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Getting Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable: Developing Students' Interpersonal Skills

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### Abstract

Interpersonal skills are an imperative part of a child's development. Strategies can be developed by educators to help students build these skills in a productive and positive manner. Based on an analysis of the program director and teacher interview data, students' interpersonal skills can be enhanced by creating Social Development lessons, creating an interactive learning environment, and exemplifying the importance of properly developed communication skills. It is important for educators to understand how to help their students find the right way to convey their emotions. It is not our job, as teachers, to solve the issue for the students, but, instead, we must guide them to a better understanding of how to reach a solution. By developing these interpersonal skills, students can perform better in social situations, as well as in an academic environment.

### Getting Comfortable With Being Uncomfortable: How to Develop Students' Interpersonal Skills

Whenever my brother and I got into a fight or disagreement, my parents rarely solved the issue for us, but instead used this as an opportunity to teach us how to communicate why we were frustrated with each other. They acted as mediators and made sure we came out of the fight with a better understanding of what the real issue was and how we could move on from it. I remember being so incredibly frustrated with my parents because all I wanted was a quick fix. However, we all know it is not that easy.

My brother is two years younger, so we were together a lot of the time growing up. We spent a lot of time playing outside, playing sports, or playing on his (our) gameboy. For the most part we got along pretty well, but also with how much time we spent together, fighting was inevitable. And when we fought, we fought hard. He would punch me, I would push back harder. We were relentless bicker-ers. I would take his words very seriously, which made the whole situation escalate further than it should have. There was a particular incident when we were between the ages of five and seven when my brother and I were brushing our teeth before bed and we started fighting over the space in front of the sink. At the time I was bigger than him and did not fully understand my strength. He shoved me, but this time when I pushed him back, he fell backwards and hit his head hard on the bathtub. He started to cry, and I stood there frozen with fear that I just seriously hurt my little brother who I cared for immensely. My dad came upstairs and calmed my brother down. Luckily nothing besides a bump on the head happened to him. After assessing his head, he sat both of us down and did two things with us. The first was to have me and my brother apologize to each other about not sharing the space and then getting angry with one another. The second, and the thing that I still carry with me to this day, was to

acknowledge what made us angry and how we can reach an agreement so that situation does not happen again. It took us a little bit to figure something out, but eventually we thought it be best to take turns brushing our teeth until we figured out how to do it in harmony.

My parents became very proactive in monitoring our fights or outbursts. They saw how often the same fights were occurring, how we each were reacting and how nothing was getting solved so instead of just telling us how to stop and move on, they would sit there with us to help get to the bottom of everything. At the time, I did not understand the importance of what they were doing. I just wanted to be told I was not the one in fault and move on with my day. Now I understand how they were trying to build mine and my brothers' interpersonal skills and I am so grateful for that. It could not have been easy to sit with two crying children and try and make us understand what was going on.

Now, being an adult and being in more professional settings, I feel I have an easier time and sense of communicating when issues or disputes arise because of what my parents were able to teach me. I also find myself using these tactics I was taught by parents at my job almost on a daily basis. I currently work in an after school care program with students ranging from ages five years to twelve years. Almost everyday I will have students walking up to me recounting an event that just transpired between a few students and someone is usually crying. There was one instance that greatly stood out to me. Two young boys, Jeff and Caden<sup>1</sup>, were playing on the field, each with a basketball in hand. I turned my back to check on other students and no more than two minutes later I heard intense, frustrated yelling from one of the boys. I walked over to see what was going on; Jeff was incredibly upset because he wanted the ball that Caden had. Jeff

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<sup>1</sup>Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people, places and organizations.

was in an uproar and would not quiet down to listen to what I had to say. When I turned to Caden to have him relay the situation to me, he merely said, "Well he wants the ball that I have, but it's basically the same as his so I don't see why we need to switch". Jeff had become upset because the ball that Caden was using meant a great deal to him, but Jeff could not effectively communicate that to Caden. The only way Jeff understood how to deal with those emotions was to throw a fit until he got what he wanted and then his mood turned back to normal and happy.

After seeing that event transpire, I have been keeping a closer eye on Jeff and have been trying to help him understand why he is mad and how we can come to a mutual agreement to solve the problem. He is in after school care with me almost everyday, so it gives us a good opportunity to work with one another and build his skills. His outbursts are not as intense and he is showing a desire to listen to what others have to say. When I work with him, my main goal is to maintain a calm environment and open line of communication which has proven to be very helpful in his developing social skills. It has only been a few weeks, but I can already see some improvement in his communication with both the other students and his teachers.

### **Literature Synthesis and Integration**

There are many occasions throughout the school day where students encounter a conflict of some sort. With that being said, students are not being taught effective ways to handle conflict or navigate through a heated conversation in order to produce a positive outcome. Instead, students result too aggressive or antisocial behavior which can, in turn, affect their academic performance. With a much higher focus centered around academics, this leaves little room for teachers to incorporate any form of training to students regarding positives ways to develop these skills.

**What is the issue?**

The development of students' interpersonal skills is an under acknowledged portion of our educational system. There is a high focus on the students' academic performance with a lack in teaching the students proper communication skills, social skills and emotional skills. It is said that "students who fail to meet teacher expectations of social behavior are at increased risk for unfavorable school outcomes" (Meier, DiPerna & Oster, 2006, p. 2). These outcomes relate to a decline in academic performance, poor interactions with teachers and peers, and can result in high rates of disciplinary problems (Meier et. al., 2006, p.2). While it is acknowledged that having developed interpersonal skills is greatly beneficial to one's academic success, there is very minimal teaching of these skills within the classroom. In addition, there is unclear communication from the teacher regarding proper behavior expected in the classroom. Students who lack properly developed interpersonal skills can create negative learning environments for both themselves and those around them. It was discussed how some skills act as building blocks for skills that are to be developed later on in life (Jones, Barnes, Bailey & Doolittle, 2017). Students are not being taught necessary skills at the correct time during their development which leads to poorly developed skills in the future.

**Why is it an issue?**

Students are not properly exercising their interpersonal skills which result in an underdeveloped social competency and a decrease in academic performance. These social skills are not prioritized to be taught in school, thus, resulting in the lack of proper development of these skills. Wentzel (1993) compared the relationship between students' social and academic behavior with their academic outcome. This comparison was able to show that students with higher developed social skills generally scored better on standardized tests and acquired higher

grades in their classes or schoolwork (Meier et al., 2006). By continuing to neglect the teaching of these important skills within the classroom, students are continuously showing poor performance in both an academic and social setting.

Malecki and Elliot (as cited in Meier et al., 2006) built off Wentzel's findings by using standardized measures to identify the relationship between academic outcomes and social behaviors of students. They also "collected data at two different points in time to explore the longitudinal relationship between social behaviors at Time 1 and academic outcomes at Time 2" (Meier et al., 2006, p. 3). After using regression analysis, their test results concluded that social skills were a significant predictor of academic competence. Further, it is stated that, "social and interpersonal skills help children and adolescents accurately interpret other people's behaviors, effectively navigate social situations, and interact positively with peers and adults" (Jones, et al., 2017). It is greatly stressed that in order for children to thrive socially, it is important for them to gain the knowledge of understanding how to regulate their emotions. There are developmental theories that suggest certain skills help students to "meet the demands of a particular developmental stage and/or setting" (Jones et al., 2017, p. 5).

It is also stressed that a key component in child development is to understand their emotions and the emotions of others. This development should take place in middle childhood and helps them to better understand more complex emotions once they proceed out of middle childhood (Jones et al., 2017).

### **What should be done?**

A main component of the proper development of these skills is to have students learn to recognize, express and handle their emotions. In order for students to properly develop their interpersonal skills, it is important for teachers to understand the necessary skills that should be



learned at specific developmental stages. By acknowledging the lack of social, behavioral, and interpersonal skills that are not being taught in schools, it is important for teachers to recognize that and incorporate ways in which they can help their students develop these skills.

In some schools, there has been the incorporation of social and emotional learning (SEL) to help students build these skills (Jones et al., 2017). After reviewing different SEL programs, it is stated that “students who participated in SEL programs had significantly better outcomes than students who did not” (Jones et al., 2017, p. 5). By understanding the positive outcomes SEL programs have had, it would be beneficial for other schools to incorporate similar programs to help their student development.

In addition to SEL programs, schools should continue to emphasize the importance of their students development by implementing similar programs of processes used within the programs and bring them into the classroom. By understanding the specific needs of the school's student body, programs can be created to help better serve the students that have shown signs of underdeveloped social, behavioral, or interpersonal skills. Expressed in *Image 1* are eleven different SEL interventions that aim to help students in different aspects of social and emotional aspects.

Program		Targets and Measured Outcomes				
		Cognitive	Social	Emotional	Academic	Behavioral
Fast Track	Targets	✓	✓	✓		
	Outcomes	✓	✓			✓
PATHS	Targets	✓	✓	✓		
	Outcomes		✓		✓	✓
MindUP	Targets	✓	✓			
	Outcomes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
RULER	Targets			✓		
	Outcomes			✓		
4Rs	Targets	✓	✓			
	Outcomes	✓	✓		✓	✓
Positive Action	Targets	✓	✓			
	Outcomes			✓	✓	✓
Second Step	Targets	✓	✓	✓		
	Outcomes	✓	✓	✓		✓
Responsive Classroom	Targets		✓			
	Outcomes				✓	
Making Choices	Targets		✓			
	Outcomes	✓	✓			✓
Good Behavior Game	Targets		✓			
	Outcomes		✓			✓

*Image 1.* Shows the programs provided and the targets and measured outcomes.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of students' interpersonal skills is proven to be an underdeveloped area of our education system. Direct correlation has been made regarding students' poor academic performance and antisocial behavior. By understanding the effects of these underdeveloped skills, it is clear that more action needs to be taken to better serve these students that are not being taught appropriate ways to develop these skills. While understanding the importance of academic growth, the development of students' interpersonal skills is of equal

importance. In addition, educators must take greater action to ensure their students are developing the correct skills that can greatly benefit them later on in life.

### **Method**

The researcher investigated how students developed their interpersonal skills during their time at school. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researcher used what she has learned to formulate an action that responded to the focus issue in a way that inspired, informed, or involved the students, teachers and parents.

### **Context**

This research took place at Northridge Community School<sup>2</sup> which is located in Aptos, Ca. Aptos is part of Santa Cruz County, CA and is comprised of many small communities. This school is located in a predominantly residential area with some surrounding businesses. A community college is located about one mile away from Northridge Community School. The school entrance is on a main road, but the school itself is surrounded by residential housing and a park with both a basketball court and tennis courts. The school is comprised of four separate buildings; the main office, one toddler building, and two upper elementary buildings. There are playgrounds equipped for each age group located in the designated areas and have boundaries that students cannot cross unless given permission to by an adult. The outside grounds are kept in great shape and provide a variety of ways the students can play or explore. The student body is primarily White. Also included are Hispanic and African Americans. The students' age ranges

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people, places and organizations.

from three years old to twelve years old.

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

Two teachers were invited to participate in this study. This group of prospective participants were invited to participate due to their relevant experience and knowledge regarding the students and their typical behavioral habits or styles during school hours.

**Jasmine Reyes.** Jasmine started her teaching career in 2004 when she received her Multiple Subject Teaching Credential. She taught in the public school system for a few years. She received her AMI Montessori Teaching Credential in 2015. She has been in the classroom environment for over 14 years. The last 6 years Jasmine has been a head teacher in a second grade classroom at Northridge Community School. She has always wanted to work with children and knew from a young age that she enjoyed teaching others. Jasmine loves to learn and feels excited to share that with the young minds of children.

**Nicholas Kent.** He has worked with children since 1982. More as a recreation specialist, sports coach, recreation coordinator, manager, supervisor and teaching extra-curricular activities that includes, cooking, woodcrafts, art, hiking clubs, and after school recreation/care. He worked for 17 years for the City of Waterville, Parks and Recreation, and developed many programs to prevent children from entering gangs (P.R.I.D.E.) and he went to several different schools to teach gang intervention to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders. He developed a successful graffiti abatement program that was implemented by the City of Watsonville and is currently still in place. Nicholas also co-founded a non-profit group called Juventud Latina to teach traditional Mexican dances and music. Through local parishes have taught and teach many numerous religious classes to children, teens and adults. Nicholas has been at Northridge Community School for 20 years and

is currently the Manager for the after school program/enrichment programs and also the Summer Program Manager.

### **Researcher**

I believe it is important for young children to develop their interpersonal skills at a young age. These skills are important to develop because of how it promotes a healthy development of one's personal relationships, helps people to perform better academically or in their career, and can create a better understanding of how to resolve issues. By developing these skills, children can understand how important interactions between peers are and how, by understanding and developing your own skills, you can help others to further progress their own development of their interpersonal skills. In living in such a technology based era, the importance of both human interaction and the development of our interpersonal skills have begun to slip causing younger and younger generations to misunderstand the importance of developing these skills. By implementing positive ways to develop students' interpersonal during time spent in the classroom, students can make this part of their everyday life.

For the past seven years I have worked with children from the ages eighteen months to fourteen years. I have babysat intermittently throughout these seven years, however, majority of this time has been spent in a classroom working either as a teacher aide or gaining hours for my service learning classes. I currently work at a private elementary school in their after school care program and substitute teach when needed. I am directly involved with the students everyday. My main job is to ensure the students' safety and settle any disputes between the students. When I see students arguing with one another, I sit them down and discuss the issue at hand and how we can all agree upon a mutual solution. I make it a priority to make sure the students understand

why it is they are upset and how to avoid the situation in the future.

Everyday I see these students interact with one another and almost everyday I am helping them to settle their arguments. I see patterns in behavior and learn how to best correct the negative behavior. Some situations are much more severe than others which takes more time to resolve the issue. However, it is worth it once you start seeing a breakthrough with the students and the way they interact with one another.

I feel that what sets my biases apart from others is the fact that my training in this field has been very diverse. I have been fortunate enough to have worked in different types of schools with a wide range of teaching styles. I have been able to see both positive and negative effects of certain schools and teaching styles which have helped mold my particular teaching techniques and views.

Educationally speaking, I grew up going to public schools. From my public high school I went straight to a community college then transferred to a four year university. With this background, I have been given first-hand knowledge of a traditional school and its philosophy. I was able to see how being taught interpersonal skills was not a priority and, therefore, had to learn from outside sources. From here I am able to take this knowledge and apply it to the other teaching styles and philosophies in the hopes to create effective strategies to strengthen students' interpersonal skills.

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

1. Do you have any major concerns when it comes to the development of students' interpersonal skills?
2. What is currently being done to improve students' interpersonal skills? -By whom - and do

you think this is good, bad, or indifferent? Why?

3. What do you think should be done about creating ways to positively develop students' interpersonal skills?

4. Have you discovered any positive techniques in facilitating the progression of students' interpersonal skills?

5. What do you think are the obstacles to changing a normal day in the classroom to better help stimulate students' interpersonal skills?

6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about students in the classroom in relation to the development of students' interpersonal skills?

### **Procedure**

The first part of the data collection was spent observing in the classroom for one and a half hours. During this time the researcher observed the class for thirty minutes without writing or taking any form of notes. The main point was to look for who interacts well, who had negative interactions with either their peers or teachers, and how those negative interactions were handled.

After the first thirty minutes the researcher began recording anything and everything they saw relating to the participants' development features of their interpersonal skills. While observing and taking notes, the most important part was to answer these four main questions:

1. **What** is triggering the student to react in either a positive or negative way toward their peer or teacher?
2. **Who** is triggering the student to react in either a positive or negative way?

3. **How** is the student responding to the reactions of either the teacher or students towards their actions?
4. **How** is the student's reaction being handled by either their teacher or peers?

### **Data Analysis**

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

### **Results**

For this Capstone Project, the Program Director and a teacher at Northridge Community School in Aptos, Ca were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve the development of students' interpersonal skills within the classroom. This is important because students are losing the capabilities of good communication, proper handling of conflicts, and lack the ability of empathizing with their peers. This, in turn, has a great effect on the students academic performance. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: time; cost; and reach. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.



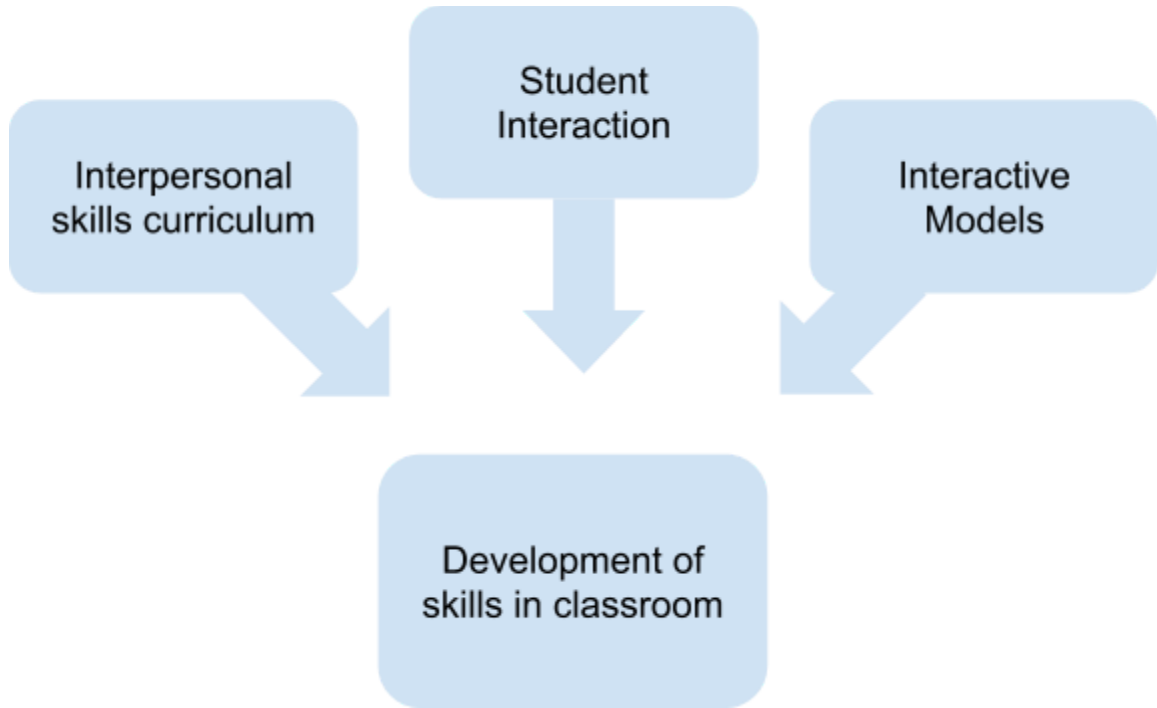


Image 2. Emergent themes based on an analysis of data and literature.

Table 1

*Evaluation of Action Options*

	Time	Cost	Reach
Create Social Development Lesson	High	Medium	Medium
Create an interactive learning environment	Medium	Medium	Low
Model the importance of developed interpersonal skills	Medium	Low	Low

### **Interpersonal Skills Curriculum**

While conducting my research, one of the more discussed themes was to create a curriculum that focuses on the students' interpersonal skills. During school, there is a lack of teaching the necessary social and behavioral skills needed which leads to the mishandling of situations by students. This can create disruptive learning environments, thus taking students away from their time spent learning. Students are not gaining correct knowledge of how to interact properly with their peers or teachers, therefore, this leads to poor social interactions and outcomes. When interviewing Nicholas, the Programs Director at Northridge Community School, he discussed his concerns regarding the students abilities to empathize with one another. It was stated, "My concerns are that children are not learning and practicing being compassionate towards each other, not being respectful, and at that same time not valuing themselves as responsible and valuable individuals to society, there seems to be an emphasis on self. There is less caring communication between themselves and more 'look at me' type of attitudes and behaviors". Students are not understanding the importance of proper communication or the ability to empathize which can result in negatives encounters or situations.

After analyzing the information given by the interviewees and the information regarding the effects of poor development of these skills, an action option was developed which creates social development lessons that can be incorporated into the curriculum. By implementing this action option, a portion of the day will be set aside for teachers to provide reasoning and apply examples regarding the development of one's interpersonal skills. These lessons will consist of small scale and large scale options to handle conflict and can be applied to a multitude of situations. By taking the time to show students the importance of developing these skills, they

can see the ways in which the strategies being taught can greatly help a negative situation turn into a positive outcome.

### **Student Interaction**

The second theme that was commonly addressed was the importance of student interaction. By having students work with one another rather than individually, students can more effectively practice social and behavioral skills. In traditional school classrooms, there is a great emphasis on the individualization of student learning. Each student has their own desk which is where approximately 90% of their work takes place. This type of classroom promotes the idea of no conversing with your neighbor unless instructed by the teacher. It was found that by having low tables and other comfortable sitting areas to relax and learn in can be very beneficial to students behavioral and social skills(N. Kent, personal communication, November 14, 2018). However, this type of conversation can actually be very constructive and can provide the opportunity for students to learn and grow from one another. Having greater student interaction can help students better their interpersonal skills because of the higher amount of time students spend conversing with one another. Students become more relaxed in environments they feel more comfortable in. The interviewees from Northridge Community School felt that the greater amount of student interaction, the better their communication and behavioral skills will become. This would allow for more opportunity to help students feel more comfortable in their environment which would lead them to addressing their conflicts of issues in a more positive manner.

After analyzing the interviewees responses regarding the importance of student interaction, an action option was developed. This action option would allow classrooms to

become an interactive learning environment. In this learning environment, there would be no individual desks for students. There would be round tables for many people to be apart of and do their work together. This will allow a greater amount of student interaction which can help promote positive communication between students.

### **Interactive Models**

The third common theme that emerged from each interview was the need for interactive models of correct behavior to implement during a conflict or disagreement. Students rarely are modeled how to correctly go about navigating a challenging conversation which leads to an unfavorable outcome. Students are left to deal with the situation as they see fit, which in many cases can be dealt with in vulgar or violent ways. When asked how students seem to handle conflict in her class, an interviewee responded by saying “children are not always taught how to interact with others and to solve their differences” (J. Reyes, personal communication, November 20, 2018). The interviewees discussed how the interactions between students are often very selfish. Students only want the outcome to be in their favor, so there is a lack of looking at the issue from the other person’s point of view. By showing the students the correct behavior in that moment, it is understood that the students will gain a better understanding of how to handle future conflicts.

After analyzing the responses from the interviewees about student behavior and conflict, a third action option was created. This action option is to have teachers model the importance of developed interpersonal skills for their students. By doing so, students will obtain helpful ways to address issues that arise between them and other students. These models will be implemented when teachers witness conflict between students. The advantage of doing this in the moment is to

help students feed off the energy they currently feel, whether it be positive or negative energy, and create a positive outcome based on those emotions. For example, if two students are having an argument over a particular work space they each desire to use, the teacher will come over and help model the correct form of conversation needed to be had in order to reach a mutual agreement. This option makes it so the teacher does not play sides or disregard the issue, but instead helps the students see each point of view with guided conversation.

### **Conclusion**

The option I recommend to help better develop students' interpersonal skills is to integrate social development lessons into the curriculum. Creating and executing social development lessons on interpersonal skills will allow students to learn correct forms of engagement dependent on certain situations. This will challenge students in a constructive and positive manner. Taking the time out of one's day to address disputes can be very taxing and time consuming. Providing mandatory lesson for students will assist in having more time being spent on the student's school work. In addition, working more closely with the students and helping them to develop these skills can create a stronger bond between the teacher and students. There is a great emotional disconnect between a teacher and their students, so these lessons can provide stronger bonds to be built. In making this recommendation, a few concessions must be addressed regarding the strengths the other two options provide. By creating more open and interactive classroom environments, this allows for greater student interaction which builds their interpersonal skills. This closer interaction allows for more conversation between students and can create better relationships between them. Students would also greatly benefit from having the teachers model the correct behavior needed to workout an argument. By physically seeing

strategies being put into action, it becomes much easier to understand ways to implement them into future disputes. Students can gain a great deal of insight by watching and experiencing different scenarios. Despite my recommendation for implementing the action option of creating social development lessons, there is a significant limitation to my analysis: I am assuming that students will be completely involved and engaged in these lessons and that students will use the strategies discussed effectively. In addition to the lack of engagement from students, there is one other potential negative outcome that may result from my recommendation. The first negative outcome being, there may be push back from parents regarding the time being spent on these lessons is taking away from the students' academic performance. Parents may argue that their child's time at school should be spent strengthening their academics rather than working on their interpersonal skills. Despite identifying these concessions and limitations, I strongly believe that implementing social development lessons into the curriculum can strengthen students interpersonal skills. By obtaining the capabilities to navigate through an argument, students will create more time for themselves by quickly handling disputes by communicating in an effective manner. In addition to handling arguments in an effective manner, students will be spending less time working out arguments which will allow more time to be spent on their school work.

### **Action Documentation and Reflection**

Throughout many educational systems in our country, there is a disregard of teaching students the importance of developing their interpersonal skills. While schools mostly focus on the academic performance of their students, there is very little to no focus on the development of these skills. This results in students having negative interactions with their peers and teachers and poor academic outcomes. With my time spent at Northridge Community School, I observed

and implemented ways in which students can effectively communicate with each other dependent on the conflicts that arose. In order to better understand the way conflicts were handled at school and the general behavior of students, two people were interviewed: the school's program director and a veteran teacher. After thoroughly analyzing the literature regarding the students' underdeveloped interpersonal skills and the effects it has on their education and the responses of the interviewees, three major themes occurred. From these themes, three action options were created. The first action option was to create social development lessons that can be implemented into the curriculum. They would be apart of the school day and treated as an academic lesson. The second action option is to create an interactive learning environment which promotes greater student interaction. The third action option is to model the importance of developed interpersonal skills for the students so they understand how they work. The first action option of creating social development lessons was implemented. This action was chosen due to how it provides a portion of the day to be dedicated to developing the students' interpersonal skills. Having this mandatory time set aside can provide for effective strategies to be taught to the students that they can later on incorporate into their future conflicts. In addition to teaching them necessary skills, this option also provides an opportunity for the teacher to better understand the challenges their students are facing, which can create a stronger and more trusting bond within the classroom. After my sessions with the class were completed, Jasmine discussed with me the ways in which she deals with conflict in her classroom. She described to me how if two students were experiencing a conflict, they would walk over to the shell and crystal and try to sort out their argument before coming to a teacher for help. The method is very

simple, the student holding the shell shares their feelings while the person holding the crystal listens to what the other has to say.

While I was here, I spent my time observing and working with a 2nd and 3rd grade combination class. During my time here, I would observe the ways the students interacted with one another. This gave me the opportunity to understand the flow of the class and how the students and the teacher handle any conflicts. While watching the class, I had four questions in mind at all times when I saw conflicts or arguments arise: *What* action is triggering the student, *who* is triggering the student, *how* is the student responding, and *how* is the student's reaction being handled. After answering these questions, I would approach the student involved in the disagreement, hear each side of the story, and assist and monitor them in conducting a conversation to help them reach a positive outcome. In addition to this, I would bring the class together towards the end of our session and discuss the importance of developing our interpersonal skills while creating scenarios to help the students visualize what it would be like in the moment.





*Image 2.* The “shell and crystal” method used by Jasmine in her classroom to help with conflicts.

### **Critical Reflection**

While working with the students, I expected much greater resistance when it came to discussing confrontation strategies and the ways to implement them. The students were very willing to take part in my lessons and took it seriously. Even though the students ranged in age from six to nine years old, they provided insightful feedback, asked relevant questions, and understood the importance of how our actions, whether they be positive or negative, can affect others. The students were very open when discussing the way their peers made them feel that day. They would also discuss the positive things they saw their peers do during our session and acknowledge how good it made them feel when conflicts were easily resolved. Their answers and reasoning were very simple, but still had a powerful meaning behind them. I found myself modifying the lessons to be more intricate. When I initially created my scenarios and talking

points, they were very simple. After I had further observed the class, I realized that majority were much more advanced when it came to communication skills so I had to go back and modify my plans to fit the levels the students were at. In addition, I realized that to be able to fully develop these skills, it takes much longer than the time I set aside. After realizing this, I focused our time together on basic, yet important, communication building blocks that I hoped would help create a strong base for the students. So far, the outcome of my work has shown positive improvements. Over the course of my time working there, I have noticed better communication between the students. I noticed that the students were trying to work the issue out amongst themselves more often, rather than coming directly to me to sort out the issue. The teacher I worked with has acknowledged the students having less conflict than before, but it is still a work in progress. I wish I had understood the importance of taking small steps when showing students the importance of developing these skills. I found myself expecting the students to catch on much quicker, when it does not work that way. Repetition is key when trying to develop these skills. From this point on, it is important to have consistency with the students and make sure they are still using the strategies we discussed during our sessions. The most effective way to make these strategies become effective ones is to continuously use them in their everyday lives. I learned that there are many different components that shape the way students interact with others. I found I became more passionate about working with these kids and really valued that they came out of our time together with some knowledge that can help them later on in life.

### **Synthesis and Integration**

There are many components from the Liberal Studies Department, required coursework and this Action Research Project that have impacted my professional development. The first

major component that has impacted my professional development is MLO 5: Subject Matter Generalist. I feel that I have acquired a strong sense of the knowledge needed to be an effective teacher. The coursework I have completed throughout my time at CSUMB has been very insightful in teaching me the necessary skills I need to becoming an effective teacher. The second component that has greatly impacted my professional development is MLO1: Developing Educator. By understanding what is expected of a California public educator, I feel strongly that I can take what I have learned and use my knowledge effectively in the classroom to make sure my students are being taught accurately and effectively. Lastly, the component I found most impactful was MLO 4: Social Justice Collaborator. By taking both my academic and personal experiences, I feel confident that I can take what I have learned regarding social justice and use it in a positive and influential way in my classroom. In addition, I feel that I have come to understand the importance of equity versus equality and the ways in which it can affect my classroom's overall performance. The next steps I see myself needing to take in order to reach my goal is to acquire more experience regarding my Action Research Project topic.

After completing this project, I realized that I feel very passionate about the development of students' social, behavioral and interpersonal skills and would like to continue my work in this area. In order for myself to become the teacher I envision myself being, it is important for me to maintain the value of developing these skills while understanding the time it will take to see real change. In addition, I have realized all the small ways in which teachers can help their students grow in a way that can greatly effective them in the longer run. This is something that should be valued throughout our education system and is something I will strive to implement through my teaching career.

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