability to address any preventative issues and deconstructing them. R may then mix up groups and try again, scaffold the task to something more within reach, or scratch the task all together and save it for another time. Again, these "next steps" would greatly depend on the contributing fore-mentioned factors: students involved, the classroom environment, time of day, day of the week, and so on.

Interviews: The Importance of Including Communication and Help-Seeking in the Classroom

The single most highly supported theme regarding the conducted interviews is the importance of interpersonal communication and help-seeking building in the classroom. J describes that building communication and self-advocacy within students as the most essential learning outcome for her students and the most important trait for student success as they transition between elementary and middle school. One of J's vital goals is for her students to dive into problem solving skills with perseverance, to use appropriate adaptive, autonomous help-seeking skills when necessary, and to inspire self-advocacy as a lifelong student habit.

AM further explains that one cannot have a classroom where learning happens without effective communication. Additionally, the classroom experience extends beyond what can be

learned at home. In the classroom environment students understand that they are one of thirty; thirty different experiences, thirty different helpers, thirty different individuals with different communication affinities, and so on. Thirty students represent twenty-nine individual peer assistants, interpersonal communication building relationships that are rarely found outside of the classroom environment.

Nevertheless, all expert interviewees voiced a common challenge that impedes the implementation of SEL instruction (including communication and self-advocacy) in the classroom: time. With increases in teacher evaluations based on standardized testing of academic subjects and limited instructional time as it is, most educators find it hard to include explicit SEL instruction. Although most educators see the benefit of including SEL inclusion in the classroom there is a clear hierarchy of content to be taught. Unfortunately, social/emotional standards do not exists, nor are they considered in any government administered, standardized assessment of educators. Still R cites interpersonal communication and self-advocacy instruction as an absolute must for every classroom. Regarding these two traits as major contributions toward any student's ability to purposefully take risks, stretch learning toward the growth zone, and be independent.

Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

Summary of Major Findings

Interpersonal communication and self-advocacy skills are essential for student growth and assisting the acquisition of these skills remains a teacher's greatest obligation. Students should not be considered as stimulus response systems; the crux of all student motives relies heavily on relationships that are fostered in the classroom. Students base their communication and help-seeking decisions on a vast number of factors, including, but not limited to: gender, genetic factors, subject, classroom environment, teacher trust, agency, autonomy, competing academic and social goals, peer comparison, and so on. Interpersonal communication and self-advocacy is a lifelong skill that is best cultivated through the fostering of trusting relationships, the creation of safe environments and communities, genuine caring, and positive reinforcement.

Comparison of Findings to the Literature

The findings in this study are aligned with prior research. This study supports research for Bandura's (2003) social cognitive theory, as many of the student responses matched their corresponding parent/guardian responses. Additional responses indicated parallel findings between this study and Butler's (1998) study relating to student help-avoidance regarding the subject of mathematics. Additionally, many of the interviewee's responses mirrored Vygotsky's (1978) sociocognitive theory, including the zone of proximal development, and the gradual release of responsibility through scaffolding tasks. Moreover, one can clearly find connections between some of the educational expert's best practices and Glasser (1998) and Connell's (1990) theories on what drives one to seek help. Education expert's best practices, whether known or unknown, also aligned with studies conducted by Ryan and Shim's (2012) prior research, Barna

and Brott's (2011) prior research and Bandura's (2003) self-system theory, describing similar best practices; specifically, teacher involvement, support for autonomy, and development of student competence.

Limitations/Gaps in the Research

This study was limited by the survey sample size; as a result the study is limited to a very specific demographic, location, and age. Considering this, the study cannot be generalized beyond the demographics of this study's group. Additionally, the research literature and collected best practices were limited to a few researchers and educational expert interviewees, further research can be done to contribute to the purpose of this study. Because of the anonymity of the parent and student surveys, it is impossible for the researcher to identify the race, ethnicity, and/or socio-economic status of the survey samples completed, thereby creating limited analyses of the collected data and comparisons to student surveys. Also, survey responses collected only addressed student help-seeking and parent help providing encompassing the area of mathematics. Because of these limitations this study should be considered a narrow practicum, a small contribution to the existing research.

Implications for Future Research

Further research can illustrate the influence interpersonal communication has on one's self-advocacy skills. Additional opportunities are needed to observe, analyze, reflect, and evaluate this practice. Future research might include more comprehensive studies that extend for many years. These studies might provide additional insight, comparisons, and correlations between the developmental help-seeking ability of toddlers as they mature through elementary and middle school. These studies could shed light on whether an infant's relationship with their

parent provides predictive indicators of their future help-seeking abilities. Such studies would need to incorporate a vast number of participants and should track growth for at least 15 years.

Overall Significance of the Study

This study has provided the researcher with a deep level of understanding of the importance of social and emotional skills development. Specifically addressing self-help skills in turn helps students create a positive self-image. A student's ability to stand strong and rely on their own advocacy abilities is monumental in success as a learner. As the demand on teachers becomes increasingly more academic, it is important to consider that without a solid understanding and commitment to SEL instruction, student achievement will be limited. Educators owe it to their students to impart all the necessary life skills to be successful as a person; interpersonal communication and self-advocacy remain to be among the most important of those life skills.

About the Author

Daniel Gasparini is a 5th Grade teacher in a suburban elementary school in the greater San Francisco Bay Area. Daniel's passion for education and teaching began while working as a naturalist at the Marin Outdoor School, Walker Creek Ranch. Daniel prides himself in creating a safe environment, whereby students are able to learn and practice communication, collaboration and self-advocacy skills in the classroom. Daniel is excited to share what he has learned through the completion of this study with his colleagues and coworkers.

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