Master Capstone Project

A Proposal for Peer-Based Mentorship using Typical Developing Students as Mentors for Neurodivergent Students to Improve Social-Management and Self-Efficacy

Kari M. Tobin

Submitted to the

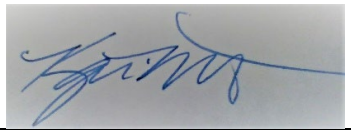
Graduate School of Education

City University of Seattle

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master in Teaching

I give permission to City University to store and use this MIT Project for teaching purposes.

Submitted by  02/19/2023

Kari M. Tobin — Date

Approved by _____ _____

Corll Morrissey, M.Ed. — Date

Approved by _____ _____

Vicki Butler, Ed.D. — Date

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

First, I want to thank Corll Morrissey for helping me narrow down my topic of inquiry and guiding my Capstone project with knowledge and compassion. I would also like to thank my mentor Julie Hannan for her continued support in completing this research by allowing me access to needed data and program information. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my husband, Sean, for his support when I felt overwhelmed, my daughter Alyssa for helping me edit my literature review and assistance with all computer problems, and of course, my son Joshua, for the struggles he dealt with in elementary school that led me in this inquiry. I have always wished to work on a program designed for all students but could also help students with autism spectrum disorder by reducing stress and increasing the potential for learning success in their early education.

Abstract

Neurodivergent or students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) struggle in multiple ways in a general education classroom. Peer mentorship may afford a reliable educational tutor to help them learn social cues and appropriate responses for academic and social situations. This is an issue-focused design-based study specific to the learning context of the researcher. The study focused on improving self-efficacy and social management for neurodivergent students by using dependable peer mentorship. The guided inquiry method is proposed to give students the knowledge to help them to ask questions and find solutions. In this design, it is proposed to work with the Relationship Development Intervention (RDI) team to design criteria for mentor training. Through an analysis of the dilemma and a review of the literature, the researcher proposes that the students be paired with a dedicated older student as a mentor. This mentor will give peer support, friendship, academic tutor support with teacher guidance, and behavior modeling. The program's desired outcomes are to minimize negative external and internalizing behaviors on subsequent screening and to positive observations from students, paraeducators, and teachers working with the ASD student.

Introduction

Neurodivergent students score consistently higher than their peers on the biannual Brief Externalizing and Internalizing Screener for Youth (BEISY); according to student intervention matching system research, these students typically have difficulties with emotional and behavioral regulation (Cook et al., 2016). This evaluation measures the student's frequency and intensity of internalizing and externalizing behaviors in relationship to average stressors in a general education classroom. The classroom teacher completes the screener to evaluate the student's responses to daily situations, determining whether they have successful coping methods and appropriate age-level responses.

Students with ASD struggle with withdrawal, internalizing emotional problems, disruptive classroom actions, and aggressive and defiant behaviors. This stems from the student being behind their peers in learning to properly direct their emotions, share their feelings clearly with explanation, and internally becoming frustrated with imperfection and the inability to express their struggles (Centers for Disease Control, *Diagnostic criteria* 2022).

This study proposed to build upon the current mentorship programs by pairing fifth-grade students with primary elementary ASD students. The mentors were asked to work one-on-one with their mentee with work directed by that student's teacher. They worked with the student on math facts, reading aloud together, playing (if age/situationally appropriate), and helped the student on their Chromebooks with work assigned by their classroom teacher.

The researchers' personal connection to this concern drove research and proposal on how this program could be emotionally beneficial for the student, both emotionally and academically. The desired outcome is to develop a mentorship bond to help model appropriate behaviors in the classroom and for the mentee to have a student to look up to and with whom to build a close relationship.

Rationale

Approximately 15 of the 70 students with an IEP, which includes students with ASD in an elementary school of 700 students, struggle with both appropriate external and internal behaviors in response to daily routines and expectations. They score high on the Brief Externalizing and Internalizing Screener for Youth (BEISY). Mentorship programs typically include 40 volunteers; these students are in fifth grade and, therefore, can help with reading and math for kindergarten, first, and second graders. This means that there is the opportunity to adjust the work these students do in their mentee classroom by thoughtfully pairing them with an ASD student that would benefit from consistent and stable mentorship from an older student.

Analysis of the Problem

Context

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) of Washington State supports collaboration and inclusion for students with disabilities. In guiding language for educators and families, OSPI (2021) states that creating a school-wide system of collaboration, including inclusive mindsets and collaborative team grade level, allows every student to be in the least restrictive education and are part of the school community. As a team, we reviewed and determined that every school should strive to ensure that each child, no matter their potential or disabilities, is given the opportunity of inclusive learning environments. These inclusive environments include access and equity so all can successfully learn grade-level material. Universal design is a preferred practice in my student placement district so that each student can have multiple ways to be engaged and challenged to learn the same content.

Connection to Standards

The way people with autism learn, think and problem-solve ranges from some being highly skilled to those severely challenged. In 2021, the CDC reported that approximately 1 in 44 children in the U.S. has ASD, according to 2018 data (CDC, 2022). The Centers for Disease Control (2022) further states that approximately 14.6% of school children have ASD. The Washington State SEL standard guidelines are for all students and all schools. Using the SEL framework in the design planning will ensure that students are proficient in social skills for lifelong success. Standard, 3: Self-Efficacy individuals work toward benchmark 3A, which includes demonstrating skills to set, monitor, adapt, persevere, achieve, and evaluate goals. As well as benchmark 3B, each student can demonstrate problem-solving skills to engage responsibly in various situations. The other SEL standard that would benefit from introducing or expanding mentorship for ASD is Standard 5: Social Management individuals can make safe and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions. The benchmark for the design that could most effectively help is benchmark 5A: Which demonstrates a range of

communication and social skills to interact effectively with others, and benchmark 5B: which demonstrates the ability to identify and take steps to resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Social Emotional Learning Standards, Benchmarks, and Indicators).

Multi-Tiered Intervention System of Support (MTSS)

A widely adopted practice is Multi-tiered Interventional support (MTSS) incorporating Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) to allow a variety of differentiation and strategy for an inclusive learning environment. For ASD students, using positive behavior support ensures they are treated equally and not as if their behavior is negative. Their struggles with controlling emotions and understanding verbal and non-verbal cues are due to disability delay, not defiance. A University of Washington researcher asks us to consider typical challenges and accommodations for students with autism spectrum disorder (2022). We learn that established routines, planning and practicing communication strategies and social routines, as well as note-takers are situations where these students could benefit from additional support. Mody and Belliveau (2012) researched ASD students' social delay and found that the failure to engage in social conversation can lead to isolation from their typically developing peers. Reviewing these multiple support strategies, we can understand the value and importance of using multiple methods to support students with ASD.

Evidence of Need for a Design Solution

The research gives cause to develop policies and plans to assist these students so they may be integrated and included in general education classrooms. Support systems need to be in place to help these children. Teachers have some training on de-escalation, but they could be served by instruction in strategies to ensure the reason for escalation does not happen. New teachers in general education may not have sufficient training to individualize instruction or understand how to de-escalate high-emotive responses. Autism Speaks (2022) discusses how promoting social goals and managing behavior challenges is essential for teachers of ASD

students to be prepared to have the safest learning environment possible. Challenges that ASD students have included difficulty with social relationships. These students prefer to learn in small groups and find peer interaction motivating (Cchiaro, 2021).

Questions to Guide Investigation

I wondered if integrating peer-to-peer mentoring within a classroom setting would allow unintimidating support for a neurodivergent student and whether it would make a measurable difference in academic skills and improve social-emotional learning.

- How can the current school-wide servant leadership program be expanded to pair typically developing (TD) 5th graders with younger neurodivergent or ASD students?
- What support would TD students need so that they are prepared to be effective mentors?
- What subjects/specialists would need the most support?
- In what subject/specialists would these mentors be the most helpful?
- How could the program ensure that all ASD students have a mentor?
- Would having a consistent mentor have a measurable improvement in overall social-emotional growth?

Literature Review

Social-Emotional Learning and Autism Spectrum Learners

Autism is a spectrum disorder; each person has a distinct set of strengths and challenges. Students present with a broad range of characteristics, including challenges with social skills, repetitive behavior, speech difficulties, and unease with nonverbal communication.

Communications

Students' deficits will vary within social communication contexts, including perception, cooperation, and understanding. Communication challenges include impairments in language and related intellectual skills with reductions in 7 areas; delayed learning of words, difficulty with word combinations and patterns; weaknesses in the use and understanding of nonverbal and verbal communication; verbal development delays; challenges with typical play deficits; conversation delays; literacy deficits and successful function.

Many students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) demonstrate communication challenges. There is evidence that addressing communication anxiety positively affects the student's ability to focus on learning. Luxford, Hadwin, and Kovshoff (2016) conducted a randomized trial on the acceptable use of school-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) intervention with adolescents identified with ASD. The results demonstrated that those who participated significantly reduced anxiety symptoms and continued improving at the six-week post-intervention. Hoskins Lloyd et al. (2016) focused on determining if a facilitate-engage-listen model in classrooms with ASD would increase learning engagement and reduce school anxiety. They found that improving the communication between a teacher and a student discussing topics as equal contributors in focused discussion relieved anxiety and improved communication confidence. Rance et al. (2017) focused their inquiry on whether interventions on individual ear-level remote microphone devices and classroom amplification systems. They wondered whether these devices to clarify voice would help listening, communication, and social interactions and reduce mental stress. They found that can use of remote auditory systems made

social interaction easier by reducing listening-related stress. These systems improved the study participants' reports of increased subjective self-reported results of enhanced well-being.

There is evidence that peer-to-peer communication skills influence classroom belonging and engagement perception. Research shows that relationships are challenging for many children with ASD. They tend to be connected socially to their TD peers in early elementary school but are not involved in close social circles or isolated in middle and high school. Rogers (2000) studied whether employing peer-mediated classroom measures and peer tutoring made any difference. This involved teaming typically developed students as peer buddies with ASD students during the school day. The interactions occurred in similar grade-level general education classrooms. The results showed that improving child–tutor interactions supported the curriculum materials as they learned to key in and mirror different retention techniques. Lloyd et al. (2016) investigated how teachers used peer conversation to discuss curriculum, motivate learners, and strengthen the classroom community. They determined that ASD students did not feel overwhelmed directly using small group social skills, including turn and talk. They had a peer in class to confirm directions and clarify material without discussing individually in a whole group setting. Dean et al. (2020) worked with ASD students with IQs ranging between 70 and 90. The participants were split; the first group learned skills for social interaction independent of peer mentors by using clinicians and charade activities to learn non-verbal cues. The second group of students learned these skills with peer-typically developed (TD) students that were not told their partner had ASD. However, several learning strategies were used with ASD teenagers in social situations to reduce prejudgment. The researchers found that combining peer engagement with personal clinician work reduced the chances that a child would only be more comfortable working alone. The purely skills group reported higher social stress and lower-quality interpersonal relationships. The negative emotional responses and problem behaviors were also higher within the skills-only group. This showed it might be beneficial to include TD peers in social intervention groups in secondary schools.

Self-efficacy, motivation, and perseverance as SEL Skills.

There is evidence that guidance for students on the AS benefits from attention to instruction that furthers self-efficacy and self-management skills. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) of Washington State envisions that students should learn how to be empowered, encouraged, and able to use their voices to the greatest extent possible. The goal for each student is to take charge of their social-emotional development as it relates to their learning and development of goals and strategies (OSPI Social Emotional Learning Standards Alignment, n.d.). Shaffer et al. (2018) wondered what techniques improved whether ASD youth struggle with personal behavior management and individual emotion regulation (ER). They examined group treatment of child/parent groups focusing on biweekly ER deficits of reasoning behavior, applied behavior, and mindfulness techniques. The outcome showed noticeable improvement in multiple behavioral categories. Still, they did not significantly show improvement in the Pediatric Quality of Life Family Impact Module, a measure of multiple factors in a child's life (Varni et al., 2004). Nowell et al. (2019) researched whether integrating the blending of parent-assisted intentional social thinking would improve self-regulation of socialization for high-functioning ASD 1st and 2nd graders. They used the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) structure to make the curriculum understandable. It uses supplementing strengths of visual acuity to strengthen a student's weaker skills. They used individual interests to encourage and support self-initiated learning by adding meaningful conversation. Social Thinking (ST) is a therapeutic, cognitive-based methodology and strategy. The process focuses on building social concepts and knowledge. The concept establishes repeatable awareness so students can flexibly adapt their behavior to different situations. The results determined that by using the combination method, educators had success in leading the learning of social communication and self-regulation concepts to ASD students and their parents. This study demonstrated improved social communication with learning self-regulation skills when participating in the

Growing, Learning and Living with Autism (GoriLLA) group compared to a delayed treatment control group (*Gorilla Group* 2020).

There is evidence that learning social skills, including social awareness and social management, positively affected the overall classroom success of ASD students. Research from Cardon et al. (2019) examined if there was a direct relationship between using video modeling (VM) teaching peer modeling behaviors and if it improved social awareness communication for ASD preschoolers. They wondered whether using classroom TD peers as actors in video mimicry of scenarios would help students connect the video skill they viewed and correctly use that prompt in their behaviors. They evaluated whether viewing just the video(s) was enough for the students to elicit an understanding of acceptable behavior without needing individual clinician sessions. They found that the ASD students had greater effectiveness in learning good behaviors when the models in the videos were students in their classrooms and not just random actors. In research from Raulston and Hansen (2021), they investigated types of strategies that promote generalized social skills and how these could be incorporated into classroom routines for ASD students. They examined how social conversation, environment setup, prompts, and repetitive praise could be used in classroom centers and outside-of-school playdates. They determined that using direct prompting to reinforce acceptable behaviors during centers and games was one way to model natural play and have a system to support ASD students. Abadi and Yazici (2019) evaluated whether students with high listening skills had a direct effect on their social-emotional skills in students. They analyzed whether a child's baseline manners, comprehension, vocabulary development, and effective listening, as rated by their teachers, connected to that same student's ability to socially communicate appropriately based on predetermined scenarios to elicit expected responses. They determined that a child's natural and learned listening ability correlated directly to socialization. They found that the children taught active listening lessons in lower primary grades experienced less stressful social communication, which improved their social experiences and problem-solving in higher primary grades (Abali & Yazici, 2019).

There is evidence that learning skills to improve task stamina affects engagement for students with ASD. Schulze (2016) wondered whether integrating instruction in self-management, which includes self-monitoring and goal setting, would improve target behaviors for ASD students. She studied whether there was improved behavior if instruction focused on improving positive behaviors versus eliminating negative ones. She theorized that if ASD students were taught to chart their focus by setting positive goals and they would therefore learn to chart success, it would also reduce negative behaviors. Her inquiry found that by specifically having this procedure to promote skill development and independence, students with ASD experienced more significant success. They found that the intervention reduced the lack of organization, limited attention, and limited task completion. She found this process helped in general education combined classrooms and stand-alone special education classrooms. Milley and Machalicek (2012) researched ways for educators to foster independence for ASD students. They investigated ways to improve engagement and reduce the habit of relying on prompting to accomplish classroom goals. They evaluated whether visual schedules, discreet beepers for tactile prompting, and integration of peer support would improve school stamina for ASD students. They found that ASD students had difficulty engaging and being independent in academics. The interventions needed consistent reinforcement and, at times, resulted in negative results due to the student's reliance on another individual to set up schedules, the program prompts, and organize peer support networks.

ASD students have struggles completing or initiating desires and needs. Hume et al. (2012) explored the effects of incorporation and direct instruction of individual work systems to improve task accuracy in ASD students. They proposed giving students clear visual prompts of what work needed completion, including how much and what it should look like; those specific tasks would be completed with higher success. They found that the targeted use of the incorporation of visual aids to structure a consistent work system reduced the need for repetitive

adult prompting and the ability for these students to self-motivate to what was next in their daily tasks.

Relationship Development Interventions

There is evidence that autistic students trained in Relationship Development Intervention (RDI) techniques had marked improvement, allowing successful functioning in challenging environments. Gutstein et al. (2007) evaluated the effectiveness of RDI, a parent-based process that attempts to improve the understanding and development of ADS children. Children completed a 16-month program to improve perception and reduce overall emotional difficulties. They determined that training parents appropriately by giving access to skilled clinicians for support and teaching them how to incorporate role play in unpredictable settings afforded the most significant student success. They found that 70% of the participants had improved on the Autism Diagnostic Interview Schedule (ADOS), meaning that these children no longer needed support to function in a general education classroom. Research from Ewe and Aspelin (2021) explored how educators interacted with all their students, including those with ASD, and how those relationships directly affected student development. They examined whether incorporating video-based interventions into teacher training benefited by helping prepare teachers using common behavior scenarios, giving them visual modeling to improve preparedness and student competence. They found that when teachers learned familiar cues, improved relationship language, and enhanced relationships, ASD student engagement in the classroom improved. Goldman et al. (2019) examined the implementation of school-home communication in connection with specialized training for guardians to be trained on appropriate reinforcement to determine if the joint effort reduced off-task behavior in the classroom and if this initiative was feasible. The study integrated training sessions, creating data collection forms looking at target behaviors with timely daily evaluation and parent-assisted reinforcement of appropriate responses taught by classroom teachers and behavior specialists. They found that when using the team approach by working with parents/guardians to ensure

ASD children received consistent responses for predetermined scenarios, children were less likely to be off task during the school day. They also found that this model was simple enough for implementation with a larger group of students and, therefore, may have school-wide benefits if implemented as standard practice.

There has been evidence that structured training, such as TEACCH, provided strategies and tools for classroom teachers. Panerai et al. (2009) first investigated the different educational approaches for children with autism or severe mental handicaps. They wondered whether integration within a mainstream school with training families and educators in TEACCH methods would give children increased learning opportunities. They evaluated whether these methods were being used at institutionalized schools and blended classrooms or not using them would make noticeable differences in students' behaviors and academic learning. The researchers assessed each student at the beginning and end of three years using the Psycho-Educational Profile-Revised (PEP-R), which evaluates developmental strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles to inform educational programming (Coonrod & Marcus, 2013), and Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale (VABS)-survey form that is a standardized assessment to diagnosis developmental or intellectual disabilities (Ability Lab, 2019). They determined that those students in a natural setting of a blended classroom had the most significant improvement in reducing the classification of having an intellectual disability that would reduce the likelihood of needing residential schooling. Delmolino & Harris (2011) wondered how to interpret individual needs and then match an ASD student to the most effective training program and classroom where that child would thrive. They proposed that to make the best decision for a child, collaboration with guardians would affect the child's ultimate potential. They wondered if partnering parents, counselors, and educators could help decide which indicators to use to determine the correct training method for each student. They also wondered about involving the students themselves; would the students give them greater insight, or would the students not be able to emotionally handle involvement to choose the most appropriate training? Finally, they

knew that goal setting and targets were critical to formulating a decision on success as well as ASD students thrived with clear and understandable goals. Using these, they set individual evidence-based interventions for each study participant to determine if those four pre-screened categories gave the correct data to place the student in the right training program. They found that when this method was used, there was an increase in indicators of success in a general education classroom. They cautioned that due to the uniqueness of ASD students having a wide range of needs, the schools are stretched to have the resources necessary to take on this individual training level for each student. Probst & Leppert (2008) investigated whether training in TEACCH methods improved student behavior in a classroom as well as reduced the stress level of their teachers due to an improved understanding of ASD students as well teachers gaining knowledge of quality daily intervention strategies for student success. They pre-screened using veteran teachers' evaluations of ASD student behavior norms and teaching methods currently used to allow integration of learning. They found that giving teachers guided training and ensuring they had continual support after training by counselors and medical professionals improved student behaviors because teachers could set up student self-management systems and structured schedules, which reduced negative student behaviors and teacher stress reactions.

Peer Mentorship

There has been evidence that peer-to-peer mentorship can improve school outcomes for ASD students' social-emotional growth. The Indiana Resource Center for Autism evaluated whether peer support can improve ASD students' success in the classroom and community (Pratt, 2019). They researched the use of cooperative play, peer buddies, and peer tutors using TD students for ASD students. They found that these programs improved relationship skills and social awareness for ASD students. The tutoring program also improved classroom success as these students had consistent aid working on classroom lessons. Kalyveza et al. (2020) researched whether using structured peer networks would improve social skills in adolescents.

Three groups with one high-functioning ASD student and a minimum of eight TD classmates were set up over ten weeks. The TD students in the group were taught support responses to be used in non-structured areas of the school. The method was set up to allow ASD students' peers to go when unsure, stressed, or overwhelmed. The TD students would model skills and give support. They determined that by providing the ASD student with a group of peers as safe support, the students could reduce negative behaviors in social settings. Crompton et al. (2022) investigated whether peer mentorship between TD and ASD students was enough for students to feel connected and engaged in the school community. They evaluated if setting up inclusivity groups gave additional support, knowing that they were not treated as different but as a part of the greater community. By interviewing young adults in mainstream schools, they gained baseline data regarding involvement and self-efficacy within a general education school. The researchers then gave these same groups methods to set up ASD clubs in their schools, so they could meet others like themselves and share concerns. In post-interviews after these clubs were set, these students reported that they felt less isolated and ostracized. This ultimately improved the social and emotional health of the student body as a whole (Crompton et al., 2022).

In conclusion, it is clear across the literature that students with ASD face many challenges in being successful in a general education classroom. The research shows that structured training in social-emotional learning areas, reduction of anxiety in communications, and integration of peer and relationship interventions have benefits. These students can use their positive personality traits, strengths in knowledge retention, and natural empathy to become strong and independent learners and, eventually, young adults.

Discussion

The process of using a peer-mentorship program in elementary school can deepen students' community and understanding that their actions have a positive influence on the world. Expanding and intentionally assigning mentors for those students on IEPs and those students with ASD seeks to ensure the school population has a reduction in bullying and negative emotions for students with disabilities.

Limitations

This study could not look at the district or regional populations of students in need due to privacy and HIPPA restrictions. Therefore, understanding the full scope of students' potential needs and behaviors is indetermined. Also, the researcher could not implement this program or conduct a trial due to administrative concerns about appropriately selecting mentee students, an aspect that was outside the scope of this study.

Recommendations

Improvements to this study could include potential training for mentors that is age appropriate and would not increase their academic burden. If volunteers have training in de-escalation strategies to help their mentees have limited outbursts, it could allow quicker buy-in from the mentored students. Engaging with the school learning specialist and counselor before the next school year would let them look at current data and decide which students may benefit from mentorship that could start at the beginning of the next school year. This way, students would start the year with a positive role model and less potential to feel the addition of receiving their mentor as a negative response to behaviors in the classroom.

Conclusion

The partnership between mentor and mentee benefits both. The mentor gains understanding, acceptance, and compassion for a child they may not have interacted with prior. These mentors also have the potential to improve their work in the classroom. This is due to the

school's requirements to maintain a leadership role. The mentor students can only continue in the role if they can manage their schoolwork and maintain positive behavior. They can mirror ideal or wanted behaviors to the students they mentor. The mentee gains an understanding of how to handle various emotional experiences, acceptance by gaining an older peer as a friend, and confidence in academics by having their mentor spend time one on one reviewing material they may have been struggling with.

Design Proposal Question

Will pairing an older peer mentor with a lower-level elementary student on the ASD spectrum allow that student to positively affect those students, reducing negative behaviors, improving learning outcomes, and reducing internalized stress of these students and families due to consistent peer engagement?

Proposed Design

Purpose

The purpose is to evaluate whether including mentors specifically assigned to ASD students improves students' overall reduction in negative behaviors and increases their classroom participation and learning outcomes. This proposal extends an established mentorship program at my placement school. The researcher envisions this extension to be easy to incorporate and beneficial for all students involved. Also, since this builds upon a successful program, the researcher presumes this proposal could be established at any elementary school with a value for servant leadership.

Theory of Change

By working with consistent mentorship for ASD students, those involved will develop an understanding of each other, including listening and emotional support through one-on-one peer involvement. This will allow students on the spectrum to have increased trust and modeling of correct behaviors by the older student. This also will allow the older student to model problem-solving in learning activities which will help ASD students feel more able to learn step-by-step methods and will reduce internal and external negative behaviors when overwhelmed.

<u>Elements of Proposed Design</u>

1. Organize mentor placement with all ASD students in lower grade levels.
2. Schedule mentor training to ensure an understanding of how to respond to negative outbursts.
3. Create screening documents to use before and after a mentorship with BEISY.

4. Generate surveys for families to report their observations and provide feedback.
5. Interview ASD students after the mentorship regarding their experience.
6. Supply classroom teachers' surveys during and after mentorship about their observations.

Outcomes

Design of a Mentorship program for ASD Students

Activities or Actions in the Structure of the Design	Short-term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes
• Increase in students involved in mentorship. • Standardize time for student mentoring. • Interview all members involved. • Training for mentors on expectations, problem-solving, and strategies to respond positively to negative emotions.	• Increased relationship and trust • Increase in listening behaviors of students. • Increased task stamina	• Reduction in BEISY scores. • Increased participation • Increased ability to ask for help when needed. • Increased ability to express feelings calmly

Personalization

Children identified to need consistent mentorship will be identified. After speaking with their teacher, either a weekly 30-minute session or bi-weekly 30-min sessions will be determined based on need and current lesson planning time available. For students identified as potentially matched, parents will be contacted to consent to their students receiving a mentor. They will be given information about the purpose and theory of change the program will be for their child. This information will not specifically tell the parent that the student was picked due to diagnosis but was chosen as a potential mentor recipient based on the BEISY survey alone. This way, the parent does not feel their student is being singled out for medical reasons only. Mentoring sessions will be personalized based on areas the classroom teacher feels the student

has needs. This means that if a student needs help in adding and subtracting, the majority of the time will be spent with flashcards vs. working on writing sentences. If the student has needs in multiple subjects, that student may benefit most from non-structured reading or play. This would allow the mentor to model appropriate behaviors and responses that may lead to reduced negative emotional behaviors during whole-class instruction.

Steps in the Process

This design involves working with the PBIS team, school counselors, and administration to identify students with the greatest potential for need and success paired with a student mentor. The mentee's classroom teacher would review IEP and 504 to ensure a mentor could assist the child. The fifth-grade team would take applications for mentorship, including personal reasons the student feels they would be a good mentor, along with recommendations from parents and prior teachers that the student would be a good influence on the younger student and could keep up with their schoolwork.

Once applications are processed, students will be matched with either a general classroom helper or paired with an ASD student. Those paired would have trained with a learning specialist or counselor on proper ways to handle emotional extremes and when to know that they should include the nearest adult to help de-escalation. The first sessions would be low-threat and friendship-building prior to including any learning. This way, the bond of friendship and trust is formed. Once bonds are established, the mentee's classroom teacher would give the mentor lessons to work with the student. This could include math flashcards, handwriting letters, or reading together.

The mentor being consistent and reliable for the mentee is vital for trust and buy-in that the older student is someone they can count on for help and friendship. The mentor will be able to model appropriate behavior when stuck in academics and give personal strategies for what they do when they feel overwhelmed. The mentee's teacher will observe changes to ensure the mentor does not become stressful for the ASD student and remains a positive role model. The

mentee's teacher will ensure appropriate tasks are available for the mentoring time. They also will share notices of positive changes to the administration and families. Ideally, this pairing would last through the entire school year. However, it could be shortened due to no longer needing to help the mentees learn behavior or academic skills because they have caught up to their typically developed peers.

Assessment Options

Assessment #1: Pre- and post-survey: 3 background questions for families to be given before targeted mentoring. This would allow insight into home responses around academics before and after to determine the effectiveness of the mentorship.

Assessment #2: Group participant's reflections: Mentees will be asked to make Thank-you cards for their mentors and include drawings of something they did together that was special or use words to tell them what they felt was the best part of the time spent together. The mentors will be asked to draw a cartoon or create a story about their experience and how it impacted them after the selected mentorship period. Researchers analyze input and their observations and interpret if these show positive experiences.

Assessment #3: Program assessment: Mentors will be asked if they felt prepared, what, if any, expectations were accurate, and if they felt their involvement was positive for their mentee and themselves. Also, they will be asked to create a list or draw out what they feel could be added to improve the experience and impact for the next group of mentors.

Assessment #4: Observation logs of behavior change by the teacher.

Assessment #5: BEISY Data evaluation: Mentee scores will be evaluated before and after the mentorship period to assess whether or not there was a positive change due to peer involvement.

Dissemination Plan

This plan will be presented to the principal, SPED, and mentor project team. Additionally, the researcher intends to include this design proposal in their professional portfolio, to be shared upon consideration for a teaching position.

Author's Note

Although I am beginning my career in education later in life does not mean that it is something that I have never had a passion for. Growing up in a low-income family in western New York, the only way I could find to enable higher learning opportunities was to join the U.S. Air Force. Through the Air Force, I gained training and certification in multiple modalities of Radiology, including General X-Ray, Mammography, Cat Scan, and Nuclear Medicine. During my 20 years of service, I completed my associate's and bachelor's degrees in Radiology. I also managed clinical training for both X-Ray and Nuclear Medicine. Education is something I have always valued for myself. That value and love of learning have been passed down to my children, who both have goals of pursuing careers in the sciences. I felt it was finally time for me to leap of faith and return to school. My dream would be to inspire all children to find the love, excitement, challenge, and reward of a STEM career. We may not all have the same opportunity financially, and some of us may struggle with disabilities like my son with ASD. However, we all have the potential to learn and be successful if we are surrounded by those that support us and learn skills to bolster our weaknesses so that they can become our best assets. My goal is in my classroom to ensure all students have the necessary support, access to inclusive services, and a teacher that will help them learn they can work hard and succeed.

References

Abadi, B., & Yazici, H. (2019). An Evaluation on Determining the Relation between Listening Skill and Social Emotional Learning Skill. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, *89*, 71–92. https://eric.ed.gov/?q=social+skills%2bautism%2bcommunication%2bblended+learning%2bcoping&pr=on&ff1=dtySince_2018&ff2=eduElementary+Education&id=EJ1269773

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). *Autism Spectrum Disorder*. ASHA. Retrieved September 14, 2022, from https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/autism/#collapse_8

Autism Speaks. (2022). *Autism Statistics and Facts*. Retrieved September 14, 2022, from https://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-statistics-asd

Cardon, T., Wangsgard, N., & Dobson, N. (2019). Video Modeling Using Classroom Peers as Models to Increase Social Communication Skills in Children with ASD in an Integrated Preschool. *Education and Treatment of Children*, *42*(4), 515–536. https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2019.0024

Cchiaro. (2021, January 29). *The challenges students with autism face*. Graduate Programs for Educators. Retrieved February 14, 2023, from https://www.graduateprogram.org/2021/01/the-challenges-students-with-autism-face/#:~:text=Students%20with%20ASD%20may%20struggle,functioning%20may%20be%20a%20challenge.

Centers for Disease Control. (2022, March 1). *CDC estimates 1 in 68 school-aged children have autism: no change from previous estimate*. Retrieved September 14, 2022, from https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2016/p0331-children-autism.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, November 2). *Diagnostic criteria*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved February 12, 2023, from https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/hcp-dsm.html

Cook, C. (2016, October 25). Integrating a Continuum of School-based Mental Health Services within a PBIS Framework. Retrieved February 19, 2023, from http://www.mnase.org/uploads/4/7/7/9/47793163/cook_breakoutdelivering_a_continuum_of_mental_health_related_supports_mase.pdf

Coonrod, E., & Marcus, L. (2013). Psychoeducational Profile – Revised (PEP-3). *Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 2439–2444. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1698-3_936

Crompton, C. J., Hallett, S., Axbey, H., McAuliffe, C., & Cebula, K. (2022). 'Someone like-minded in a big place': Autistic young adults' attitudes towards autistic peer support in mainstream education. *Autism*, 136236132210811. https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221081189

Dean, M., Williams, J., Orlich, F., & Kasari, C. (2020). Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder and social skills groups at school: A randomized trial comparing intervention environment and peer composition. *School Psychology Review, 49*(1), 60-73. https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2020.1716636

Delmolino, L., & Harris, S. L. (2011). Matching children on the autism spectrum to classrooms: A guide for parents and professionals. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *42*(6), 1197–1204. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-011-1298-6

Ewe, L. P., & Aspelin, J. (2021). Relational competence regarding students with ADHD – An intervention study with in-service teachers. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *37*(2), 293–308. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1872999

Goldman, S. E., Sanderson, K. A., Lloyd, B. P., & Barton, E. E. (2019). Effects of School-Home Communication With Parent-Implemented Reinforcement on Off-Task Behavior for

Students With ASD. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, *57*(2), 95–111. https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-57.2.95

Gorilla Group. TEACCH® Autism Program. (2020, July 14). Retrieved February 19, 2023, from https://teacch.com/regional-centers/chapel-hill-teacch-center/clinical-services-at-chapel-hill-1/interventions-for-school-age-children/gorilla-group/

Gutstein, S. E., Burgess, A. F., & Montfort, K. (2007). Evaluation of the Relationship Development Intervention Program. *Autism*, *11*(5), 397–411. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361307079603

Hoskins Lloyd, M., Kolodziej, N., & Brashears, K. (2016). Classroom Discourse: An Essential Component in Building a Classroom Community. *School Community Journal*, *26*(2), 291–304.

Hume, K., Plavnick, J., & Odom, S. L. (2012). Promoting Task Accuracy and Independence in Students with Autism Across Educational Setting Through the Use of Individual Work Systems. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *42*(10), 2084–2099. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-012-1457-4

Inclusionary practices handbook - k12.wa.us. Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2021, March). Retrieved February 14, 2023, from https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/specialed/inclusion/Inclusionary-Practices-Handbook-DRAFT.pdf

Kalyveza, S., Gkogkos, G., Maridaki-Kassotaki, K., Gena, A., & Antonopoulou, K. (2020). Promoting the Social Skills of Adolescents With Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Using Peer Network Intervention. *Learning Disabilities -- A Contemporary Journal*, *18*(2), 243–267.

Lloyd, MH, Kolodziej, NJ, Brashears, KM (2016). Classroom discourse: an essential component in building a classroom community. *School Community 26*: 291–304.

Luxford S., Hadwin J. A., Kovshoff H. (2016). Evaluating the effectiveness of a school-based cognitive behavioural therapy intervention for anxiety in adolescents diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-016-2857-7.

Milley, A., & Machalicek, W. (2012). Decreasing Students' Reliance on Adults. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *48*(2), 67–75. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451212449739

Mody, M., & Belliveau, J. W. (2012). Speech and Language Impairments in Autism: Insights from Behavior and Neuroimaging. *American Chinese Journal of Medicine and Science*, *5*(3), 157. https://doi.org/10.7156/v5i3p157

Nowell, S. W., Watson, L. R., Boyd, B., & Klinger, L. G. (2019, July 12). Efficacy Study of a Social Communication and Self-Regulation Intervention for School-Age Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, *50*(3), 416–433. https://doi.org/10.1044/2019_lshss-18-0093

Rance, G., Chisari, D., Saunders, K., & Rault, J. (2017). Reducing Listening-Related Stress in School-Aged Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 47*(7), 2010-2022. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3114-4

Raulston, T. J., & Hansen, S. G. (2021). Promoting Generalization of Social Skills to Inclusive Play Settings for Children With Autism and Their Peers. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, *54*(6), 434–439. https://doi.org/10.1177/00400599211025550

Rogers, S. (2000). Interventions That Facilitate Socialization in Children with Autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *30*(5), 399–409.

Schulze, M. A. (2016). Self-Management Strategies to Support Students With ASD. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, *48*(5), 225–231. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059916640759

Shaffer, R. C., Wink, L. K., Ruberg, J., Pittenger, A., Adams, R., Sorter, M., Manning, P., & Erickson, C. A. (2019). Emotion Regulation Intensive Outpatient Programming: Development, Feasibility, and Acceptability. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 49*(2), 495-508. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3727-2

Teachers and administrators. Autism Speaks. (n.d.). Retrieved February 14, 2023, from https://www.autismspeaks.org/teachers-and-administrators

OSPI Social Emotional Learning Standards Alignment. (n.d.). k12.wa.us. Retrieved September 20, 2022, from https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/studentsupport/sel/pubdocs/OSPI-SEL-Pathways.pdf

Panerai, S., Zingale, M., Trubia, G., Finocchiaro, M., Zuccarello, R., Ferri, R., & Elia, M. (2009). Special education versus inclusive education: The role of the TEACCH program. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *39*(6), 874–882. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-009-0696-5

Pratt, C. (2019, January 4). *Peer support programs for students with autism*. Reading Rockets. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from https://www.readingrockets.org/article/peer-support-programs-students-autism

Probst, P., & Leppert, T. (2008). Brief report: Outcomes of a teacher training program for Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *38*(9), 1791–1796. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-008-0561-y

University of Washington. (2022, May 24). *What are typical challenges and accommodations for students with autism spectrum disorder?* What are typical challenges and accommodations for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder? | DO-IT. Retrieved February 14, 2023, from https://www.washington.edu/doit/what-are-typical-

challenges-and-accommodations-students-autism-spectrum-disorder#:~:text=School%20activities%20that%20may%20be,and%20changes%20in%20expected%20routines.

Varni, J., Sherman, S. A., Burwinkle, T. M., Dickinson, P. E., & Dixon, P. (2004). The PedsQL Family Impact Module: Preliminary reliability and validity. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, *2*(1), 55. https://doi.org/10.1186/1477-7525-2-55

Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales. Shirley Ryan AbilityLab. (2019, April 26). Retrieved November 28, 2022, from https://www.sralab.org/rehabilitation-measures/vineland-adaptive-behavior-scales

Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Education. (n.d.). *Social Emotional Learning Standards, Benchmarks, and Indicators*. Retrieved February 15, 2023, from https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/studentsupport/sel/pubdocs/SELStandardsBenchmarksIndicatorsLongForm.pdf

Appendix A
Servant Leadership Flyer

Explorer Mentors

DEE Mentors are paired with a K-3 grade student that needs to have a positive connection and/or relationship. Mentors will check in with their assigned student(s) on a regular basis (this can be at designated times within the classroom or recess, meeting them at the bus, walking them out after school, helping them get settled and started for the day, etc.). They may also eat lunch with them and/or participate in numerous activities throughout the year.

THIS IS A 3-MONTH JOB.

Servant Leadership-

It's What You're Doing When No One Is Watching That Counts!

5th graders are Servant Leaders at DEE!

5 jobs - 1 for YOU!