Help Me Help Myself: The Role of Helper Flags as Tools for Self-Regulation

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Help Me Help Myself:
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An Action Research Report
By Lara G. Bergman
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In fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree
St. Catherine University
St. Paul, Minnesota
Abstract

The purpose of this action research was to determine if using flags, created as tools for signaling for help, was an effective way to develop persistence and encourage children to complete their chosen work. The study was conducted in a preschool classroom at a private Montessori school. Participants included 15 children aged three to five and three teachers. Data was collected in the form of student interviews, tallies, and observations made during the period of research. The results indicated that the helper flags increased the children’s persistence with their work and increased the likelihood they would complete their chosen work. Therefore, it was concluded that the flags were effective tools for the children. Additionally, the flags proved to be a useful classroom management technique. However, because the research was conducted at the beginning of the school year in a class of children new to the Montessori environment, it is unclear whether or not the results would apply to other classrooms. Therefore, further research is recommended in other classroom environments and at a later point in the school year.
Research in the past decade has confirmed what some teachers have known for a long time: a child’s ability to self-regulate is directly linked to their ability to succeed in school (Tough, 2009). Self-regulation is a term used to describe a person’s ability to set goals, monitor effort, control impulses, and self-motivate (Ervin, Wash & Mecca, 2010). According to Blair (2003) it also includes traits of sustaining attention, self-correction and persistence. As a collective skillset, it is clear how self-regulation can be a powerful force in a child’s ability to learn and why many teachers, particularly in early childhood, are seeking out ways to cultivate its development in their classrooms.

In a Montessori early childhood classroom, more commonly referred to as a Children’s House, behaviors are regularly modeled and developed that encourage a child’s ability to self-regulate (Ervin, Wash & Mecca, 2010) and this is by design. Dr. Maria Montessori created her model of education based on her observations of children’s inclination towards work and the transformation that occurred when they were allowed opportunities to self-regulate. She called the transformation *normalization*. Normalization is a process in which obstacles, both physical and psychic, are removed from the learning environment and a child is freed to reveal his true personality through purposeful, concentrated work (Montessori, 1995). Everything in the classroom is purposefully placed so that the child can achieve this concentrated state. For example, the use of child-sized furniture and learning materials placed at an accessible height on shelves for the children to reach allows them to choose their work independently. Similarly, great care is taken to show the children how to navigate social situations amongst themselves through role plays referred to as grace and courtesy lessons. As with children who can self-regulate, children who are normalized are in an optimal state to learn.
The respect for the children’s work in a Children’s House creates a classroom environment where children experience deep concentration in their work and opportunities to develop self-regulation. That is to say, more experience with work leads to more experience with self-regulating behaviors (Blair, 2003). As the teachers, commonly referred to as guides, it is our role to aid the development of self-regulation by providing children with opportunities to choose their work, self-correct and do so without interruption. Therefore, embedded into the pedagogical practice of the Montessori method are long periods of time to work, the freedom to choose from materials they have been shown how to use, and opportunities to make mistakes and self-correct. This kind of learning environment motivates children to work hard and solve problems for themselves, which can be defined as persistence, an important component of self-regulation.

In a Montessori classroom, it can be challenging to the guide to determine when is an appropriate time to intervene if children are experiencing frustration in their work. Dr. Montessori wrote, “Never help a child while he is performing a task in which he feels he can succeed” (Certini, 2012). Yet, as a guide, there is a fine distinction between being a help or a hindrance to the children’s developing ability to persist. The balancing act between following their need for help with their need for space is a crucial skill for the guide (Montessori, 1967). Just as we don’t want to interrupt the child’s concentration, nor do we want to interrupt the child’s attempts to solve problems by offering our own solutions too quickly. In fact, Dr. Montessori found that children enjoy problem solving and “feel irritated if we intervene, and find a way if left to themselves” (Montessori, 1995, p. 224). In my years of observing my classrooms, however, I have seen children who are not yet normalized easily give up on their work when confronted with a
challenge, either by asking for the help of an adult or abandoning it all together. Yet, like most Montessori guides, I recognize that it is “essential to give the least help- just enough to isolate the difficulty so the child can solve the problem” (Bettman, 2003, p. 80). Therefore, in my research I chose to isolate the skill of persistence and explore how to develop it in the children of my class. I was looking for a tool to foster a child’s ability to persist as well as a classroom management technique that managed the requests for help in a way that respects the child’s independence and minimized my interventions.

While in training to become a Montessori guide in 2010, the question of how and when to address students in need of help came up on several occasions. Ideas such as presenting a grace and courtesy lesson about getting attention by the soft touch to the shoulder, a child-sized “waiting chair” next to the chair used by the adult, as well as the traditional approach of hand raising were all discussed. We were aiming to provide the child with the most natural and practical means of getting attention and help. These ideas all presented different challenges in acknowledging students who needed help while respecting their effort and work. Often times, the very act of asking for the help of a teacher can interrupt the concentration of a child (Bettman, 2003). So, when I first observed helper flags in a public Montessori school Children’s House during a classroom visit in the spring of 2011, I was curious to learn more about how, and if, they really worked.

Helper flags, as they were described to me by the guide of that class, allowed children to recognize and acknowledge they needed help while staying with their work. The idea was that the proximity to their work would allow them to keep trying to figure out a solution for themselves while they waited for help to arrive. In other means, it
encouraged the children’s persistence. In the fall of 2014, I was presented with a unique opportunity to research the effectiveness of helper flags as I began teaching in a class full of children who were new to a Montessori classroom environment. I anticipated lots of requests for help from the children due to the newness of the routine, expectations and materials. I wanted to know how the introduction of helper flags as a tool for signaling for help affected a child’s ability to persist and complete a chosen work in a Montessori Children’s House.

**Setting and Participants**

The data collection for this study took place over a six-week period spanning September and October of 2014. Subjects for this study were 15 out of 17 children in my class ranging in age from three to five years old. Two children were not given permission to participate when parental consent forms were distributed and collected in the weeks prior to the beginning of this study. Participants had varying previous experiences with daycare and preschool, but all were new to the Children’s House environment. My class, Children’s House Three, was the most recent classroom to open at a small private Montessori school that was housed in a church but there was no religious affiliation with the program. Along with myself, the lead Montessori guide, the adults in the class included two assistants with minimal experience with a Montessori environment.

**Description of Research Process**

Prior to the start of my data collection, parental consent needed to be given for all of the participants. Consent forms (see Appendix A) notifying families of the research were sent home during the second week of the school year to be collected by the following Wednesday. Seventeen consent forms were distributed and 15 were returned
with full consent for each child to participate in the research. Two were not returned and therefore those two children were not included in the data collection. Also during this time helper flags were constructed (see Appendix B). Four flags were created and painted green.

The research began September 11, 2014. The first two days of research were spent doing student interviews composed of five questions (see Appendix C) to gather preliminary data about the children’s perceptions of their work. In attempts to elicit responses to the questions that were honest and make the interview process appear to be part of a casual conversation, I would invite individual children to answer a few questions and then offer to give them a presentation of new work. Children were interviewed, sitting at their level either at a table or on the floor. To conduct the interview, I had a script of the five questions to ask and I wrote down the children’s responses in a notebook divided into individual sections numbering their responses one through five to correlate to the question they were asked. All 15 children were interviewed.

The following Monday, I presented the first of two grace and courtesy lessons needed to fully implement the helper flags. The first lesson, “How to use a helper flag” (Appendix D), was introduced during the morning group circle before the beginning of the work period. That day I began my data collection using observational techniques that were comprised of 1) anecdotal notes documenting children’s interactions with the flags, 2) a tally (see Appendix E) of how many works were being chosen and completed and whether or not a helper flag was used, and 3) a time sampling tool. These tools were used in conjunction with each other for the entire week.
Anecdotal Notes

In a notebook designated for observations of the class, I sat for at least 15 minutes every day of the research to record intermittent observations during the morning work period. Depending on the work and needs of the children, some days I was able to sit and observe several times. These observations focused primarily on instances where I saw a child utilize a helper flag, and included what material they were working with, what they did while they waited for help, who helped them, how they were helped, and if they were able to complete their work after the help had been given.

Tally

Along with the anecdotal notes, I wanted to record some kind of numerical data. So, through the work period, I would mark a tally for each time I saw a child choose a work. I was able to keep this data collection tool on my person so that I could quickly and easily follow the work cycle of the children I saw choose work even if I was engaged with another activity other than observing. This made it easy to see if a flag was being used and if a work was not completed. With this tool there is the possibility that work was chosen that I could not see to record. Therefore this data would be used only to give an impression of how often the flags were used compared to how much work was being chosen. The tally was used to during the first and final week of research.

Time Sample

It became clear after a week of using the time sampling format that because of the rapid pace of the work being chosen, I was not able to accurately time all of the children working at once. However, this gave way to important insight: the flags were not being utilized as often as I thought they would be and the children were using other means of
getting help. Therefore, I decided to present the initial lesson again the following week and I also created an additional data chart (see Appendix F) that would help collect information about what kinds of requests for help were being used and why the children were requesting help.

**Chart of Types of Requests for Help**

I began using this chart during the second full week of research to replace the time sampling tool. While I was observing, when I saw a child request help, I recorded how the help was requested as well as what they needed assistance with. This was able to give me an idea of how many different ways the children were able to seek out help.

It had been my intention to present the second grace and courtesy lesson the following week, but the second week of my research was interrupted by a field trip, a special guest visitor to our class, and an absence, and I wanted to be sure to present the lesson at a time that the children would have the plenty of time and opportunity to repeatedly practice the lesson. So, the following Monday, in the third week of research, I presented the grace and courtesy lesson of “How to answer a helper flag” (see Appendix G) during the morning group circle before the beginning of the work period. That day, I began using a final data chart (see Appendix H) to collect information about whether or not the children were practicing the additional part of the lesson. I was then able to record who was answering the helper flags in addition to continuing to observe with anecdotal notes and the chart used to collect data from the first presentation.

Video clips were taken using a small handheld camera during the fourth and final full week of the research once the helper flags had been fully integrated into the normal classroom routine. These videos would provide valuable information on how long a child
waited for help, what they did while they waited, and how the peer-to-peer interaction affected the child’s ability to complete the work. Videos were only be taken during the morning work periods when the use of a helper flag was observed and I was not engaged with another child, and therefore only five videos were collected to transcribe and analyze at a later time.

The final two days of research were used to revisit the student interviews (see Appendix C). Again, individual children were invited to answer some questions and offered a presentation after the interview was complete. The same interview questions were asked as before and the same system of recording responses was used. All 15 children participated in the final interview. Research concluded on October 14, 2014.

Analysis of Data

I began my data collection by conducting short interviews with the students participating in the study to record baseline data about their perceptions of their work and how to get help. The first question was about the work they liked to do at school and the second one was about what work was hard for them. After comparing their answers to these questions, I was able to classify the individual responses to the two questions into one of four categories: same response given (S), different response given (D), irrelevant or indecisive response given (I), and the response where the children felt nothing was difficult for them (N). Figure 1 illustrates the results.
Figure 1. Results of the comparison between the first and second question of the student interview before the implementation of helper flags.

For the purpose of this research, if children identified the same work as enjoyable and hard for them I interpreted that to mean that there was something intangible that drew them to choosing a difficult work. When a child has the ability to persist at a difficult task, it is possible that this encourages them to choose work they feel is hard for them. Therefore I identified these children to have some skills of persistence. If children identified different work I was not able to determine if they had any ability to persist. The children who responded irrelevantly or “I don’t know” were younger students whose understanding of the question may have been affected by their developmental stage of their language abilities. Only older students responded that none of the work was hard for them. This could have been because of a high sense of confidence or a lack of challenging work having been presented to them at that point in the school year.
The same interview questions were asked at the end of the research after the helper flags had been implemented to determine if there was a change in the occurrence of the categorized responses. The results can be seen in figure 2.

Figure 2. Comparison of the responses before and after the implementation of helper flags.

The data show there was a 12% increase in the percentage of children with the same responses, meaning there was an increase in the number of children who were persisting with their chosen work after the helper flags were introduced into the classroom. There is also a slight (6%) increase in the occurrence of different responses, but the decrease in irrelevant/indecisive responses of students is most likely the cause of this change. Interestingly, narrative data showed that some of the children who responded differently to the two questions after the addition of helper flags did display the ability to persist. These students repeatedly chose work that required assistance to complete. Additionally, while waiting for their helper flags to be answered, these same children
continued to attempt to figure out their work for themselves. Overall, the results of student interview after the implementation of helper flags show that the helper flags were a means to develop persistence.

The third and fourth questions of the interview were used to determine if the flags helped the children complete and/or persist with their work. For the third question, I asked what the children did when a work was difficult for them. I coded their responses into four categories: keep trying (T), ask for help (A), give up (G) and irrelevant/ I don’t know (I). Figure 3 represents the results.

Figure 3. Results of the third question of the student interview before the implementation of helper flags.

The responses indicated that some children were already persisting with their work and more likely to complete it. For example, two children said that they would try to do their work more slowly. A total of 53% of the children had ideas about how to make their work easier; meanwhile 47% of the children did not. However, responses to
question three after introducing helper flags to the classroom demonstrate a significant change in the children’s ability to find a way to make their work easier, as seen in figure 4.

*Figure 4.* Results of the third question of the student interview after the implementation of helper flags.

Including the aid of helper flags, 66% of the children now identified a means to making their work easier, an increase of 13%. However, just because a child could make their work easier didn’t necessarily mean that they had an ability to persist with their work. It did increase the likelihood that the work would be completed. Therefore the response to question three suggests that the use of helper flags were a way to complete a chosen work.

Because nearly half of the responses to the third question indicated that children were unable to recognize they needed help to complete their work, the fourth question provided valuable information about how they would attain help if given the choice. An
overwhelming majority of the children (60%) said they would ask a teacher, an effective way of getting help, but part of my research was to determine if the helper flags could encourage children to complete their work on their own. In the final student interview, 100% of the children said when they needed help they would use a helper flag, meaning the flags had been successfully integrated into their strategies of getting help. This increased the chance that they were attempting to solve their issue for themselves and therefore indicates the helper flags were effective tools in aiding the completion of chosen work and developing persistence.

The final question, question five, of the interview was used to compare the children’s understanding of the intention of the helper flag after it was introduced. 33% of the children emphasized that it was green, while 44% of the children mentioned how it was used. The remaining 22% responded by simply saying, “It’s a flag.” It therefore could therefore be said that all the children were familiar with a helper flag. However, narrative data indicates this did not appear to affect whether or not they actually used one while they worked because two children were observed to have never made use of a flag despite knowing what it was.

The next piece of data collected was a tally of how many works were chosen and completed compared to how many were left incomplete. This data was collected during the first and final weeks of the research and the results can be seen in figures 5 and 6.
Figure 5. Results of the tally recording work completion from the first week of research after introducing the helper flags.

Figure 6. Results of the tally recording work completion from the final week of research.
This data shows that, overall, there was a decrease in the percentage of chosen work left incomplete as the percentage of work completed with the use of a flag increased. It also shows that the use of the flags increased from the first week to the final week, supporting the evidence from the student interviews that helper flags were being used effectively to attain help. Additionally, observational data indicated that if a child sought out a helper flag, it encouraged them to stay with their work rather than abandon it. In fact, it was never observed that after fetching a flag the chosen work was abandoned, rather, it was always completed. This strongly suggests that the completion of work was more likely with the integration of the flags.

Observations were made over the course of the research to document how the children requested help, what their request for help was and the degree of effort the children exerted after they sought out a flag. Out of the 137 requests for help observed over the course of the research, the majority of requests were made using helper flags, as seen in figure 7. This is consistent with the results of the student interviews and confirms that the helper flags were used as a primary means of getting help.
Figure 7. Results of observational data recording the different ways the children sought out help during the work time.

Observational data also revealed that while all but one child used helper flags as means of getting help, few children requested help by another means. This suggests that the helper flags made getting help easier for more children, and therefore increased the likelihood of work being completed. If helper flags were being used as they had been presented, it also meant that children were being encouraged to persist with their work while they waited for help to arrive. To confirm this, I examined the data that focused on the children who had used a helper flag to request help. Each instance I saw a child use a flag, I noted the degree of effort observed using a rating scale of no persistence present (N), some persistence present (S), much persistence present (M), and persisted to the point of completion (Y). A sample of the results is represented in figure 8.
Figure 8. A sample of children who used a flag to request help and their efforts to persist while waiting for their flag to be answered over the course of the research. Efforts were rated as follows: no persistence present (N), some persistence present (S), much persistence present (M), and persisted to the point of completion (Y).

While it is clear that some children continually persisted with their work more often than not, a closer look at the data also shows the sum of each child’s efforts to persist always amounted to more than the number of times they showed no attempt to figure it out for themselves. This suggests that the majority of the time children chose a helper flag, it encouraged them to persist with their work.

The observational data also suggested other evidence of persistence in the children, including those who showed no attempts to work while they waited for help to arrive. Persistence was evident in children that were repeatedly choosing work despite knowing they needed help to complete it. For example, child B, C and D from figure 8 who had the highest instances of not persisting, also had the highest incidence of
repeating work. In fact, child B identified the dressing frames as a work that was hard for him in the final student interview and yet he was observed choosing that work on five different occasions. This indicated a strong desire to do the dressing frames and the helper flag enabled him to feel like he could be successful in that work despite the challenge it presented him. Similarly, child F was observed at the beginning of the research using a helper flag to request help slicing an apple, making no attempt to slice it on her own. As the research continued, each time she chose the apple work she would also get a helper flag, but her efforts to persist increased little by little. At the end of the research, she was able to slice the apple all by herself. Helper flags also developed persistence by increasing the chance that children would continue to repeatedly choose work.

Finally, the observational data suggests that developing persistence also encouraged the development of independence. This manifested itself in two ways: first, the children became more independent by helping themselves. The following transcription was made of a video taken during in the final week of research (personal communication, October 8, 2014):

*A child is sitting at a table with an unrolled oil cloth in front of her and a helper flag. It is presumed that she needs help rolling her oil cloth. She sits there and makes no attempt to roll it herself, even yawning while she waits for someone to answer her helper flag. Several children pass by without offering to help. Finally, at the 2:00 mark, her fingertips touch the edge of the oil cloth. At 2:10, she starts rolling the cloth slowly and gently, tapping the ends just as she had been shown. At 2:40, she finishes rolling the cloth and looks up with an air of relief and surprise. “Ah, there,” she says as she stands. “I just helped myself.”*
Similarly, one child responded to question five of the student interview, “What is a helper flag?” by stating, “A helper flag is when somebody can’t do it. You just grab a helper flag and they will help you. Or you can help yourself.”

Second, the children became more independent by helping each other and working together. For example, a child was observed answering the helper flag of another child who had not shown any effort to figure out her work for herself. She told him she needed help getting polishing liquid out of the eye dropper she was using and then he tried to do it for her. When no polish came out, he looked at it and tried again. In fact, he tried six times over the course of their exchange to get the polish out. In this way, it was encouraging his persistence despite the fact it wasn’t even his work.

Another example occurred during a filming of the work time during the final week of research. The exchange is transcribed here (personal communication, October 7, 2014):

The first child (C1) sits with an unrolled work mat on the floor, looking at the camera making no attempt to roll it herself. There is a helper flag next to her. Another child (C2) approaches.

C2: “How do you need help?”
C1: “Rolling this up.” She moves to center herself on one end of the mat.
C2 sits next to her and says, “Oh, I can do it.” He pinches the edge of the mat. She watches. C2 begins to roll the mat.
C1: “Let’s do it together.” She taps the end. C2 does the same on the other end. They roll it up. C2 stands.
C2: ”We did it!”
Observational data also indicated that after the children were shown how to answer a helper flag, the number of helper flags answered by children caused a decrease in the number answered by adults, as seen in figure 9. This means the children were less reliant on waiting for the help of the few adults in the room and could more easily move through their work time at an individual pace.

![Figure 9. Observations made of the frequency of adults and children answering helper flags after the presentation of “How to answer a helper flag.”](image)

The analyzed data leads me to two conclusions. First, with the introduction of helper flags into the classroom environment, the children were more likely to persist with their work. This is because unlike the other means of getting assistance used by the children, the flags were brought to their workspace where they could keep trying their work while they waited for help to arrive. Second, the use of a helper flag made it more likely for children to complete their work because it provided a reliable strategy for getting help. The flag acknowledged they needed assistance and the children could trust
that their request would always be answered by an adult or a peer who would help them see it through to the end. Unless, of course, they helped themselves finish first.

**Action Plan**

The purpose of this action research was to determine if using helper flags as tools for signaling for help was an effective way to develop persistence and encourage the children in my class to complete their chosen work. After collecting some initial data about the children’s perceptions of hard work and what they could do to make it easier, helper flags were introduced to the classroom environment and the children were shown how to use them to request assistance while they worked. With the use of the helper flags, the children were left with their work while waiting for help and the research revealed that they were more likely to continue to persist. With the use of the helper flags, children were also more likely to complete their work because they were able to acknowledge they needed assistance and know that others would offer to help them. Therefore, the results indicated that the helper flags were effective tools in helping the children develop persistence and complete their work.

One reason I decided to do this research was because I was anticipating a large number of requests for help as the children acclimated to the new classroom environment at the beginning of a new school year. None of the children nor the two assistants in the study had experience with the Montessori classroom structure and expectations, with the children being independent and free to choose from the work they had been shown by the Montessori guide. I anticipated that the freedom to choose from materials the children had been shown would create a certain amount of hesitation and confusion regarding how to go about one’s work. The research revealed that this wasn’t necessarily the case.
Children chose work that interested them as well as presented them with a certain degree of challenge. The project also revealed that children first needed to able to recognize they needed help and have the skills to request it. Before the implementation of the flags, some children did not know what they could do to get help. Because the helper flags gave them a means of getting help the flags also increased the number of requests for help. Therefore, it was even more important to investigate if the flags created opportunities to be independent rather than dependent on the adults of the classroom to complete their work. The research revealed that some children were quick to make use of a flag without making any attempt with their work. In this way, the flags were used more as a means of getting attention instead of encouraging them to persist. It is unknown whether or not this would continue occur as the year went on and the children became more independent and trusting relationships were formed at school. For this reason, I would be interested in conducting a future study later in the school year.

From my perspective as the Montessori guide in the classroom, the research was also an opportunity to help me determine when children truly required the intervention and assistance of a teacher. The project allowed me pause and evaluate what the children were doing with their work before offering my assistance. The flags also highlighted activities in the class that could be changed to improve the children’s ability to move independently through their work time. For example, one child continuously sought out a helper flag when she needed an adult to cut her paper down from the easel. With the simple addition of a pair of child sized scissors left at the easel, this need for adult intervention was eliminated. Similarly, the flags were often used to signal that children needed help to roll their oil cloths. This observation led me to realize that I should re-
present that lesson to those children with more attention paid to the analysis of my movement so that they could clearly see how to roll the oil cloths. These examples illustrate that helper flags proved to be a good classroom management technique by providing me with useful information about how to better my practice as a guide.

In conclusion, because the helper flags proved to be a useful tool it is my intention to continue to use them in my class. However, the research suggested that if children were left for longer periods of time before their helper flag was answered, there was a greater chance that they would persist with their work. Therefore the only change I will make with the flags is that if I see a child with a helper flag, instead of immediately answering it, I will first wait long enough to see if they are attempting their work themselves so that they are allowed the chance to persist. However, I will permit the children to answer each other’s flags as quickly as they deem necessary. This is because I believe the peer interaction that occurs with the use of flags creates a positive interdependence that will add to an environment where children are helpful and peaceful.

As the year goes on, I will continue to look at how frequently the flags are used. The study was conducted at the beginning of the school year and the helper flags were introduced to the children alongside numerous new and enticing materials. It is possible that the novelty of the flags could diminish as the year goes on, either because children forget about them or because they become more persistent with their work. Because of this, it is important to continue to observe how often the flags are used and possibly phase them out, to be re-introduced with the beginning of another new school year. I must remember that they are only a means and not an end to greater self-regulation in the children.
Finally, because of the independence of the children and the natural peer interaction of a Montessori learning environment, helper flags were easily integrated into the Children’s House, however it is unclear if they would show the similar results with older children. It is also unknown if the helper flags would be useful in for other pedagogies and therefore this is an area for further research. Being a Montessori guide, however, I am encouraged to delve deeper into my commitment to the method. Bettman wrote, “It is an art to be able to give the least help so the child has confidence to go ahead independently” (2003, p. 80) and it is my intention to continue refining my craft with this sentiment in mind. As I continue to witness the incredible capabilities of children, I experience a greater trust in their emerging personalities and my ability to guide them on their journeys to self-mastery. Just as Dr. Montessori observed so many years ago, if left to find their own way with just the right amount of help and guidance, children will be freed to fulfill their true potential.
References


Appendix A

Notification and Consent Form

Dear Children’s House 3 Families,

This fall, as part of my Master’s program at St. Kate’s, I will be conducting an action research project entitled “Help Me Help Myself: The role of Helper Flags as a Tool for Self-Regulation.” To complete this project I will introduce “helper flags” into our classroom environment and observe how they affect the children’s ability to complete their chosen work, either independently or with the help of another student or teacher.

As a part of this project, I will need to observe, take written anecdotes, record short video sessions as well as conduct brief pre- and post- project interviews to collect data. The data collected will be solely used for the completion of this project and will not be used in any way to negatively affect their experience in the classroom. Additionally, the children’s privacy is of utmost importance throughout this process. All of the children's identities will remain anonymous within the final report and data will be destroyed within 2 months of the completion of the research.

I, __________________________________________, guardian of ________________________________

__________________________________________, give permission for my child to take part in the following portions of Lara Bergman’s action research project, “Help Me Help Myself: The Role of Helper Flags as a Tool for Self-Regulation.”

_____ My child may be observed using written observations

_____ My child may be observed using video recording

_____ My child may take part in pre- and post- project interviews

_____ My child may not take part in any portion of this project.

I understand that my child will in no way be negatively affected by his/her participation in this project and that confidentiality will be protected at all times.

Signed: ________________________________ Date: ____________________________
Appendix B

Instructions for Assembling the Helper Flag

Materials Needed:
Green felt
Wooden dowel
Wooden Spool
Wooden disc
Wood glue
Green paint

Instructions for Assembly:
1. Cut wooden dowel to 12 inches long.
2. Paint dowel, spool and disc with green paint. Allow to dry.
3. Cut a piece of green felt in the shape of a triangle that is elongated on one side. This side will be used to wrap around the dowel to be secured to the flag pole (dowel).
4. Attach the felt to the dowel by gluing around the side of the triangle and wrapping securely around the top of the dowel. Allow to dry.
5. Glue the wooden spool in the middle of the wooden disc. Allow to dry.
6. Apply glue to the bottom of dowel and insert into the hole of the spool. Allow to dry.
Appendix C

Student Interview

DATA COLLECTION TOOL: Student Interview

Questions:

1) What kind of work do you like to do at school?
2) What kind of work is hard for you?
3) When something is hard for you, what do you do to make it easier?
4) What do you do when you need help?
5) What is a helper flag?
Appendix D

Write-up for First Grace and Courtesy Lesson

How to Use a Helper Flag (First Presentation)

1. Say, “Sometimes when we are working, we need help.”
2. Hold up a helper flag and say, “This is a helper flag. It shows that you need help.” Place the helper flag on the shelf designated as the place to keep the flags.
3. Say, “I want to show you how to use a helper flag to get help when you are working.”
4. Stand, retrieve a work mat and unroll in the middle of the circle.
5. Say, “Let’s say I am working on the red rods and I decide I need help. Watch what I do.”
6. Begin pantomiming work with the red rods on the work mat. Pause, making a confused face. Look around, as if you are looking for someone to come help. Suddenly, brighten your face and smile, as if you’ve had an idea. Stand, retrieve a helper flag and sit by your work. Make it look as if you are thinking hard about the next step while slowly moving an imaginary red rod. Continue to do this for 5-10 seconds.
7. Say, “I needed help with my red rods. Did you see me get the helper flag?”
8. After children respond (affirmatively) say, “The helper flag shows I need help. And what did you see me do while I was waiting for help?”
9. If no one responds appropriately, say, “While I was waiting for someone to help, I kept trying.”
10. Point out that the flag is painted green. “When you see traffic lights, red means stop, but green means…. Go! This helper flag is green to help you remember to keep going and keep trying while you wait for help.”
11. Offer for a child to practice getting a helper flag by saying, “Does anyone want to try using a helper flag to get help?”
12. Invite an older child who is willing to role play by saying, “Let’s say (insert name) is doing the pink tower on this work mat and he/she needs help. Let’s see what happens.”
13. Allow the child to pretend to work with the pink tower, retrieve a flag and sit with their work.
14. Stand, walk over to the child and gently place a hand on his/her shoulder. Say, “I see you have a helper flag. How can I help you?”
15. The child may or may not respond. Point out, “When I see you have a helper flag, I know you need help and I will be there to help you as soon as I can. Remember, while you wait, keep trying!”
16. Summarize the lesson by saying, “That is how to use a helper flag.”
Appendix E

Record of Tally

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<th>Work Completed with flag</th>
<th>Work completed without flag</th>
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Appendix F

Chart Recording Requests for Help

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Appendix G

Write-up for Second Grace and Courtesy Lesson

How to Answer a Helper Flag (Second Presentation)

1. Prior to showing the lesson to the group, invite two older children to help give the lesson. Prepare the first child by saying that he/she will be pretending to work and will then get a helper flag. When the second child sees that, they can touch his/her shoulder and ask, “How can I help you?” Then that child will return the flag to its place. Run through this one time if the children don’t seem to understand.

2. In a large group, remind the children of the first presentation by saying, “Do you remember when I showed you how to use a helper flag?”

3. Introduce the second piece of using a helper flag by saying, “Did you know that anyone can help answer a helper flag? It’s true! You can help your friend when you see they have a helper flag.”

4. Cue your helpers to set up for the lesson by saying, “Let’s say (insert name) is working on the brown stairs. He/she needs help. Let’s see what happens.”

5. Watch as the two older children role play as practiced.

6. When they are finished say, “Did you see (insert name) help his/her friend?”

7. Highlight the points of interest by saying, “Did you see (insert name) touch (insert name)’s shoulder? Did you hear what they asked? Who put the helper flag away?”

8. Offer the children the chance to practice this in the group circle.

9. Summarize the lesson by saying, “You can help answer helper flags whenever you want during the work time.”
Appendix H

Chart Recording the Use of Helper Flags

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<th>NAME</th>
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<th>PERSISTANCE</th>
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**PERSISTANCE RATING:**

N- No evidence of persistence
S- some persistence observed
M- much persistence observed
Y- flag was retrieved, but persisted to completion for oneself