

Why Can't We Be Friends? Equipping 2nd Graders with Social-Emotional Skills For Life

Question

What happens when I teach social-emotional learning in my 2nd grade classroom more strategically and frequently?

Sub Questions

- What happens to students' social skills and student relationships?
- What happens to students' academic achievement?
- What happens to their relationships with me and other adults?
- What happens to students' relationships with peers when they are given conflict resolution methods?
- What happens to my emotions as I model and grow into an agent of social-emotional learning change?

Rationale and Project Overview

This is my first time teaching 2nd grade since the start of my career in 2008. I taught Kindergarten for 8 years and developed a curiosity about social-emotional development during those primary years. The students were developing in a few areas but due to their age and lack of classroom experience, there was a limited amount of progress. I wondered if more progress would be made if students had matured from their egocentric behaviors and had more experience

in a school setting. This wondering led me to further exploring socio-emotional learning while teaching 2nd grade this year. To my surprise, although the students were older, they had similar social behaviors as the Kindergartners. They showed lack of empathy, inability to share and take turns, and were very disrespectful to their peers as well as adults.

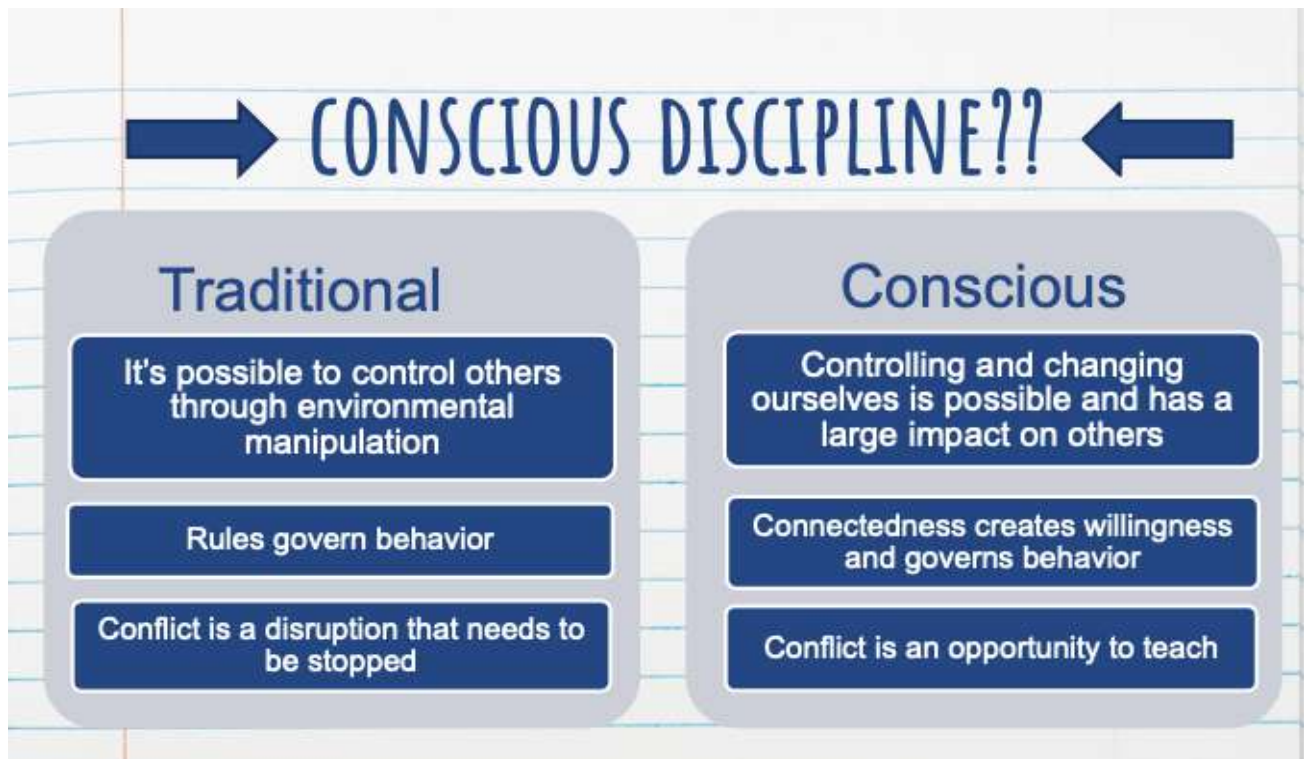
Our school is a PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention & Support) school, which means we focus on putting proactive systems in place to establish the behavioral supports and social culture needed for all students in a school to achieve social, emotional and academic success. The problem at our school is that we don't focus on character development and social skills enough to meet the students' needs. We have a social-emotional learning (SEL) program, but it's not being taught consistently in any grades due to time restraints and more emphasis on test scores and academic interventions. In the upper grades, we have a significant number of students that act disrespectfully to their peers as well as teachers, bullies and very confrontational, and behave like they are apathetic to education, discipline, and being a good person. It is important to me to help prevent my students from developing these character traits, so I feel more emphasis needs to be placed on character education and social-emotional learning in the primary department where their foundation for everything is built. Once they get to the upper grades, the teachers will hopefully have a firm foundation of compassion, peer collaboration, and self-control to build upon.

My main method for providing this change is through a program called, "Conscious Discipline" which I'll refer to as CD throughout the paper. The program was founded by Dr. Becky Bailey, an internationally recognized expert in childhood education and developmental psychology. I adapted it for my class because it focuses on self-regulation and integrates SEL,

school culture, and discipline by fostering the emotional intelligence of teachers first and children second. Some of the key points that I follow in my class are:

1. Working to build specific relationships with individual students
2. Focusing on the behaviors that I want to see instead of the misbehaviors
3. Maintaining composure during difficult times
4. Actively modeling calming down and self-talk in real life situations

Comparison of Behavior Management Techniques



CD is different from the traditional methods of discipline such as rewards and punishments, and it focuses on building self-control innately and permanently through relationship building and modeling the skills and character traits we want to see in our students. This is the missing element that our school needs in order to truly reform student behavior and character development.

Our School Improvement Plan states that we are raising the next generation of wholesome compassionate citizens who will be productive in society. In order to do that, we have to help our students develop the interpersonal and collaboration skills in early childhood education that will allow them to be productive in the upper grades, workplace, community, and society as a whole. I hope my findings will benefit the primary department by suggesting some strategies that may help students develop collaborative and problem-solving skills. As these students grow older, I hope they will take these skills with them and, hopefully, raise the achievement levels in the upper grades and possibly provide a model for other schools in the area that are having similar issues. Students learn well from their peers and students with self-regulation have more productive lives in adulthood. In order for them to learn from their peers they need to be able to work with and collaborate with them. They need to know the crucial skills like sharing, considering the thoughts of others, and disagreeing respectfully, at a young age so that they will have the necessary skills for conflict resolution as they get older.

My research tracked the following:

- Student interviews that focused on students' views about school, friendship, and peer collaboration. I actually administered two beginning of the year surveys because in the first one, I felt the students weren't being truthful in their responses and were basically telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. I will discuss this further in the Data Review section. I considered conducting interviews one-on-one using a puppet so students will hopefully feel more comfortable telling their truth and not simply stating what they believe I wanted to hear. I decided to conduct them in a small group setting and

reviewing each question, modelling how to answer truthfully and with complete thought and reflection on my behaviors and beliefs.

- I hoped to conduct a biweekly observation during “Fun Friday” while students were having free time in small groups. Although the frequency of the observations changed over time due to time constraints, scheduling, and oftentimes cancellation because of misbehaviors, I was able to observe the groups three times over the course of three months. This allowed me to see how their collaboration and social skills were developing over time and what skills needed improvement. In addition to the observations, I also planned to have a skills checklist with the desired skills listed alongside the students’ names so I could check off any skills I was seeing and take note of the skills I was not seeing. Again, due to the inconsistency of the observations, I decided to forgo the checklist and just compare notes from each observation. This will be discussed in more detail in the Data Review section.
- At least two days per week, I planned to teach lessons on character development to help guide students’ self-discipline and collaboration skills that will help improve peer relationships. This was changed to one day for lesson introduction and another day for review and reflection.
- I had a Focus Group of four students with whom I conducted more in-depth observations and interviews to offer different viewpoints, growth levels, and effects from a variety of students. Three of the students had behavior and emotional issues, while one was extremely quiet and shy.

My research not only tracked the growth of my students but also tracked my progress in my path towards becoming an agent of SEL reform. This allowed me to see how my composure, patience, self-control, and classroom management evolved through this process of teaching SEL and practicing conscious discipline. With this new perspective that misbehavior is really a cry for help, I was hoping to be able to teach students how to identify and display their feelings and emotions in a calm and safe manner while building positive relationships with their peers and teachers. I hoped to gain more patience and a deeper understanding of the misbehaviors and connect them to the internal needs of the students.

I pictured this as being the beginning of a new school environment that will phase out the old attitudes and misbehaviors and phase in the new methods of character building and social skills development. It was to resemble how they are building the new high school. They are starting with freshmen and each year they add a class. By year 4, the freshmen are now seniors and the school is in full swing with a full class body. My program will start with the primary students and focus on their growth over time to see if the behavior issues have declined and the school climate is showing a positive shift in student interactions. My dilemma is trying to get other teachers onboard with partaking in this process, which is why I am starting the research with my students. I want to have data on the impact of character development and how we as a team can change the dynamics of our school and eventually community. This first research project focuses on my students, and hopefully I will be able to track their progress through the years by collaborating with their future teachers. I feel my expectations may be high considering a lot of the growth is going to come from the teachers reinforcing SEL learning just as much as I

will be. I might form another PLC (Professional Learning Community) where we meet over the summer and develop a plan together for implementation and data collection.

School Context

Benjamin E. Mays Academy is a predominantly African American school located on the south side of Chicago in the Englewood community. We are a Title I eligible school with a current school ranking of Level 3. Our statistics include 98% low income students, 16% diverse learners, and 3% limited English learners. We have had three principals in the past four years, and are hoping that this latest principal is deemed worthy of the position and voted in. Since her interim, which started at the end of last year, our attendance rate has increased and been steadily holding at 96%. Our student membership is currently 343 and grades are from Pre-K through eighth.

I have been working in the Englewood community for 10 of my 12 years of teaching in CPS. I love the potential of the students, the zest for knowledge, and the need for passionate, compassionate teachers who are committed to changing the character of the community. I teach Reading, Writing, and Social Science to 38 students while my grade level partner teaches Math and Science. We are departmentalizing reading and math in order to better prepare the students for the benchmark level of 3rd grade. With the reading and math levels being so low, having one teacher focus on the intensive areas will help bridge the gaps in the students' learning and get them closer to their target reading/math levels as measured by NWEA testing. My students have physical education, music, dance, and guidance as their weekly preps. I also integrated more strategic character education into the curriculum this year, to better train students on

self-discipline and self-motivation. In the past, I've taught these skills but in a more basic manner that wasn't as strategic and thorough. The lessons were more reactionary to the occurrences in the classroom since I was teaching Kindergarten students who had little background knowledge on behaviors in a school setting. Also, the lessons didn't include the other necessary components like discussion, follow-up, and accountability because that wasn't age appropriate nor reasonable based on their experience.

Our school environment is pleasant, collaborative, and supportive. With our new administration, the staff is friendlier and full of dedicated team players who do not mind lending their time, knowledge, or anything necessary to assist. We have several partnership programs that include Youth Guidance: B.A.M., Children's Home + Aid, and the Chicago Urban League. One of the programs enables parents to volunteer in classrooms on a daily basis, which has been a tremendous help to many teachers. We also have the local church's support with organizing back-to-school rallies, backpack and school supplies giveaways, and allowing the 8th grade graduation to be held in their facility. We have the names of colleges posted throughout the school and we wear college t-shirts on Fridays to encourage students to see themselves as college graduates.

Literature Review

What is SEL?

In my opinion, social-emotional learning (SEL) teaches students how to interact and collaborate with other people in everyday situations; how to develop empathy and compassion by putting other persons' needs before their own; and how to recognize and control their

emotions in various stages of their lives. Students have been told to stifle their anger or that certain emotions are wrong to have, so when they experience these natural emotions, they don't know how to control them. SEL teaches children that all emotions are normal to have but need to be maintained and controlled in certain situations and scenarios. It is also the foundation for laying more important life skills like respect, moral values, and trustworthiness. According to Dowd and Tierney (2005), social skills are the tools that enable people to communicate, learn, ask questions, get along with others, make friends, develop healthy relationships, and be able to interact with everyone they meet in their life journey (p.1). I agree that SEL gives children the basis to form skills that will shape their character and assist them in making morally good choices in their everyday lives. To me, SEL is the umbrella under which character education is a subset. SEL is the awareness of your emotions and being able to self-regulate them when necessary or, as Dowd and Tierney (2005) stated, using the right skills at the right time in the right situation (p.2). Character education is the part of SEL where the teacher has more of an impact by directly teaching and focusing on particular skills one at a time, and having students practice applying it, not just in the classroom or during discussions, but in their everyday lives.

Why is SEL important?

Social-emotional learning is important to children's success both academically and emotionally because it helps children develop very essential life skills that they need in order to live and thrive in our world. Being able to control your emotions is critical to working with others, learning a new skill, developing empathy, and other social skills that are needed in society. Without a moral compass, people develop unethical character traits that grow into

personalities that are comfortable with making dangerous choices that lead to violence and crime in society. When taught and developed in the right stages, SEL empowers our youth to be responsible and accountable for their own actions and not just repeat the detrimental behaviors that they see. Children aren't being deliberately taught or shown good manners or character traits at home, so they come to school lacking many skills like compassion, sharing, and empathy. Sometimes school is the only place that many of my students receive one-on-one attention and conversation so it's important that these skills are introduced here, or they may never receive them. According to Dowd and Tierney (2005),

A child who does not learn social skills and the basics of social interactions is at tremendous risk for failure in the classroom, juvenile delinquency, being ostracized by positive peers, or being adversely influenced by negative peers. Children who are never taught social skills develop their own habits and devices for getting their needs met, habits and devices that often conflict with what society views as acceptable behavior. The result can be an adolescent and adult life punctuated by violence, drug and alcohol abuse, failed relationships, incarceration, and the frustration of never realizing one's goals. (p.2)

In regards to CD, according to Bailey (2014), we must build schools based on the internal resources of safety, connection and problem solving instead of external rewards and punishments. Our internal state dictates our behavior, so we should work to better equip our students with innate self-control and discipline by fostering and modeling the skills first then teaching the children. This is hard to do in my school because so much of the focus is on external rewards and punishments. I introduced CD to the staff during grade level meetings, but the old system and habits are so ingrained in them that they do not seem willing to try a new method. We

have just opened up “The School Store” and administration is pushing this heavily, even after the introduction to CD! My concern with this is children will begin to think that their behavior is more of a performance than a good moral trait to have. The impact is short-term but the misleading mindset of “if I do good I’ll get rewarded/should get rewarded” will lead them to only being motivated extrinsically, doing good only when someone is watching, and tons of other detrimental actions that will get worse as they get older. Like Kohn (2018) said, “When we repeatedly promise rewards to children for acting responsibly, we are assuming that they could not choose to act this way on their own and if the capacity to do this is a part of us then the rewards system is dehumanizing” (p.26). I totally agree because prior to the introduction of the store, my students were making good choices independent of me giving them positive reinforcement or even seeing their actions many times. Now that the store has been introduced, I have students asking me how much they earned or if I saw the good deed they did. It really takes away from the effectiveness of CD which is to promote intrinsic motivation. I feel both have their place in shaping my students, but I don’t want to confuse them or cause them to lose the innate feeling of pride and joy that doing something nice or making a good choice brings.

How did I teach it? What are some ways I taught it?

Although I would have liked to have daily lessons on social-emotional learning, my crowded schedule did not allow for it. I felt the best way to teach these essential skills was to introduce the skill on Monday at the beginning of the day. We highlighted times when the skill was shown in ourselves or if a classmate displayed it. We had a Wednesday check-in to discuss our individual progress towards applying the skill and to set new goals for the rest of the week.

On Friday, we took a self-assessment to gauge our individual progress for the week and to set new goals for the following week. Although I would have loved to conduct a morning meeting and begin the day with SEL, many of my students came in tardy so they would miss the lesson. In place of the morning meeting, we conducted an afternoon check-up and jotted down goals to implement the skills at home as well. I would have liked to get parents involved by having them write down when they saw their child displaying the skills for the week but parent communication was low in my classroom.

To provide students with opportunities to share their innate beliefs about the importance of good character, I was thinking about posing various situations and having them discuss their possible actions in them, but I wondered, will this lead to teaching them the skill or merely confusing them and making them think that morality is up to interpretation? According to Kilpatrick (1992), classroom time might be better spent in talking about the virtues of friendship, loyalty, and honesty, and how to implement them versus dredging up situations and having open discussions about them. I agree that the conversations could lead down roads that aren't relevant and move away from the purpose which is to teach the skills through modeling and practice. Curriculum publishers assume that morals are highly valued in our youth, so they base their programs on various situations where the moral choice is obvious without considering the dilemma and background that many children living in poverty have. I feel that children have an innate ability and desire to do the right thing, but it can and has been tarnished when put in various traumatic situations. Without being taught the virtues of honesty, integrity, and human compassion, children will continue to react and behave from a selfish premise that can be very destructive.

I believe the approach from CD can be effective but is more intricate and takes a lot of practice and rethinking of skills and habits that we as teachers have developed. This program starts with the teacher being the model and showing students through conscious discipline and self-control, how to behave and react in ways that are appropriate in various situations. The problem is getting other teachers, parents, and administration onboard with changing the way they respond to certain behaviors while teaching students to do the same. According to Bailey (2014), we must stop pretending we can effectively teach children life skills through single-issue prescriptive curriculums like Character Education and Bully Prevention while simultaneously using stickers, shaming, and loss of privileges in attempts to force compliance. We must model and demonstrate it in daily life. I agree with her partly, but I also feel that behaviors need to be identified and modeled so that students have a general understanding of these character traits instead of assuming they do and becoming frustrated when they don't make good choices. I merged both CD and Character Education so that students could develop internal values through relationship building and develop social skills and good character through modeling what certain skills look like in daily life.

Intended Implementation

My intended implementation was to provide direct instruction to my students three times per week, with follow-up discussions, modeling, and self-reflection as we tracked our progress in the skills we were learning. The math teacher would do the same or something similar but maybe less frequently, so that both classes were getting some time allotted for social skills training and practice.

Implementation

What actually occurred in my classroom was a big reality check and an assessment of time management that I had overlooked. After trying to start the classes in mid-October, the time I set for SEL was constantly getting smaller or removed due to several issues like testing, reading lessons being extended, and pressure from administration to stick to our daily Reading times set by the network. I changed my three days per week plan to one day per week on Mondays with a follow-up discussion on Fridays. After this adjustment, there were more interruptions due to having to hold five to seven students from absent teachers' classrooms since our school doesn't get consistent teacher coverage. Beginning in January, I introduced an SEL skill weekly using a book that explained the skill in various scenarios. We would discuss various incidents where we could use the skill and encourage each other to do so. I also included a bonding exercise each morning where the students would sing a chant and hug each other before we start our day. It was something that I used in Kindergarten and initially wondered if it would be too young for my 2nd graders but they loved it!

Along with implementing strategies and skills from the lessons, I also worked hard on becoming "a lesson" myself. I showed my students through daily practice, mistakes, and real-world reactions that nobody is perfect, not even teachers. There were days that I was exemplifying patience, love, and self-control, while there were other days where I unfortunately showed anger in the midst of a challenge, frustration when expectations aren't met, and that I have buttons that can be pushed. During these challenging times, I implemented correcting mistakes, remorse, forgiveness, and how to regain self-control when things aren't going your way. My students were able on several occasions to offer me the advice that I taught them, which

was very rewarding. We grew together and learned how to implement teamwork and compassion with each other.

Data Collection Methods

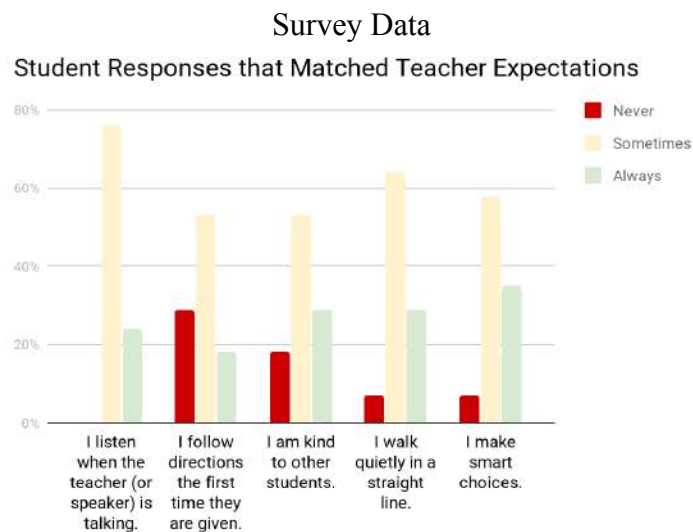
1. Student Self-Assessment Survey: Initially, I administered a survey to the whole class that was too general and not giving me the SEL information I wanted. The students also were not answering the survey questions with honesty and reflection but more like broad ideas of what they felt I wanted to hear. My concern about response reliability led to me giving my students a second survey two weeks later that asked them about their social-emotional skills, academic interests, and what skills they felt they needed to work on in the next few weeks before report cards went out. Instead of a whole group setting, I conducted the assessments in a small group setting which was more intimate and allowed students more time to be reflective. Prior to the assessment, I modelled how to think about their responses before answering and making sure that their answers were true reflections of their actual choices and behaviors.
2. Teacher Reflection Journal: I kept a reflective journal of my thoughts, emotions, and actions, as well as the actions of my focus students and others. I used it as a glimpse into my classroom to view what CD looked like and how it changed throughout the year. I used it as a place to capture anecdotal data on my students, showing how they interacted with me and their peers, as well as other adults. I discussed some issues and concerns that I saw with my students as well as myself. I used it to examine my emotional state at

various times of the year and within numerous incidents that were occurring with my students. I also included next steps, observation notes, and lesson reflections.

Data and Interpretation

Student Self-Assessment Survey

After a first survey where I felt like the questions were too general and students' answers didn't seem to reflect their actual experience, For example, I asked “What do you like about school and why?” A resounding amount of 14 out of 17 students said reading and/or math because it “helps your brain grow.” This is something that I say to remind them daily about the effects of their work ethics and habits which led me to the notion that they were stating what they felt I wanted to hear. I designed a second survey on February 2, 2020. This survey included more specific questions about their daily behaviors and emotions which gave me a clearer picture of their thoughts and actions. I surveyed 17 students. The response choices listed on the paper where they were to color in their choice were thumb down=never, thumb to the side=sometimes, thumb up=always.



Analysis

This survey allowed me to see what my students thought of themselves and allowed me to compare my observations and anecdotal notes to their opinions. Most of the students' self-analysis results were similar to mine. For example, the data shows that the majority of my students did not follow directions the first time they are given. This was seen in my class on a daily basis through constant repetition of simple one or two-step directions that cost me teaching and transition time. It also shows that only $\frac{1}{3}$ of my students saw themselves as being kind to other students. According to my journal entries and anecdotal notes, kindness was a major problem in my class over the course of the year. I frequently had to model kindness and remind students to treat each other how they want to be treated. They would share or help each other clean up a spill, but it was mainly their words that were the problem. I recall students grouping together and saying mean things about one student. After several attempts at mediation, they were still being mean but just more sneaky with it.

2-3-20: "Today I revisited Bucket Filling using a sorting activity. These past few days the students have been becoming more mean and aggressive towards each other. I introduced Bucket Filling but since I've been bombarded with so many distractions, I haven't been able to post and introduce the actual bucket filling of each other's buckets. Deron and Anthony are still being sneaky and secretly bullying other students."

2-4-20: "It seems like my "problem children" are starting to get it while the others are going backwards. I've got to be okay with assisting them more. I want them to do it innately but I've got to be patient as they get there. I've also got to be okay with helping them get there. I feel like I'm doing too much scaffolding but maybe my expectations are

too high and they still need the scaffolding. I will squeeze in a read-aloud tomorrow on how to do the right thing when nobody's watching.”

My students realized that they need support in listening to their teachers and other adults, following directions the first time, being kind to other students, walking quietly in line, and making smart choices. These were some of the skills that I had been working on and modeling for them so it was still frustrating that they were still having such a hard time. I didn't expect perfection but I did, however, expect them to improve in these areas, so I began teaching more lessons on kindness and empathy, while modeling and praising students when they displayed the skills in class. For example, I read the book, “Bucket Fillers”, which teaches children the effects of kindness on themselves and other people. Initially, students weren't making the connections which is possibly because our time was cut short due to the fire alarm sounding off. The following day, I read another book that had more examples of bucket-filling, which showed students how they could take action by applying the skill in their class. I also did a scenario sort to help them gain a deeper understanding. They enjoyed both, but as the day went along they had forgotten the connection and was back to their mean ways. I wasn't able to fully implement it with the display of each students' bucket until a week later. I rushed into introducing this because I was at my wits end with their bullying and hostility towards each other.

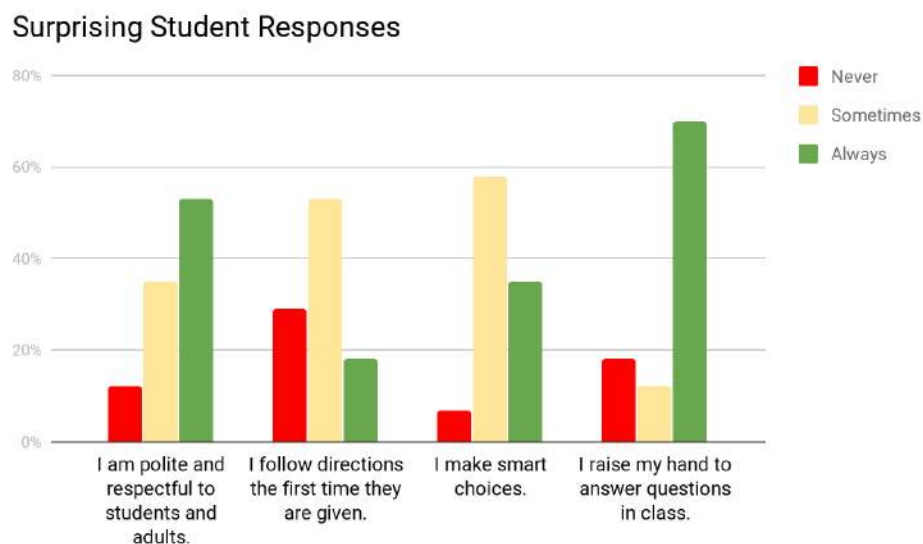
This photo shows students taking a Post-It note to write a kind note to a classmate to “fill their bucket.”



Once the actual Bucket Board was on display, the students flocked to it and loved it! I put personal notes to each one of them and some students from the afterschool program did so as well which was a pleasant surprise. The smiles on their faces and joy in their hearts as they read their notes were priceless. Kids were coming to me hugging me and thanking me. They eagerly wanted to write notes to each other, so I reminded them that it's for bucket filling and not just for friends. The thrill lasted for a couple weeks, so I had to reignite it with notes of my own and gentle nudges reminding them to fill a bucket when someone does something kind to you. I would have loved to see how this would have impacted their behaviors and moral choices over time but a month later, we were shut down due to coronavirus.

I was a little disappointed that their growth wasn't as great as I was hoping for, but I also saw something deeper. They are being more honest and more self-reflective than they were in the

first survey! The fact that they are cognitive of their areas that need improvement is a great thing because it shows them how to think metacognitively about themselves and be accountable for their own choices and actions. This allowed me to set goals with them and get more buy-in from them to work towards self-improvement. This process was halted due to the school closure, so I don't really know how the goal setting would have worked, but the fact that they are honest with themselves is a great start towards accountability and making better choices.



The data also showed that the amount of students who felt they are never polite to others, follow directions, nor make smart choices was higher than I expected. Although many of my students exhibit inconsistency in these skills, I was surprised to see that so many of my students felt they never showed these skills. I am glad they were honest, but for some students I even reasked the question so they had enough clarification. For example, when asked about making smart choices I had a few students to mark Always right away without any reflective thought. Not to sound leading, I simply asked the question again and reminded them to think about their choices in the past and be honest with their responses. Then they erased their answers and chose









the one more true to themselves. Instead of expressing judgment or disappointment, I praised them for being honest and told them that we can now set some goals and map out action plans that will help them improve their scores.

After reviewing the data, I noticed that many of my female students said that they weren't kind all the time. The survey was given at a time where I had reprimanded them for forming groups and bullying, so I was glad to see that they recognized their behavior wasn't kind. With this data, I started brainstorming and researching extrinsically motivated ideas that will encourage them to be kind. I was still using CD to motivate them intrinsically too, but I was losing faith in this working alone. Students this age need some kind of motivation to remind them that the skill exists and needs to be applied in order for it to grow. My initial thought was to start with small rewards like stickers and another reward system called, "The Super Improver Wall," which is a visual representation of each students' choices. I agree with CD that these are temporary fixes, but I also believe that they can be helpful if the emphasis is placed on the internal growth in character. I started adding stickers to the wall, but it was infrequent because it was hard to maintain. After a while, I didn't have time in the day to add the stickers or I would forget to reward certain actions, so it became more of a headache and the students pretty much forgot it was there. This reminded me of the importance of focusing on the behaviors I want to see so that the students will do the same and feel accomplished with or without a sticker.

Teacher Reflection Journal

My reflection journal shows my actions, reactions, emotions, and feelings as well as my students' behaviors and emotions in trying to implement CD and SEL throughout the course of the school year. It tracks my journey implementing SEL strategies and character education using

strategies I've used in the past, along with the lessons I learned from a 2-day conference on CD, classroom community building, and reflective discussions with my students. My journal was 28 notebook pages long with at least one journal entry per week from September 23, 2019 until March 12, 2020, two days prior to the last day of school due to the coronavirus closure. I decided to code every entry of my journal as follows:

	Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions	Positive Behaviors	Negative Behaviors
Students				
Teacher				

See the next page for a page from my journal that shows some of my coding in action. I coded every page of my journal in order to tell the complete story of my students' CD and SEL journey as well as my own.

was confirmation telling me not to give up and see this particular project through! I feel much better now!

Hezekiah is really getting annoying with his bullying. He knows what to do because when I ask him what he should do instead of hitting, he will tell me, step by step, what he should do but he's not taking any preventive measures. It's like he's seeking attention, negative or positive, of both myself and the other students. He has moments where he will do the right thing but is constantly looking at me to see if I am noticing them. I want to move him from that stage to the next stage of doing what's right, even when no one is watching. I state it but I think more modeling is needed.

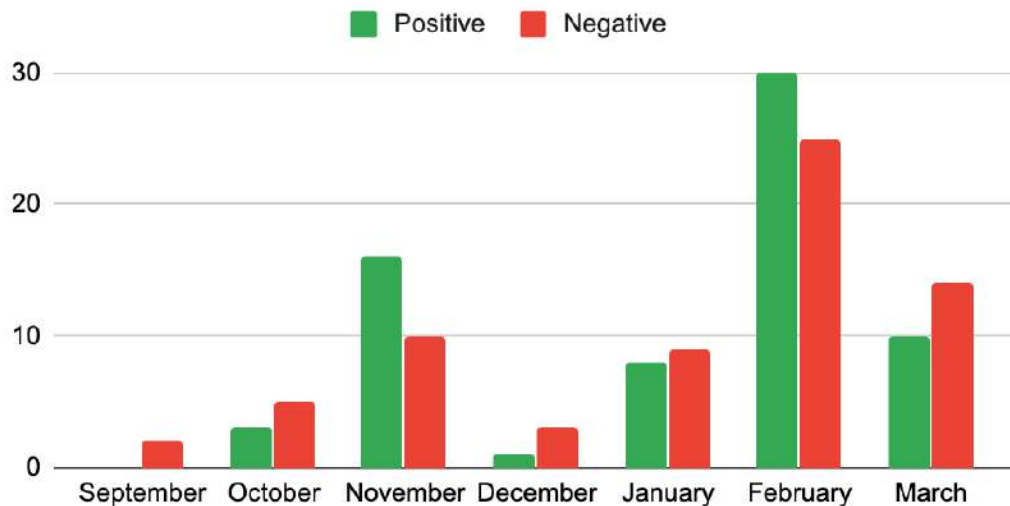
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I just learned that Hezekiah's mom isn't in the picture as often as I thought so he's looking for that motherly nurturing and connection. Conscious Discipline (CD) teaches that instead of seeing misbehavior as attention seeking, see it as connection seeking. Now this makes sense because his actions coincide with whenever I am focused on other students, he will act out or start playing with his pencils while glancing at me for a response. I'm learning composure but it's impossible for me to give him all the attention he needs and still manage to attend to my other students' needs, as well as teach! This is getting frustrating. I am learning patience and composure with myself because as the program states, "You can't teach children something you don't know." I will be reading up on how to connect with him even though he's rejecting my efforts now. He loves praise but will almost instantly revert back to bullying as soon as my back is turned. He also needs constant encouragement to finish assignments, try harder, etc. One good thing is he really likes to read to me. He is using the sounding out skills and I am encouraging to him which makes him really feel proud and produce this huge smile of pride. I just need to learn how to get him self-motivated, even with harder books. He is so needy but I feel he will be a good candidate for my research if I can get him to use self-talk, calming techniques, and stop antagonizing others - all independently. I'm rethinking my research to maybe simplify it to somehow be more measurable. I don't know.

11-6-19

Hezekiah is really doing his best to make good choices and be kind to others. He has been having good days since we've been back from the strike. I randomly catch him giving his peers good behavioral advice without me watching or intervening, he's polite when he enters the room, and he is starting to move away from Isaiah who is starting to act out for more attention. His grandmother is buying him shoes, a coat, every morning he comes in telling me something his grandmother did. I don't know if this new attention he's getting is helping his behavior but whatever it is, I hope it continues. I've been modeling some calm down strategies but as far as specific lessons, I haven't been able to make time in the day for them since we have so much catching up to do from the strike. I say that to say, I don't know if I can attribute this change to the project just yet or it could be the previous skills that we were working. I don't know but I'm happy that he's working harder, not giving up when I walk away, and is really motivated to learn. I started small group instruction with him and informed him of how his skills were improving and that he might be able to move up soon. That really got him excited so maybe that could be a part of it. I'd really like to pinpoint the source of this change in behavior so that I can build upon it, add it to my research in some way or just be able to add another resource to my arsenal.

Positive and Negative Student Behaviors Recorded in Teacher Journal Over Time



Analysis

This graph compares the students' positive and negative behaviors over time. I noticed that in the early months of journaling, I would write more when I was upset or frustrated. Journaling was very therapeutic for me. As the new year came in, with advice from one of my awesome ARLI mentors Sue, I began trying to write more positive incidents to see a clear picture of my class- the good, the bad, and the ugly. I originally thought that there would be more negative than positive incidents, but once I tallied the data, I noticed the opposite occurred. In the months that I wrote the most, there were more positive instances than negative. It would appear that my original thinking was that my class was more negative and a huge chunk of time was spent on redirecting instead of teaching. As teachers, we tend to focus on the negative which is what I did in the beginning. We often take the positive behaviors for granted but through the power of self-reflection, I was able to look at the data closely and realized that there were more positive occurrences than I originally thought. I initially had this deficit view of what SEL

looked like in my classroom. I was often feeling defeated and frustrated at the negative actions and overall view of the state of my class. I realize now that it wasn't as bad as what it appeared to be. Looking more closely at the data, I was surprised that there were these months where the good seemed to outweigh the bad. I can also speculate that some of the events that happened in certain months had an impact on the amount of positive versus negative writing. For instance, February was a strong month possibly because we implemented the Bucket filling board and we also threw our students a party for their great scores on the NWEA tests. The students were displaying positive attitudes and behaviors towards each other. There were also some negative incidences from a couple of new students that caused a little disruption to our momentum. Based on these findings I plan to implement the bucket-filling earlier in the year, as well as focusing on building character through direct instruction, modeling, and follow up. I took necessary steps to build relationships with my students early in the year by talking with them about their day, non-school related events, and giving them opportunities to chat with classmates about anything. I will reiterate building relationships with peers more next year by implementing the "I Love You" rituals, having a morning greeter, and introducing the conflict resolution mat earlier in the year. I will also remind them that we are learning together, therefore I need their support and ideas on how we can increase kindness, empathy, and teamwork in our classroom community. Starting the year with these relationship building efforts will help students form bonds with all their classmates and shun the negative behaviors like teasing and bullying.

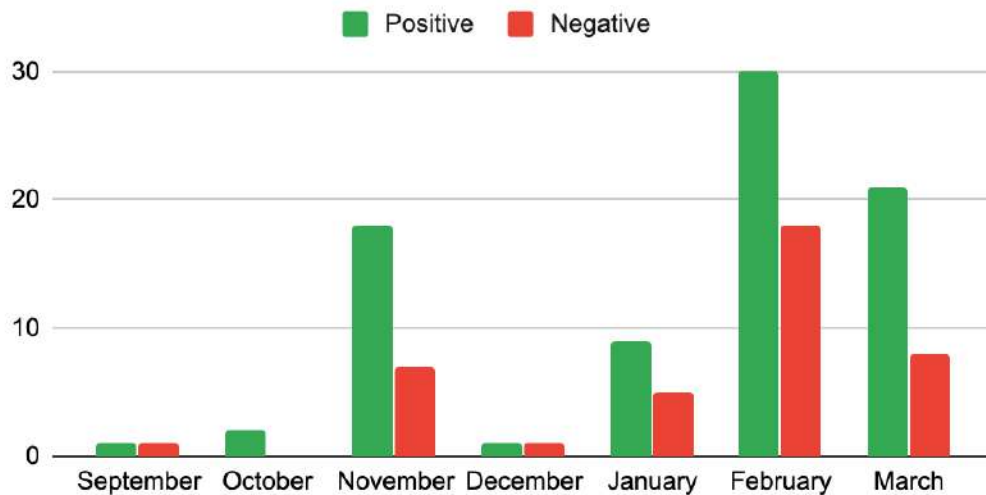
Another challenge that began to form was some of my well-behaved students were starting to rebel and act out as the other students were making progress. I feel this was partly due to my giving more attention and positive reinforcement to the case study students and somewhat

neglecting or taking the social skills of the well-behaved students for granted. Although I did praise them often, many times as a way to get the other students to mimic their behaviors, they may have benefitted from more personal one-on-one time that I was giving to the case study students.

3-3-20 “Both classes seem to be losing focus quicker and I have to keep speaking over them. One of my SEL tricks was to reteach the procedures that they are acting out in and have them practice it.”

Next year, I plan to use praise as less of an incentive to get off-track students back on-track and replace it with more one-on-one strategies that students can apply and build upon internally. This will lessen the need for extrinsic motivation when balanced with personal and descriptive feedback and encouragement that develops innately.

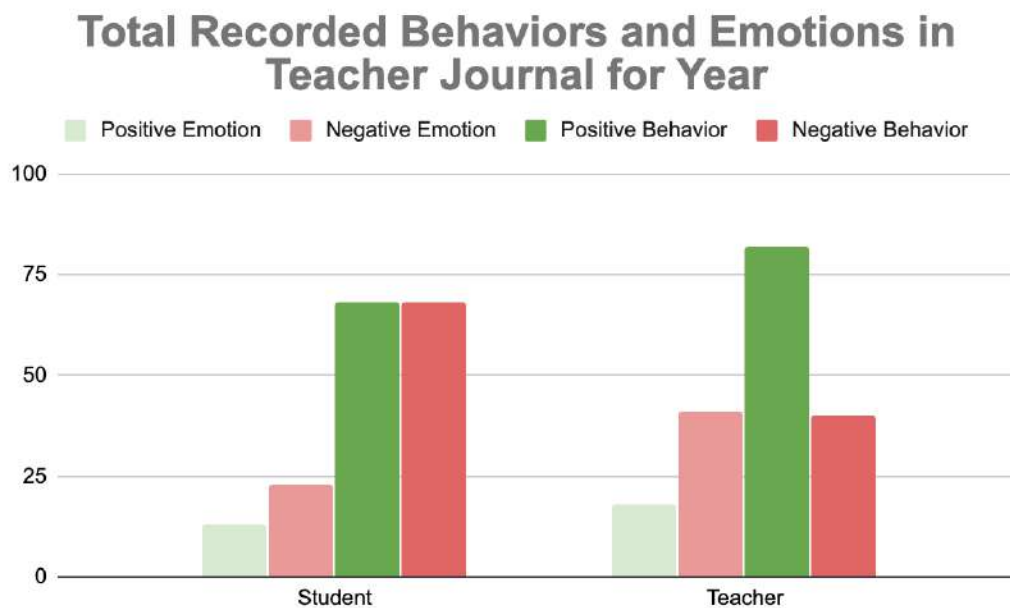
Positive and Negative Teacher Behaviors Recorded in Teacher Journal Over Time



Analysis

Here is a peek at my positive and negative behaviors over time. I noticed that many months mimicked the students, but looking at this overall brings me joy because I was displaying more positive behaviors than I initially thought. For the most part, I was maintaining my composure and redirecting students more calmly. A few times, the students had reminded me of the calm down method! Looking at the data this way reiterates the importance of the journal in giving me an overall look at how CD was implemented in my class and what changes I can make for next year that will be helpful to myself and my students. Upon analysis and reflection, I feel I will definitely force myself to include at least one positive and negative in each entry. I will do this by drawing a line down the middle of the page and labelling each side positive or negative. This will allow me to focus on both the good and the bad. If there happens to be one of those days that nothing negative or positive happened, I will notate that, causing me to be more reflective yet honest and transparent about the happenings in my classroom.

In performing this case study on myself, I noticed my inability to consistently react calmly and not take students' behaviors personally. Initially, I thought it would be easier to do since I am naturally a mild-mannered adult who has a great amount of self-control (so I thought). I soon realized that I still have buttons that can be pushed, prejudgments of students that I needed to overcome, and lacked the ideal Mary Poppins skill to see the best in every student even when they're giving you their worst.



Conclusion of Journal Data

Journaling and coding my journal allowed me to compare the times I have used the program, my growth in the program, the students' growth, and how effective the strategies were. It also showed me what I needed improvement with and what were some areas my students needed help with as well.

Overall, the journal data is showing me that this process is not a linear path to a certain end. I started it with the belief that as time progresses my students and I would be getting better at self-control and social skills, but that is not the case. We had some ups and downs, setbacks and comebacks, and success and failures but our path was continuous. Looking at the total amount of each behavior showed me several points:

- I wrote more about our behaviors than our emotions
- I was modeling more CD than I realized, especially composure
- The students' negative behaviors were the same as their positive behaviors

The journal data is showing that I wrote more about our behaviors than our emotions. This tells me that I focused more on the external responses than what was going on with myself and my students internally. It reiterates the CD premise that misbehavior and conflict is an opportunity to teach life skills. I often would use conflict as a time to teach but sometimes I didn't. I wasn't able emotionally at times to model what I was looking for or guide them to the next steps because I didn't know the next step or I was battling with my traditional methods of control. I needed more patience with myself and my students as we learned together how to see the best in other people and take deep breaths to calm down before reacting.

I also noticed that I was modeling and practicing more CD than I was giving myself credit for. I originally thought I was failing at it because I was focusing on the negative incidents and feelings they brought. I often had to apologize to my students for my reaction and remind them that we are learning together. While skimming through my journal, it appears there were more negative incidents because that's what you remember most. After tallying each instance and charting the data I am pleasantly surprised to see that I was able to model certain skills for

my students and watch them use them, although not consistently, they were able to learn, apply, and hopefully grow towards consistency.

Lastly, and probably most importantly, my reporting of the students' negative behaviors occurred the same number of times as my reporting of their positive behaviors (which is still shocking to me). Again, originally, I wasn't expecting that to be the case. My journal is loaded with instances where I felt like giving up so I believed that there was a huge deficit in their daily application of CD skills. The students were really trying to be better, whether their motivation was for a reward or internally. I learned through self-reflection of my journal that you really have to seize conflict as an opportunity to teach. It's almost like you would look forward to conflict because you're not taking it personal and you know how to handle it by maintaining composure through seeing the best in a person.

I also can see from the journal that I have been mainly journaling about the negative outliers. At first glance, it looked like I hadn't been using CD as often as I had lost self-control but actually, I had been using it but not journaling about it. I seem to journal more when I'm having a rough day or am triggered by a negative event. I haven't been teaching and modeling all the strategies that I would like at the original pace that I set out to do, but I feel moving forward, I need to include more of the positive moments as well in order to tell the complete story. I originally set out to have an SEL lesson daily which I quickly learned was unrealistic due to time and other issues out of my control. I adjusted my schedule to introduce a weekly skill on Monday, check in with them on Wednesday via partner discussions on self-assessments of the skill, and Friday have a class reflection and discussion on what our next steps could be. This seems to be too much to maintain as well because our schedule always has some last-minute

adjustments. Below is a list of CD and SEL strategies and techniques I was using throughout the year.



This is CD and SEL in my classroom. I'd like to take a deeper look into 2 of my students' journeys with CD and SEL, as well as mine.

Kimy's Journey

At the start of the year, I was warned about Kimy and how disrespectful he was to adults, especially women, which caused me to prejudge him and form this mental plan to show him who's boss from the beginning of the year. He's tall for his age, so you tend to think he's older than what he is, which caused me to respond to his misbehaviors and disrespectful nature in ways that I am not proud of. I initially thought I would be able to rise to the challenge, but I will admit, I was a bit intimidated by him. To hide my intimidation and demand my respect, I



openly reprimanded with yelling which caused him to get angry enough to cry. I felt horrible because that is not the relationship that I want to have with any of my students. On the other hand, I felt that it helped establish the level of respect that I sought. In my mind, this child had to be brought down a peg, and the only way I knew how was to show him that I was the boss because this kid had everyone's fear and respect. The security guards would go easy on him and talk softer to him than they would to the other misbehaving students because of his aggressive personality. I, too, felt like I was adjusting my tone with him and walking on nails around him because I did not want more confrontation. I used my "old school" methods of demanding respect through yelling and open reprimands because I knew I had to spark some kind of fear in him to hide my fear of him!

This was not working, so I decided to try another way, the CD way. I was fearful of the backlash because I saw what the perception of weakness was doing to him. He had adults fearing him! In my upbringing, children were seen and not heard, so for him to challenge my authority in that way was the ultimate sign of defeat for me. I felt like a failure because my options were limited, temporary, and not getting to the root of his problem. To continue this way would ruin my entire year. But there was more at stake than my reputation of strong classroom management and fun classroom environment. I didn't want his disdain for other students, lack of perseverance with assignments, and his disregard for rules and adults to grow into what I considered dangerous territory. Kimy was your textbook image of what an adult criminal was possibly like as a kid. When I saw that image, it didn't sit well with me. The students feared him, even older students, adults feared him and tolerated his negative attitude, and no one seemed to care that this kid was heading down a path that would lead to a violent end. I had a moral decision to make.

Do I follow the safer, easier, confrontational path that involved yelling and more aggression, allowing him to continue down the road towards possible gangs and crime? Or, do I take the tougher path of finding some good in him and nurture it through kindness, empathy, and love? Me, being the risk taker that I am and knowing that this was literally a matter of life or death for this child, decided to take on Kimy and all the good, bad, and ugly that came with him! After some self-talk of my own, I mustered up the courage to challenge him in a loving and nurturing way.

Although I knew this path was not going to be easy, I had no idea of what was going to happen. I decided that my “in” would be our birthdays which were two weeks apart. We shared the same zodiac sign which gave me an even deeper desire to bond with him and make this work. I began to see myself in this kid. According to our sign, Libras are mild-mannered until pushed, always seeking justice, are natural peacemakers, and love harmony and balance. These traits are true to me so they’ve got to be embedded in him as well, so I hoped. My task was to bring out these skills and show him how awesome and successful he can be in life if he were to shift his focus. When he found out it was my birthday he was excited to tell me that his was coming up. We had a great conversation about what both of us were doing for our birthdays and he asked me to take pictures of my event that upcoming weekend! I was thrilled! We continued having these bonding moments where we talked about any and everything. Soon he was coming into class on time, eager to tell me about everything from his birthday plans to playing basketball at the park with his brother. The relationship building and bonding techniques from CD were working and in full effect. My prejudgements of him began to change and I was beginning to see the good in him. His work habits in class changed as well. He was raising his hand to answer questions,

following directions without an attitude, and being helpful to his classmates. The true Libra was beginning to shine through!

On November 12, 2019, I wrote in my journal about how awesome Kimy's anger management was going. He was holding the door open for the class to enter and another student decided he wanted to hold it so he started an argument with Kimy and punched him in his back. I didn't see any of this but when I came to the front of the line Kimy told me what happened. I was shocked and so proud that Kimy didn't hit him back or get upset as he's done in the past, but simply told me what happened. This was a huge step for him in the right direction. I praised him for how he handled the situation and reprimanded the other student for hitting him. Day after day I watched Kimy grow into this natural leader who was becoming respectful in class, having fun with his classmates, participating in activities, and walking proudly and excitedly into the room to get to work. He would grab a book after breakfast without my prompting and was really working hard on his reading skills, independently. His self-motivation quickly spread to other students and before I knew it, I had a class of eager learners that were buddy reading, chatting, laughing, and enjoying the class climate. I was implementing CD by focusing on the behaviors I wanted to see instead of his misbehaviors. According to CD, "What you focus on, you get more of." I would encourage the great things I saw him doing and when he made a mistake, I held my composure and talked to him with care.



Kimy talked aggressively to students who did not want him to work in their group. He would often get frustrated when students whom he had bullied in the past, weren't quick to forgive and forget his past transgressions.

Nearly two weeks had passed and the friendly classroom was in full effect. On November 22, 2019, I wrote in my journal that Kimy had a great week but on this particular day he was off task quite often. At the beginning of the day he was putting his shirt over his head during whole group lessons. The day before, he got frustrated when he couldn't complete an assignment and decided to put his head down. I ignored his attempts at attention which in hindsight I should have addressed them but I was frustrated at his rebellious behaviors. I took it personal that he didn't ask for help like everyone else but instead decided to revert back to his old ways of dealing with frustration. Again, as CD advises, I focused on the behaviors I wanted to see by praising the other students for persevering and working hard on the assignment. He later came and apologized for his behavior and completed the assignment. Again, I could have been more encouraging but I didn't want him to rely on external assistance and motivation when things get tough. He had shown me in the past that he knows how to persevere but for some reason he decided not to this time. Now here we are today with another situation. When I picked the students up from gym class, the teacher told me that Kimy wasn't following directions and hitting others (the students started telling me how he was hitting them with basketballs and pushing them). I reprimanded him firmly and we went back to class where he was still pouting, turning his head, and being rebellious. I continued to ignore his disrespectful cries for attention and gave a fun assignment to end the day on. When he received his paper from the student passing them out, he put it on the other desk. This angered me to no end! How dare he? I maintained my composure because at this point I was too upset to address him. This made matters worse where he started walking around the classroom, attempting to leave out which at this point I called his mother's phone (no answer). I couldn't believe how far he was trying to

push me! I was so angry that I immediately went home to journal and relax. I was in my emotions and did not follow the CD recommendation of pivoting. Bailey states, “When we are upset, we are always focused on what we don’t want instead of what we do want. The goal is not to eliminate life’s frustrations, but to regain self-control so we can deal with them effectively. We must discipline ourselves first and our children second”(p.123). That last part should have been a plaque in my classroom because that is very hard to do yet essential in order to be effective at teaching self-discipline. Pivoting is the act of taking a deep breath (when upset or triggered) and switching my focus from the behaviors or actions I don’t want to what I do want. Then telling yourself, “I’m safe. I can handle this.” Then ask, “Do I want more of this?” If the answer is no then pivot my mind to what I do want and state it assertively. Looking back, had I known or been willing to do this, it would have helped me model self-control and teach him how to handle frustration. I realized that this is much harder than I thought and needs to be practiced daily by myself. Again, I have to discipline myself before I can properly discipline children.

While relaxing and journaling, I realized that maybe him putting the paper on the other table wasn’t an act of rebellion. As I recall, I did tell him when I picked him up from the gym that he wasn’t going to participate in Fun Friday due to his misbehavior. The activity I gave them wasn’t a part of Fun Friday but how was he to know that? Maybe, just maybe, he thought that he wasn’t supposed to get a paper because he was in trouble from gym class. I couldn’t wait to get to class on Monday to ask him why he moved the paper. When I asked him about it he told me that he thought he wasn’t supposed to participate, so he moved the paper! I was overjoyed and praised him for being accountable for his actions. I also asked him why he was having such a hard time in gym class. He explained that he didn’t like being yelled at and that the teacher

doesn't listen to him. Being a fellow Libra, I know how it feels to see injustice being committed, so I empathized with him and encouraged him to use the calm down techniques that we had learned from CD. The gym teacher is an older man and doesn't really appear to have the patience needed to implement self-control. He talks and yells at students as if they were in prison and he's the head guard. I decided to give him some tips and phrases that helped me in dealing with Kimy. Had I chosen to see the best in Kimy, as CD states, I would have asked him what the problem was and learned that his intentions weren't what I thought they were. Instead of judging him based on his actions, I should have assumed positive intent and reacted with love and concern.



Kimy approaches a group of students, particularly Leon, who was mean to him earlier, and appears to be trying to make amends with him. He was helping him answer the question, even though Leon hit him earlier.

As the year progressed, I saw some big changes in Kimy's personality, work ethic, and social skills. He would independently walk away from students that were misbehaving, stop other students from bullying, and tried to become a peacemaker amongst two groups of boys that were constantly fighting during recess. The aggression that he once showed was turning into more self-control and discipline, or so I thought. The linear progression that I was hoping for and anticipating was beginning to somehow crumble. While I was putting out other fires between

students, Kimy was starting to regress a little. Towards the end of January, I wrote about how he was watching me more and becoming a little sneaky with his misbehaviors. I thought our relationship was preventing him from acting out as some of the others were, but he was starting to test me a little more. I was being patient because I know peer pressure is strong so I gently redirected him. I also didn't want him to take my kindness for weakness. Looking back, I can see from my journal that I was reacting based on my emotions and prejudgments of his intentions. CD has a section on Problem Solving which lists Positive Intent as one of the tools. According to Bailey, "We must see children differently, especially our most challenging children, before they can act differently. offering positive intent to children fosters integration, and the willingness to reflect on and change behavior" (p. 253). This important step was oftentimes missing in my implementation, causing me to regress at times and revert to old habits instead of changing my mindset and use misbehaviors as teachable moments rather than judgement and shifting blame. I struggled the entire year with seeing the best in my students during their misbehavior and taking their actions personally, which led to more stress and inconsistent implementation of CD.

At the start of February, Kimy's desire for justice started taking a stronger role in my classroom. There was an incident in the bathroom where one boy, Aidan, pushed Hez. I asked him why and he said that Anthony told him to do it. I confronted all involved and no one would tell me the truth so I decided to punish both boys. I was very disappointed because the class was making good progress in being nice to each other. Later that day, Kimy came to me and explained that Anthony didn't tell him to push the other boy but that they had labelled the urinals, "Rich, rich, gay, gay." When Aidan was on the "gay" urinal, Anthony called him gay so he quickly moved to the next urinal, pushing Hez who was using it. I was relieved that Anthony

wasn't instigating fights but unsure why they didn't just tell me the truth when I first asked them. A few days later, when some boys tried to implement the "urinal labels," both Kimy and Anthony told them, "I don't do that anymore." I got chills when I found out!

Later that day, Kimy told me how he and Anthony stood up for Dean when he was getting bullied on the playground. We had been reading about bullying in this wonderful book called *Dare* by Erin Frankel. I thought it might be too mature for my students but I read it anyway since they were experiencing the same situations at their young ages. In my journal I wrote how he stood up for Rani, another girl in class who was getting picked on by a group of girls. Rani said something that made one of the girls cry so as I was talking to her, Kimy came over and told me what happened. I'm loving watching him become a leader, peacemaker, and problem-solver - a true Libra! I encouraged him to put more effort to stay a leader in his other classes as well. Ms. S told me that he was doing much better in her class as well! I gave him a super high-five and he was so proud to hear her discussing his accomplishments instead of yelling at him. Looking back, it's times like these that show me how effective even the little CD portions that I was trying to implement were.

As the month went on, Kimy took the title "leader" to heart. He was making a greater effort in all his other classes and the teachers were telling me how great his behavior was. I noticed in my journal that during this time, I rarely had any entries on Kimy because he was doing so well.



Kimy showed his love for helping others by modeling reading techniques to Gerry during the Reading Workshop.

As stated before, I noticed that I journaled more about the misbehaviors. On February 7, 2020, Ms. S and I decided to throw the students a party to celebrate their growth on the NWEA test. I journaled about a rough incident that happened but also inserted how great Kimy was! He started cleaning up the plates and garbage without anyone asking him. I marveled at the maturity and level of leadership he was displaying at his age. He still had his moments, like earlier he was upset about a girl in class hitting him so he wouldn't get in line when my assistant asked him to. I intervened, probably too aggressively because I was still frustrated from an earlier incident, and he eventually got in line. I saw that I really needed to reemphasize how to control their anger, even when someone else is wrong. Looking back, had I utilized the skills of composure and calming down that I was getting better with, I would have been able to control my aggression and model composure and calming down more effectively. CD talks about compassion, which is natural for me but often tested when I feel a student is knowingly being disrespectful. According

to Bailey, “On the most basic level, we must become masters of composure, able to override our triggers. Then we must suspend our judgments about others’ intentions and be willing to see those who act in hurtful ways as people calling for help” (p.255). Had I been able to do that, I would have felt more compassion for him during his cry for help, seeing him as someone who needs me versus someone who despises me so I need to defend myself.

As we entered March, what we now know will be the final month of school as we know it, I noted in my journal that Kimy was starting to act out when he didn’t get his way. I ignored him and praised the other students that were on task, reminding them they were leaders and building great lives for themselves. He eventually got himself together and started working. These steps both forward and backward would continue until the closure. On March 4, 2020, I journaled about our relationship and how far it had come.

Kimy is starting to be more disrespectful in my class now. I am continuing to be firm with him because I know he knows and has done better. I had a talk with him and he was able to explain why he had been acting out. I was able to have this conversation with him because of the relationship we have built. Looking back at the beginning of my journal, I’m remembering when there was a time we could have never had such a calm and respectful chat about his behavior. Now he’s more accountable but I need to guide him to the next step of being proactive instead of reacting and always having to apologize (even though he doesn’t).

A week later, Kimy was still acting out and getting in trouble in other classes, which caused him to bring his rage into my classroom. He got in trouble in dance class and instead of owning up to it, he came to the room angry and trying desperately to get a reaction from me. I

ignored him and kept praising the other students, which caused him to try harder to annoy me. He began picking at Hez, which is where I almost lost my composure. According to my journal, I was frustrated because I had read books, we had discussed scenarios, and talked about the importance of self-control, but it seemed like students were under some force that was stronger than what I was offering. It's like they preferred to fight and be mean than get along with each other. I was frustrated to no end. I thought he was going to be my poster child for the program! Maybe the pressure to do the right thing is becoming too much, although I didn't know that praising him and encouraging him was pressure. I also noticed that the students are so emotionally attached to their friends and cliques. I think one of his friends upset him and instead of talking about it, he allowed it to anger him and take it out on the rest of us. Looking back, I should have taken him to the side for a chat and given him more tips on not letting others get to him, but at that point I was drained. I also didn't want him to get in the habit of doing something wrong and me talking to him and that's it. Where were the consequences in this program? Now I know and agree with CD that, "What you offer to others you strengthen within yourself" (p.255). The more I would have offered him compassion, the more compassion would have formed in me. The following day was better. I talked to Kimy and he told me he was upset because someone stepped on his foot but he got in trouble. I knew it had to be something, because he had never taken his frustration to this level. I, too, would be upset if I got in trouble for something someone else did. I learned that Kimy needs more non-aggressive strategies that will teach him how to cope with things that don't go your way. His fight for injustice was getting in the way of his progress of managing his emotions. He's still young so these skills will grow. I just hate that I didn't get the chance to continue to reinforce the skills that were planted due to the coronavirus

closing our school. I really think his self-motivation needs to be nurtured, so I plan to connect with his teacher next year and share what I've learned that works for him.

As I reflect on our journey with CD and wonder if it was effective, I revisit my sub-questions for the answer:

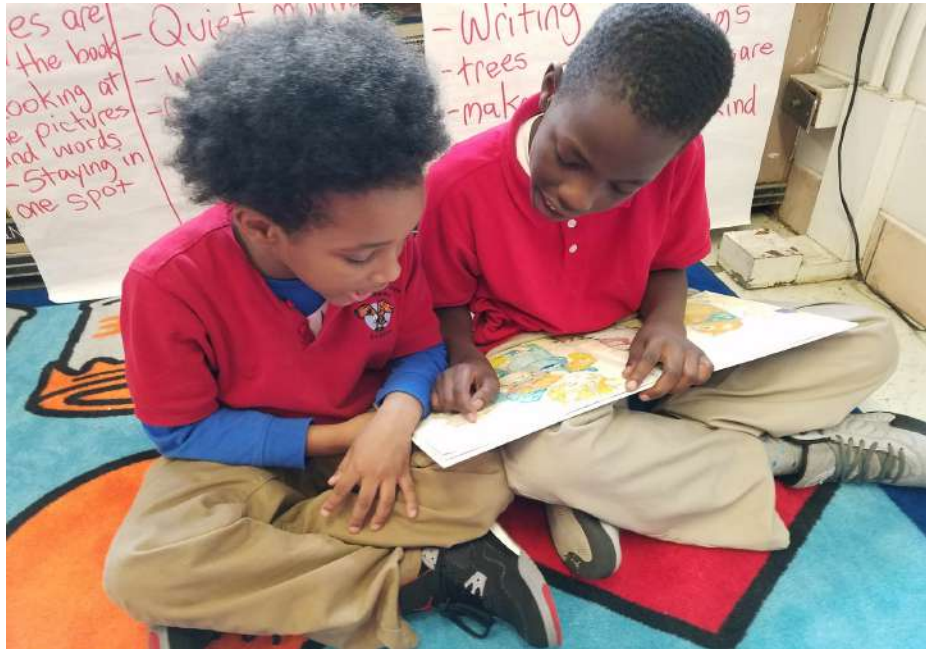
- Was Kimy's social skills and relationships with his peers an improvement?

I feel they were, because as the year progressed, he changed from being a bully to being an advocate for victims of bullying. CD helped me to build my relationship with him so we could talk comfortably about his natural ability to lead and using his courage to protect students who couldn't stand up for themselves. His peers started to look up to him and felt safe around him. He became close friends with a new student who was shy and having a hard time adjusting. CD helped me create a safe environment for him as well as the other students, to thrive.

- What happened to Kimy's academic achievement?

Through focusing on his good behaviors and encouraging him through empathy and compassion, he was able to persevere when assignments were hard and accept it as a challenge that he was going to conquer. Although I wasn't as consistent with the empathy as I should have been, the moments where I was compassionate really planted seeds of self-worth and determination in him. I watched as he would grab his sight words book and practice relentlessly without me telling him to. When he saw his test scores he realized that if he puts in the effort, he can accomplish anything! That led to him requesting higher level books, more homework, and reading during Fun Friday! His

reading skills improved, moving up 4 levels in 2 months! He became a tutor for 3 students, and independently initiated a book club with his friends!



- What happened to Kimy's relationships with me and other adults?

I feel Kimy became more respectful towards me when I changed how I reacted to his misbehaviors. I started out giving him what he was giving me, which was aggression and anger, but when I started to implement CD by maintaining my composure when he acted out; creating a safe environment through class routines that promote kindness and friendship; and building our relationship with discussions about his interests, he started to open up to me and began letting his aggression-related guard down. He realized that I cared about him and his future, so he was more willing to become the person he wanted to be.

- What happened to Kimy's relationships with peers when he was given conflict resolution methods?

Kimy began to use the calm down strategy very often and would use his words rather than his hands. This was a major improvement from the beginning of the year where he would react without thinking. He would also tell me or an adult whenever someone would bother him, but oftentimes he would talk to the student and speak up for himself. This took some time but he was becoming more capable of talking through conflicts and also taking up for other students who were being bullied. He also used his words to become a great mediator for students who were having conflicts with each other. He began to do this independently and more often than reverting to his old habits of anger and aggression. He wasn't perfect. There were some students that could push his buttons and although he wouldn't fight, he would become visibly upset and tend to act out in class. We were about to begin using the Conflict Resolution Mat when school was disrupted by the coronavirus closure. I think the seed has been planted for him and he will continue towards the path of conflict resolutions versus causing conflicts, if that skill is nurtured more next year.

I feel that I needed more time implementing the program with myself before I started with the children. The book covers a lot of topics and has a lot of neuro-scientific information which makes it difficult to implement it without feeling overwhelmed. It has activities that teachers can do with themselves to reinforce the skills we are trying to teach the students. Had I known of them instead of looking for a quick fix or reverting to old habits, I feel my progress with both students would have been more consistent and I would have seen much more growth. I

am proud of the growth they made and the strategies that I implemented, but I now know that it takes a personal mind-shift and consistent practice in each level to be effective with this program. I have faith that it works because looking at the bits of it that I implemented and seeing such growth from that, I can only imagine what changes would have occurred if I were equipped with knowledge and the skills of the entire program. Bailey states it best and this will be my mindset focus for next year:

When we lose self-control, we lose our ability to discipline ourselves and our children. For this reason, self-control and self-regulation must be our first priority as teachers. We can no longer have teachers who scream at children to be quiet. We can no longer attribute negative intent to children's behavior, yet expect them to respect each other. We can no longer bicker with faculty members while demanding children use problem-solving strategies. It's time to begin leading the way instead of simply demanding better ways from others. (p.100)

Hez's Journey

When I first met Hez, I knew from the start that he was going to be "trouble" based on him appearing apathetic towards learning and school in general, his constant need for attention, and his behavior issues from the past with his previous teacher. I remember last year that he was constantly being removed from his 1st grade classroom while kicking and screaming, almost on a daily basis. When I saw his name on my roster, I had an emotional response of, Oh no! Not him! I quickly regrouped my thoughts and took it on as the perfect test of my SEL abilities because I was not going to be defeated! I rose to the challenge and had a plan that I was not

going to prejudge him based on his past. Although he was known around the school as the tantrum kid, other teachers, administration, and the security team all felt that I would get him straight. The pressure was on, but I was much more eager to have a breakthrough with this kid to prove that CD works and also because my reputation was on the line.



Hez would constantly bully and aggravate any student that was near him in order to gain their attention and start a fight or cause them to tell me of his aggression, seeking my attention.

Within the first few weeks of school, Hezekiah was on his job that he had predictably handled well in the past, which was tormenting other students, ignoring me or talking out in my class, and not doing nor turning in any assignments. I would give him time-outs and try to talk to him after he had calmed down, refusing to send him to the office because the stakes were high at this point. I had to prove to the staff and myself that I could turn this kid around. I noticed during one of our chats that he was starting to smile and look me in the eye when talking to me, things I often begged him to do in the past. He used to refuse and be stubborn but instead of me yelling at him or bullying him into submission, I gave him more kindness and love and maintained my

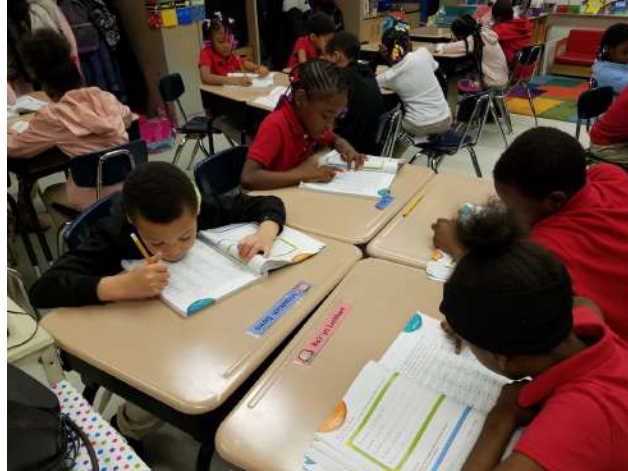
calm composure. CD teaches that when a child is acting aggressive is when more composure is needed. If I raise my voice to match the student's, it's like pouring gasoline on an open flame. Even though my normal response was to be authoritative and show him that I'm in charge, I was learning through CD that that's not the way. What children need during this stage is more compassion and love, reactions that I didn't see him getting elsewhere in the school. Was it stressful? Yes! Was it working? No, which was causing me more stress. Did I feel like giving up? Definitely, because I hadn't prepared for the current outcome and rejection that I initially received from him. Some days, he would hit a student while watching me and before I could respond, he was walking towards me, expecting "the talk." This repetitive behavior was draining and appeared to be having the reverse effect on him. He was delighting in the negative attention and the one-on-one chats from me.

Instead of openly reprimanding him and giving him the attention he desired, I decided to switch my approach. Using what he loved which was attention, I started praising the little things he was doing that were positive. Him rushing to get in line became me praising him for being eager to get in line and show the school how awesome he is in the hallway. I began thanking him for pushing his chair in and standing so quietly in line. Even though it wasn't happening, I would praise him for it so that he could make it happen. He soon started living up to the expectations and doing the tasks I was praising him for in advance! Our behavior chats began happening more but the focus was on things happening in his life, not his behavior. He started following directions almost overnight, and was becoming a model student.

As weeks passed, my model student was doing much better, but I noticed that it was always in an effort to get praise from me. If I didn't acknowledge his behavior he would tap me

or call my name to show me he was being quiet in line. I began stating that it's important to do what's right, even when no one is watching. Praise was a temporary fix to a deeper problem that I had yet to unveil. In October, I wrote in my journal how I talked with his previous teacher and learned that his mother isn't in his life and he rarely sees her. This explains the need for nurturing and constant approval. CD teaches that instead of seeing misbehavior as attention seeking, see it as connection seeking. This makes sense because his actions coincide with whenever I am focused on other students, he will act out or start playing with his pencils while staring at me for a response. I was getting frustrated because it was impossible for me to give him all the constant attention he sought and still manage to attend to the emotional needs of my other students, as well as teach! My 10-11-19 journal entry states:

He loves praise but will almost instantly revert back to bullying as soon as my back is turned. He also needs constant encouragement to finish assignments, try harder, etc. One good thing is he really likes to read to me. He is using the sounding out skills and I am encouraging him which makes him really feel proud and produces this huge smile of pride. I just need to learn how to get him self-motivated, even with harder books. He is so needy but I feel I can get him to use self-talk, calming techniques, and to stop antagonizing others - all independently.



On November 6, 2019, I wrote in my journal about how Hez was doing much better since we had been back from the teacher's strike. I would randomly catch him giving his peers good behavioral advice without me watching or intervening, he was polite when he entered the room in the morning, and he was starting to move away from Isa who was picking fights with him to provoke a reaction from him. His grandmother bought him a new coat and shoes which he came in class glowing about. Every morning he came in telling me something his grandmother did. It seemed like this break from his classmates along with this new attention he was getting from home sparked something positive in him. In small groups, I informed him that through his hard work he would be moving up to another reading group, and this was really exciting for him. He continued to do his work independently and was becoming a helpful classmate by picking up things, helping students figure out words, and sharing materials during free time, which used to be a big challenge for him. I noticed that in my journal, I hadn't written anything negative about him for almost a month! The principal even shared with me the change that she was noticing in his behavior. I was so proud of him and he was proud of himself. Then on December 4, 2019, I wrote in my journal that Hez was back to his misbehaviors. This was disheartening because he

was doing so well. I thought something was going on at home that was triggering his outbursts and playing with pencils during class. I talked with his stepdad and he told me he would deal with it but I wasn't sure if it would be helpful. I didn't feel comfortable telling them that they needed to be better role models, so I just continued to have Hez talk through his feelings and practice self-talk to calm himself down. This wasn't working and other students began acting out as well, more violently towards each other, so I didn't have the extra time I once had for Hez.

On January 16, 2020, I noted that Hez was going further backwards. Christmas break was over, and the break that brought him great results in the past did not have the same effect now. He was very unmotivated to learn, often distracted or distracting others for attention, and his behaviors were becoming more violent. He would start arguments with other students to get my attention or theirs, whether negative or positive. I began losing patience with him because I felt like his intentions were mean-spirited. He had a taste of the other side so why was he intentionally going back to his old ways? As the months progressed, he would be on this roller coaster of behaviors filled with ups and downs that eventually left me frustrated and sometimes reverting back to my old authoritative ways as well. It didn't help that my partner teacher was constantly intensifying the madness with her yelling and bullying tactics. We were all tired and feeling overwhelmed because of the testing demands and the overall negativity stemming from both classes. I wish I could say that Hez magically changed back to the sweet, caring kid that he once was, but this isn't Hollywood. Again, I really needed more practice with seeing the best when he was showing me his worst. Looking back, I realize how important this step is. According to Bailey, "Positive intent is essential for our most difficult and challenging children because they have defined themselves as "bad" or "unworthy," incorporated this into their

self-concept and live out this self-fulfilling prophecy in school.”(p.264) This is exactly what developed in Hez! He would sometimes state that he knows he’s bad and that some family members called him that, so I’m sure he accepted it and was used to it. When I started showing him love, he responded like a dying flower receiving water.



Hez shows his ability to collaborate with his peers and play a game fairly and with comradeship.

Although he didn’t totally change, he did show great improvements through the two months leading up to the school closure in mid-March. I feel the seeds of empathy, kindness, and compassion that I planted earlier in the year were starting to take root and will continue to grow in him. He wasn’t perfect, but he was making consistent efforts to be a better person. I recall one day in February someone hit him in the bathroom and instead of him hitting back, he came out and told me! This was a huge breakthrough for Hez because I had seen him become very aggressive and physical with other students on numerous occasions. This gave me hope that he will continue to grow and become a better student as he is guided in the right direction.

Looking back on our journey with CD as I determine its effectiveness with Hez, I revisit my sub-questions for the answer:

- Was Hez's social skills and relationships with his peers an improvement?



I feel Hez made great improvements in these areas due to him starting the year off with a strong disregard for learning, friends, and school in general. He was seeking attention, whether negative or positive, which caused his peers to dislike him. CD teaches that students are seeking connection, not attention, which I tried to keep in mind while helping him work through his issues. Hez had a rollercoaster of emotions, social highs and lows, and he even developed some bonds with two students, so this is a great improvement from the beginning of the year. He would enter the classroom saying, “Good morning” to everyone by name (some said it back and some didn’t, but it didn’t seem to bother him either way). He could also be the first person to help another student if they spilled something, couldn’t find the page number, or was talking in line. Although this behavior would change on a weekly basis sometimes, I feel the seeds were planted and he was starting to feel wanted in the classroom. His bullying tactics had isolated him from his peers, but he eventually began to break down some of those walls through his kind acts and words.

- What happened to Hez's academic achievement?

As with Kimy, Hez was willing and able to persevere through tough assignments due to encouragement, patience, and praise for hard work. Although he didn't make as strong gains like Kimy did, he was able to maintain a grade level average and move up two reading levels. His achievement could have been greater if his motivation and positive behaviors were more consistent. He lost a lot of independent work time due to acting out when assignments were tough, not managing his emotions when someone was bothering him, and many times he would start bothering other students out of rebellion and jealousy. For instance, when he got a lower score than a girl at his table, he wrote on her paper and called her a mean name. This setback caused him to remain upset the rest of the day and miss out on classwork and independent reading time that he could not afford to miss. His grades improved but not as much as they could have had he been more focused and able to manage his emotions on a daily basis.

- What happened to Hez's relationships with me and other adults?

Hez's relationship with me began to grow gradually in the beginning and I feel the pace increased as he began to trust me more. Through showing him empathy, maintaining my composure when he was making bad behavioral choices, and encouraging him with praise for the small accomplishments he was making, he saw me more as a nurturer and not another adult that is yelling at or controlling him. His behavior with other adults improved as well. Having the principal pull me to the side to inform me of how proud she was of his growth was extraordinary for him and myself because it helped me stay on task during difficult times. I wasn't seeing the big picture of how far he had come until someone from the outside looked in and informed me of what they saw. He still has a

long road ahead because I feel his maturity level needs to grow to the level of the issues he's facing at home, which isn't fair but it's his reality. I truly hope he doesn't fall under pressure but rises above the stereotypes and names being called and placed on him by his family and peers. I will reach out to the adults in his life and implore them to continue to encourage him and model what they want to see.

- What happened to Hez's relationships with his peers when given conflict resolution methods?

Hez's peer relationships didn't really improve because he began regressing to bullying quite often when he didn't get his way. He would try to talk to the students and apologize for his behaviors but after so many repeat offenses, the students didn't believe him nor did they want to associate with him. He would often respond with more bullying which caused his peers to stay away from him even more. Kimy tried to intervene a few times, but Hez was taking his frustration out on him and would be mean and aggressive so Kimy would often give up and walk away. When I would intervene with talks he would regress as well and say he didn't care or he didn't like school anymore. I would try to talk him through his emotions and give him time to calm down but his reaction wasn't consistent. Some days he would apologize and other days he would be stubborn and ignore me. It was hard to remember CD and offer more love during these times because they were becoming more frequent. I couldn't spend the large amount of time he needed because I had other students that needed me as well. I was hoping for more independence in him where he wasn't so needy, but it didn't come. I talked to his family about his behavior,

but they didn't understand his emotional needs. I will continue to reach out to him and offer advice to his next teachers that will hopefully motivate him to stay on the right path.



Overall, I feel the journey was well worth it because I saw some evident growth in many of my students' character. Both Kimy and Hez have made strong growth despite the inconsistencies and challenges they faced. Kimy has come a long way from the defiant disrespectful student to a natural leader who, although he was still struggling with the "yelling teacher" next door, has started to really blossom in being a mediator, peacemaker, and putting forth great effort in his

classwork as well. Hez also has grown in his decision-making skills and made a significant change in how he treats others. The principal complimented me for the change she's seeing in Hezekiah which was motivating and inspiring for me. I feel they have given me more patience and wisdom in dealing with students with trauma and emotional problems.

Conscious Discipline in a Challenging Environment

Throughout this research project, there were many limitations within our class, grade level, school, and community. Since our class had students that were consistently late, many of them were not able to participate in the "I Love You" rituals that were used to help students bond and develop a sense of community inside our classroom. This often caused the progress we were

making towards bonding to move at a slower pace and sometimes come to a complete halt because the students were adapting the misbehaviors of the few students who missed the lessons instead of teaching and showing those students their developing social skills. There was also a divide in the class that was beginning to form, causing students to form cliques and disassociate themselves from other students, which led to isolation and bullying.

Journal entries:

1-30-20: “These students are forming little cliques and being mean to each other. The girls are getting just as mean as the boys.”

2-6-20: “As the class went on, the girls were sneakily being mean to each other. I think the bucket filling board will help them. We’ll see how the rest of the day goes.”

3-11-20: “It seems like these students are under some force that is stronger than what I am offering. It’s like they’d prefer to fight and be mean that get along with each other. I’ve never seen this in kids this young.”

Another challenge that formed early on and probably had some effect on the social skills development of the second class was the hesitation in switching classes. Since we didn’t start departmentalizing our classes until the 4th week of school, I feel the students in the other class saw me as the substitute teacher instead of their regular teacher. They eventually got over that but I feel valuable time was lost in building those strong relationships from the beginning.

I had placed reminders around the room for me to use during these tough times like Q-Tip: quit taking it personal, and breathe before responding, which I had gotten pretty good at,

but there were many times that I had to apologize to students and remind them that I am learning as well. This is difficult to do because we as teachers are expected to be perfect at everything. I was hard on myself, and at times I felt like it was impossible to give them love when they are cursing, fighting, or being blatantly disrespectful to me and other adults. My upbringing was so different than theirs, which also played a part in how I would respond to my students. I was taught to respect adults, don't talk back, and do what you are told to do without questions or an attitude so it was hard for me to keep calm when I witnessed the level of disrespect these students had. I worked hard on maintaining self-control and refrained from yelling or reprimanding the students with the same level of disrespect they were giving me. It worked well for the most part, but there were a couple instances where I felt the student was going too far and taking my kindness and calmness for weakness, so I reverted back to yelling or open rebuke. I quickly realized and agreed with the Conscious Discipline book that when the student is acting out the most is when they need more love and empathy, not anger and frustration. I also learned to be patient with myself and my students because this growth that I sought for us will take time, way more time, than I realized and it's okay. As long as the seeds are planted, the skills will grow.

The other challenge was our school wide behavior plan. We are still growing as a school and trying to make a comeback from the various changes we've endured including multiple shifts in leadership, inconsistent behavior plans, and teachers feeling helpless and unsupported. Our school, like many others, uses a rewards/punishment system that needs tweaking. It is the opposite of what I'm trying to do, which is to instill social skills that are prompted innately and independently by the students. Now I know this is a big task, but I feel the school and

community is promoting a system that does not work and is unrealistic in the real world. For instance, we have a school store where students earn “money” for such things as good behavior and attendance, and they can use that money to purchase items in the store. Although it is admirable to make good choices and to come to school regularly, the students are getting the false sense that they should be paid for doing the right thing. This is a challenge because Conscious Discipline teaches that students need to develop skills such as empathy and compassion, so they will make good choices innately, which will build good character, morals, and other life-long skills that will help them as they become adults. With the school store, students lost sight of the goal of the store, which was to promote good behavior, and only saw the need for getting money as their goal. For example, I wrote in my journal about how the students were complaining about their BEMA bucks being stolen and other students’ older siblings were stealing them from their peers and teachers, then giving them to my students. They knew they hadn’t earned them but they did not care nor have empathy for the students who had earned them but had none to spend due to theft. A few of the accused students in my class were questioned and they lied about stealing them, claiming they found them or that another teacher gave them to them. This was very disheartening to watch because it was teaching a horrible lesson in lack of morals and ethics. Since there was no proof of the theft, it appeared that doing good was more of a punishment and that bad choices were being rewarded. I definitely did not want this lesson being taught so I stopped my students from participating in the school store and encouraged them to make good choices so that they would become great adults.

The other reward system was based on behaviors in the hallway. For example, I noted in my journal on January 13th that the class as a whole was doing better in the hallway based on the

“Eagles” (a reward given to a class by either security or another teacher in the hallway) they had accumulated so far in the month. There is a bulletin board in the hallway where each class posts their Eagles and the class with the most at the end of the month wins a prize. Although this incentive was effective in that it kept down a lot of disruption during hallway transitions, it missed the mark with building SEL innately and holding students accountable for their actions. Later in the week I noted that Athan, an ordinarily well-behaved student, was starting to rely more on being paid for good behavior and that his actions were starting to change for the worse. For instance, he was given the class job of being the messenger for the week. He walked with a student to the office for an early dismissal and when he returned he told me how he’d walked down the hall without running and was quiet. I thanked him for being responsible in the hall. The next day, he took a message to the office for me and returned, telling me again how quiet he was in the hallway. I thanked him but this time his demeanor seemed sad and disappointed. I asked him what was wrong and he stated, “I walked to the office quietly two times and Mrs. Bradley (the security guard who sits in the hallway near the office and gives the most Eagles since she sees all the classes in the hallway throughout the day) didn’t give me an Eagle.” I explained that him walking quietly down the hallway is a great thing that shows he’s a mature person that can make good choices by himself, etc. He still wanted the Eagle though and seemed to forget the importance of being respectful to other classes and doing the right thing because it’s the right thing versus for pay. I gave him a BEMA buck so that he wouldn’t feel like what he was doing was for naught, but it was disheartening to see that he was more excited about getting paid for his good deeds than he was about the lessons in good character that he was learning and developing. After that, I watched him more closely in class and he seemed to start doing things

in line that he wasn't doing before like swinging his arms and talking. I think the Eagles and BEMA bucks had a reverse effect on the students who didn't need the incentives. They soon began to act out or rebel which made me wonder if the reward systems we were putting in place was indeed bringing out the worst in people, and if so, why? Not only were students feeling the need to get paid for their good deeds, they also began taking BEMA bucks from each other. This led to enhancing worse behaviors like stealing money, deception, and greed.

Students were not being accountable for their behaviors and only began making good choices in public where they thought they would get paid for it. This counterproductive behavior deterred the students from experiencing the joy and pride that making good choices innately brings. Their moral character wasn't changing, only their greed and desire for money at any cost. This path of course will lead them to make immoral choices as they get older and the seeds of compassion are overshadowed by the weeds of greed due to a temporary reward of an item at the school store.

Since I know that it truly takes a village to raise a child, I elicited the help of the other 2nd grade teacher to try to implement some of the techniques in her classroom. This was our first year working together and I had previously heard that she was a consistent yeller. I was not prepared for what was to come. I could hear her yelling through the cement walls of my classroom, screaming at students in the hallway, and using aggression as her first and sometimes only line of defense. I talked to her and offered her some readings from the book, but she told me she didn't need them. I was considering asking to stop the departmentalization of our grade band because I didn't think I'd be able to work with her. Because my students went to her for math and science, I would spend the first 5-10 minutes of class trying to calm them down, build their

spirit back up, and reaffirm our classroom norms in order to teach them. She explained that she was high-strung and could not work in a noisy environment but me, coming from Kindergarten, was just the opposite. Productive noise is a goal because it breeds collaboration, participation, and problem-solving skills which is what our students really needed. She eventually began seeking advice and really trying to control her temper which was awesome. She even excitedly joined me for the Conscious Discipline Conference which gave me hope that she would get better and start putting in the effort to control her emotions. We both have work to do, but knowing that we can count on each other and we are both willing to evaluate ourselves and apply the skills we are learning brings me joy.

Conclusion

I have learned that all the clichés are true: Rome wasn't built in a day; it takes a village to raise a child; lead by example; and, in Kimy's case, you can't judge a book by its cover. Had I judged him based on his tough exterior, past school experiences, and his original aggressive nature, I would not have seen the gentle and compassionate peacemaker that was at his core. I can go on and on but I realized that ultimately, I need to be committed to being the change that I want to see in the world. I started with the strong desire to save my students from themselves and help shape them into productive well-rounded citizens that society has sort of given up on. In order to truly be committed to this effort, I have to first start with me. I have to be willing to see myself – the good, bad, and the ugly, and work on aligning those bad and ugly parts with what I'm trying to teach and instill in my students. I know I'm not perfect but I thought I had a better handle on my emotions so I figured this task of shaping and molding my students wouldn't be

too hard. I was willing to teach from the text but didn't take into account that I am truly teaching from my life. In this process I learned that you truly have to practice what you preach, not just during class or in a mini-lesson but throughout the day, every day. In my personal life, when students aren't around, when stuck in traffic, when someone steps on your toe, all these daily occurrences where you can lose self-control need to be addressed and managed so that you can effectively model self-control for your students. Once you become consistent with managing your emotions, not taking things personal, calming yourself down before you react, you won't be so quick to lose control when a student is going too far or pushing the wrong buttons. The practice of self-discipline during rush hour traffic or the long line at the grocery store will better prepare you for your lessons, modeling, and training with your students. I can't tell them one thing but then do another or the opposite in my life. I can't say that bullying is wrong but when they are being disruptive I yell at them, because that is contradictory and unfair. Students truly pick up on those small things that we don't realize we do.

I also learned that there is no time frame nor linear growth pattern to this process. People learn at different paces, have different levels of growth, take two steps forward then three steps backward, so we have to be patient with ourselves and each other during this beautiful gift we call life. This is why developing relationships with students is by far the most important step in this process. I cannot stress this point enough because had I not developed the relationships with my students, those times when I made mistakes would have caused me to lose my students' respect and their willingness to participate in their growth. It would have been a much tougher road to teach them and my ultimate goal of shaping their character would have been seen as

inauthentic and hypocritical which would have caused a loss of respect that could have been unrepairable.

Going forward, I will keep track of how often I chat with students outside of class early on so that I can ensure I am building relationships with each student. I will also begin SEL earlier next year and have a weekly focus skill so that we learn about them early and spend the rest of the year reinforcing and applying the skill. Again, we didn't start departmentalizing our classes until the 4th week of school, which caused the students to view us as the substitute teacher and therefore not trusting us to build relationships with them. This caused us to have to spend more time working on relationship building, time we did not have, which made it difficult to reach some of the students who needed more lessons and practice. I will emphasize the teacher-student partnership early on and with both classes as well so that students understand that we are a family and we are learning together. I will also seek out proactive techniques and solutions to common problems and traumas so that I am better prepared to handle them when they arise versus trying to figure out what to do after the problem has surfaced.

Some areas that I feel need further inquiry are how to balance the school environment with the goals of our classroom; how to get teachers motivated to evaluate and work on changing themselves in order to help our students more effectively; and how do we get parents involved in assisting at home with the character development of their child? I understand the concept behind the school store and what its intentions are, which is to promote good behavior, but there has to be a balance of how much intrinsic over extrinsic motivation is needed to be effective long term. If our goal is to develop well-rounded individuals, then our policy of payment for good behavior is a temporary fix to a life-long problem. We have to figure out how to motivate students to do

the right thing when nobody's watching. I know this is a hard task, but it is necessary, especially in the scope of what students are doing now in order to get money for the store. Some extrinsic motivation is definitely needed for some students, but it shouldn't be the only motivation nor the first line of action. We, as a school, need to develop some type of scale or point system that includes rewarding innate character development and intrinsic motivation. We need to paint the big beautiful picture for students that doing the right thing because it's the right thing is important, admirable, and a life skill that is valuable in the real world.

Another area for further inquiry is getting teachers onboard with taking the necessary steps to become a true agent of change. I learned through this experience that this is a hard but necessary task which is why I feel teachers might not be committed to doing all it entails. As I mentioned earlier, the inconsistencies of the taught and modeled lessons of CD possibly slowed the students' growth down. They needed more prolonged exposure and practice of the skills and consistency in the lessons for them to become a part of their daily routine and mindset. During the grade-level meetings and the professional learning committee meetings, I felt my colleagues were looking for a quicker fix like I initially was looking for. It was overwhelming for me when I realized that there was no easy cookie-cutter solution to this problem and until we stop with the norm and actually take an in-depth look at what we're doing and how it's affecting our students, we won't be able to effectively help them long term. Knowing this, I don't know if more colleagues will join the group that I am trying to start at my school, which will allow us to learn and grow together, hold each other accountable, be vulnerable and critical in our teaching practice, and practice what we want to teach in our classrooms. I was able to get four of my colleagues to go to the Conscious Discipline seminar, but do they think it stops there? Do they

realize the work they will have to do on themselves to be the true agents of change that our students desperately need to see? Are they prepared for the time and relentless effort it will take both inside and outside of the classroom?

The last inquiry I feel needs more development is getting our parents involved in this process of character development. The students need consistency both at home and school in order to be motivated to change. The level of participation that we have is depressing, so I don't know how we would motivate parents to change their bad habits, model temperament, and work with molding their children in ways and behaviors that many of them do not possess themselves. Parents sometimes do not realize that they are their child's first teacher, and to some this might not be a comfortable fit. It's easy to tell children to do the right thing, but they don't do as we say, they do what we do and it's difficult to change bad habits, especially in certain environments that do not fit well with that change. I wonder how committed the parents will be during the tough times and how willing they will be to partner with their child's teacher as agents of change together.

Policy Recommendations

Me: As a teacher, I feel I need to evaluate myself to determine which skills I have and which skills need improvement in order to model them for my students. Once that has taken place, I will be more mindful of my weaknesses and be able to work on them as I work with my students. I will also begin the year with a strategic SEL plan in mind based on my findings this year. Classroom management hasn't been a problem for me, but I want to take it a step further with adding character development classes at the start of the year. Being strategic and intentional on

building character and the importance of it from the start will help lay a foundation of high expectations, pride in accomplishments, and leadership skills. It's easy to neglect the areas that we assume children should already know, so I will make sure that I put morals and values at the forefront of learning so that students know what is expected of them and that it is valuable in life.

Teachers: I feel teachers should be required to take a course in social-emotional learning so that they have some form of background knowledge on the issues they will have to face with their students. Counselor is not our title but we are expected to be able to assist our students with their emotions, so we should definitely be equipped with the know-how to do so. I also feel teachers should collaborate with their grade band teachers on a proactive approach to dealing with the known issues that occur year after year. There should be time devoted either during grade level meetings or possibly after school, where teachers discuss their needs and concerns with a liaison that is connected to CASEL - The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, and can get them immediate feedback, or they have a curriculum that has answers and immediate actions to take. The counselor, Dean of Students, or even a fellow teacher should have resources and knowledge in SEL that is age and grade-level appropriate, along with some form of follow-up with the teacher and student if necessary, so that problems are solved and not recurrent.

District: I feel CPS needs to equip new teachers with SEL courses and resources prior to entering the classroom. More focus needs to be on SEL implementation as a proactive measure and not reactive nor punitive. The district needs to be more knowledgeable about the various communities of the schools, the dilemmas and issues they face, and come up with proactive measures to build up the communities that involve the students and possibly their families.

Teaching students to serve their communities through volunteer programs, service learning, and partnering with organizations that provide counseling and other services that the families of certain neighborhoods need but cannot afford. I know there are some good programs in place but having more follow-up check ins and having neighborhood meetings where community members can voice their needs instead of the powers that be guessing and assuming, would be helpful. Showing that you care and not just during election time, but being a visible presence in these areas, not as a judge but as a partner, will get them to want to promote change and care about their neighborhood which will trickle down to the students. It really does take a village to raise a child.

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