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How Adding Social Emotional Learning Impacts Preschool Student's Ability to Manage Their Behavior

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Their Emotions

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Abstract

This action research was inspired by the researcher's own classroom observations of students' behaviors, interactions, and emotional reactions throughout the day in preschool. Having students who have behaviors that may get out of control, the researcher wondered if a whole class social emotional instruction would provide them with strategies make a difference in all student's ability to manage their emotions. The participants in this study included 20 preschool students, 3- to 5-year-old. This study took place over a 4-week period where social emotional lessons were presented as whole groups and small groups. During this time, the teacher was intentional in teaching about emotions during free choice time as the opportunity allowed. Data was collected by the researcher using observations, journal entries, and parent questionnaires to indicate the ability for preschool students to manage their emotions. The study found that when adding social emotional learning, social emotional literature, and intentional modeling, there was a positive effect on student's awareness of their emotions.

Keywords; Social emotional learning, emotions, social emotional curriculum, classroom management, preschool

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How Adding Social Emotional Learning Impacts Preschool Students' Ability to Manage

Their Emotions

Contributing to lifetime success, social and emotional skills encourage healthier lifestyles, enhanced life satisfaction, and safer societies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD 2015; Siew & Bull 2018). In shaping foundations for lifelong learning, early education is critical in equipping children not only with academic knowledge and abilities but also with socio-emotional skills and competencies (Durlak et al. 2011; Wall et al., 2015); (Siew & Bull, 2018).

Jones et al. (2015) found that kindergarten prosocial skills (e.g., cooperation, providing assistance to peers, problem solving) were positively associated and predictive of whether participants completed a college degree, obtained stable employment, and were employed in full time work in young adulthood. Social and emotional competencies are also vital in promoting children's engagement and capacities in learning (Denham et al., 2012). Montroy et al. (2014), found that preschoolers who had higher levels of behavioral self-regulation (ability to respond with appropriate actions) performed better in literacy; importantly, social skills and problem behaviors were found to be the mediating mechanism (Siew & Bull, 2018).

Social-emotional skills develop early. Preschool students are just in the beginning stages of discovering their emotions. Challenging behaviors that disrupt classroom learning constitute one of the strongest predictors of a child's later aggression, delinquency, antisocial behavior, and substance abuse (McCabe & Frede 2007; Kemple & LLrang Lee, 2019). There are more frequent behaviors of lashing out, destroying property, and angry verbiage in preschool. Anger is an important and normal feeling which informs us that something is not right and potentially

harmful to us. It is fine to feel angry-however, it is not acceptable to lash out and hurt people or destroy property (Swanepoel A., 2018, Munevver M., 2018).

Challenging behaviors that disrupt classroom learning constitute one of the strongest predictors of a child's later aggression, delinquency, anti-social behavior, and substance abuse (McCabr & Frede 2007; Kemple & LLrang Lee, 2019). Children's emotion regulation, as well as their understanding of social cues and social rules are important areas of growth in early childhood and set a foundation for later life outcomes such as health and well-being (Boyd et al.2005; Braveman et al.2008; Kemple & LLrang Lee, 2019).

There has been a surge in interest among educators, parents, and policymakers in addressing children's social and emotional development in addition to academic skills but, yet no clear consensus exists on what constitute the best strategies and methods for cultivating these positive qualities in young children (Greenberg et al., 2003; Flook et al., 2015). Social and Emotional competencies are important for the whole-student development and well-being. We know that brain function is hierarchical. "We feel and then we think" (Blodgett, 2015 & Perry, 2006; Iowa Department of Education, 2020). A purposeful focus on implementing strong social emotional competencies fosters an environment where all individuals feel supported to thrive (Iowa Department of Education, 2020). If children are supplied with the tools and strategies to be able to self-regulate their behaviors, there would be less frequent behavior issues due to anger. This action research project will explore the effect of adding social emotional learning each day and how it can provide the students with different strategies that they can use to manage their emotions.

Review of the Literature

Social Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is defined as the process where a person can acknowledge and manage their own emotions, recognize the emotions of others, make good decisions, establish friendships, and handle challenges and situations appropriately (Gunter, 2012). Social and emotional issues are quite common during the preschool years (Egger & Angold, 2006 & Gunter, 2012). Children are just beginning to develop language skills and capacities to regulate their behaviors, thoughts, and feelings (Egger & Angold, 2006 & Gunter, 2012). Deficiencies in social emotional may make it difficult for children to connect with peers and teachers (Smith, 2009). This is when a child may begin to develop behavior problems or use physical aggression to express their needs. Preschool is a primetime to help students manage their behaviors.

Development

Tremblay (2000) indicates, aggressive behavior is part of the typical development of young children. When children reach the age of 2 or 3, they show a peak in their level of aggression (Alink et al., 2006; Al Sayed, 2018). Children, at this age, lack of verbal abilities and they have increased motor skills and sense of autonomy, as a result, they use physical aggression as a tool to express themselves (Campbell, 2002). Children aged between 2 and 5 years have a limited capacity with which to control their emotions. As indicated in the current findings (Nuske et al., 2018), and consistent with other research, externalizing behaviors are already common in young children with ASD. When behaviors persist into older childhood and adolescence, they become increasingly difficult for families to cope with (e.g., a tantruming preschooler vs. a tantruming adolescent) (Nuske et al., 2018). Indeed, the vast

majority of research in this area has been conducted with older children and adolescent samples, with persistent emotion regulation difficulties common at this age (e.g. Mazefsky et al.,2014, Samson et al., 2015; Nuske et al., & Dissanayake, 2018).

Emotion regulation is clearly important for the development of prosocial behavior and overall social competence (Eisenberg et al., 1997; Fabes et al., 1999; Locke et al., 2015). Children who misinterpret social interactions are more likely to be rejected or victimized by peers (Dodge et al., 2003; Garner & Lemerise, 2007; Meece & Mize, 2010; Reijntjes et al., 2011; Schultz et al., 2000; Locke et al., 2015). Aggressive behavior and negative social experiences, particularly during the preschool years when social and emotional competencies are rapidly developing (Denham et al., 1990), can lead to later externalizing and delinquent behavior (Coie et al., 1995; Haselager et al., 2002; Locke et al., 2015).

Although preschoolers may lack the higher level of cognitive processing ability necessary to take the perspective of another, and thereby come to a mutually satisfying resolution to conflict, early learning theories (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1987) have suggested that children can (and strive to) model behaviors of more competent peers and adults (Vestal & Jones, 2004). An environmental change and a curriculum designed to teach adaptive problem-solving principles can effectively teach Head Start children to use and adopt conflict resolution strategies into their understanding of social interactions (Vestal & Jones, 2004).

As children develop, most begin to use self-regulation skills without prompting or assistance (Florez, 2011). They develop strategies to manage incoming information, choose appropriate responses, and maintain levels of arousal that allow them to actively participate in learning. When children routinely self-regulate without adult assistance, they have internalized

self-regulation (Bronson 2000; Florez 2011). Vygotsky ([1934]1986) described internalization as a process in which children progress from co-regulating behavior with an adult to doing so independently (Florez, 2011). For children to develop self-regulation, children need many opportunities to experience and practice with adults and capable peers (Florez, 2011).

Curriculum

Children can learn techniques to manage, recognize the emotions of others, and get along with peers (Vestal & Jones, 2004). There has been substantial support for the effectiveness of the Second Step program in elementary and middle school children, and the data in support of Second Step in preschool is growing (Kemple & LLrang Lee, 2019). A recent study results suggest that the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum/PreK can be used effectively by preschool teachers to increase children's social knowledge and social skills (Kemple & LLrang Lee, 2019). Evidence suggests that changes in rates of observed aggression can be reduced as well (Kemple & LLrang Lee, 2019). While specific teaching techniques incorporated in Second Step uses photo cards of social situations and related lessons that elicit discussions of appropriate behaviors (Smith, 2018). This may be a good option to include in a preschool classroom. By blending behavior management techniques, along with literacy skills, educators can reinforce appropriate behaviors and literacy in the classroom (Smith, 2009). An educator's responsibility is to incorporate literacy that encourages appropriate behaviors and create a dialogue with students. Self-regulation is taught. Listening to a book without interrupting the reader requires self-regulation as well as cognitive self-regulation (Leong, 2003). Using these different practices throughout the day in your preschool will encourage self-regulation, and positive behaviors.

Mindfulness curriculum includes different strategies for students to use when feeling different emotions (Wood et al., 2018). Included in each session are brief yoga, mindful breathing, and compassion components (Wood et al., 2018). Mindfulness training enhances attention and Emotional Function, by bringing awareness to a particular attentional object, whether it is the breath, external stimuli, thoughts, or emotions (Flook et al., 2015). Several researchers have suggested MBIs as a potential avenue of enhancing EF skills and related processes (e.g., Diamond, 2012; Flook et al., 2010; Razza et al., 2015; Van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2012; Willis & Dinehart, 2014: Wood et al., 2018). Using a randomized controlled design, the study (Flook et al., 2015) investigated the effects of a 12-week mindfulness-based Kindness Curriculum (KC) delivered in a public-school setting on executive function, self-regulation, and prosocial behavior in a sample of 68 preschool children. The KC intervention group showed greater improvements in social competence and earned higher report card grades in domains of learning, health, and social-emotional development, whereas the control group exhibited more selfish behavior over time (Flook et al., 2015).

In a recent study (Arda & Ocak, 2012) it was found that PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies)-Preschool was an effective program in terms of improvement of children's social emotional competence and to lay groundwork for a comprehensive evaluation of the program as a preventive intervention for Turkish children. An environmental change and a curriculum designed to teach adaptive problem-solving principles can effectively teach Head Start children to use and adopt conflict resolution strategies into their understanding of social interactions (Vestal, & Jones, 2004).

Teacher/Classroom Influence

An educator's responsibility is to incorporate literacy that encourages appropriate behaviors and create a dialogue with students. Instances where teachers' presence and direction (whether they arise intentionally or incidentally) support SEL in the kindergarten classrooms. Teachers should set up opportunities for children to make discoveries so that they can develop a sense of self-competence and learn to cooperate with peers. These opportunities should include highlighting good peer relations, praising children who respond empathically when aiding peers who are physically hurt or emotionally upset. To support children in forming positive relations and build social awareness with peers, teachers should help them enter play, sustain play, and enhance play (Epstein, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2013; NAEYC 2015; Siew, & Bull, 2018). When educators blend behavior management techniques and literacy skills, they can reach certain students who might have missed the instruction due to exhibiting negative behaviors. Preschool teachers should be committed to improving children's social skills and enhancing their literacy knowledge through these blended management techniques (Smith, 2009).

Teachers are models of learning. As teachers help children solve social and intellectual problems, as they respond to children's creative and emotional responses to classroom events, as they plan and implement projects that represent multiple learning opportunities for diverse learners, they are teaching young children powerful lessons in what knowledge is important, what behaviors are valued, and what sorts of relationships are essential to a safe and inclusive learning community (New 1999, p. 278; Smith, 2009). Play is a creative, dynamic process, therefore using improvisational approach is acceptable and feasible, because games and open-ended dramatic play build on children's interests and provide a natural and unobtrusive method for building on children's play (O'Neill, 2013). The most powerful way teachers can help

children learn self-regulation is by modeling and scaffolding during ordinary activities (Florez, 2011). When teachers deliberately teach self-regulation as a part of everyday experiences, they help children become actively engaged learners, laying the foundation for years of future success in school and life (Florez, 2011).

Potential SEL opportunities might arise when teachers anticipate and facilitate day-to-day interactions in order to cultivate skills related to social and emotional competencies, such as turn-taking, sharing, and emotion regulation (Booren et al., 2012). For example, Mashford-Scott and Church (2011) suggested that teachers may afford opportunities for SEL by encouraging children to propose solutions when peer conflicts occur (Siew, & Bull, 2018).

The findings of this study (Veijalainen et al., 2019) suggest that teachers in ECEC should pay attention and offer sufficient support for children in situations of frustration. According to the results, it should be considered that some of the children do not have the comprehension of their own possibilities and options when they confront the frustration (Veijalainen et al., 2019). Research shows that simply placing children with special needs in an inclusive setting with a play-based curriculum does not afford them the same benefits their peers reap, because during dramatic play they do not interact socially at the same rate as their peers without special needs (Odom et al., 2006; Iarocci et al. 2008; Guralnick et al., 2009; O'Neill, 2013). The findings of a recent study, (Jahromi, et al., 2012), suggests that when students with autism are faced with frustration, these students display a higher intensity and duration of resignation that became most pronounced when children worked without the support of an adult in the room. Therefore, it is important for teachers to support these children in expanding their repertoire of play skills and

gaining the tools necessary for social integration and success (Conroy & Brown 2004; Sandall et al., 2005; Brown & Conroy 2011; O'Neill, 2013).

When taught by motivated teachers who have undergone transformative training in conflict resolution strategies, preschoolers can acquire significant problem-solving skills (Vestal, & Jones, 2004). This study, (Jennings, & Greenberg 2005) stated that the learning environment is shaped by teachers who are socially and emotionally competence, and has encouraging relationships with children, and so they affect classrooms' social - emotional atmosphere and children's learning outcomes (Arda & Ocak, 2012). Adults foster children's motivation regulation by being motivated themselves (Galinsky 2010,11; Florez, 2011). Children learn to regulate thoughts, feelings, behavior, and emotion by watching and responding to adult's self - regulation (Florez, 2011).

The positive relationship found between teachers' child-centered beliefs, children's self-regulation, and children's academic achievement highlights the importance of targeting teachers' beliefs, values, and attitudes in regard to promoting children's self-regulatory development and academic achievement (Hur, Buettner, & Jeon, 2015).

Classroom Management

The definition of classroom management has evolved from a narrow focus on discipline to one that includes all teacher actions inside and outside of direct instruction that set the stage for both academic and social-emotional learning to occur (Emmer & Sabornie 2015; Garwood & Feagans, 2017). Teachers are expected to be emotionally supportive and to create an organized and efficient classroom to support students' achievement (Nie & Lau, 2009; Garwood & Feagans, 2017).

Given the known struggles in classroom management for teachers working with students with or at risk for EBD (emotional behavior disorder) (Farmer et al., 2014), it should not be surprising that many teachers resort to punitive and reactive practices (e.g., removal from the class), which then leads to less time for learning (Garwood & Feagans, 2017). On the other hand, teachers who create classrooms characterized by high-quality emotional and organizational supports may help children with or at risk for EBD do better academically by improving their on-task behaviors and engagement (Fruth, 2014; Kortering & Christenson, 2009; Garwood & Feagans, 2017). High-quality classroom management, which includes a focus on both behavioral control and teachers' warmth and care for students (Nie & Lau, 2009), has been identified as a necessary component for effective elementary reading instruction (Brownell et al., 2009; Roskos & Neuman, 2012; Garwood & Feagans, 2017).

Guidelines published in the USA by the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders identified ten teaching practices to promote social and emotional competencies (Yoder 2014; Siew & Bull, 2018). These practices include student centered discipline; teacher language; responsibility and choice; warmth and support; cooperative learning; discussions; self-reflection and self-assessment; balanced instruction; academic press (challenges for students) and expectations; and competence building (some of these listed practices may be considered as more relevant to teachers' beliefs (e.g., expectations) rather than teaching practices (Siew & Bull, 2018).

Social Stories

Social Stories are individualized short stories used to assist children with ASD in understanding social situations by describing and explaining appropriate behavior and providing examples of appropriate responses (Wright & McCathren, 2012). Social stories can be created by

the classroom teachers with individual child's interest and perspective in mind (Wright &

McCathren, 2012). Social stories offer additional information about social situations, enabling

children to better understand and interpret what is expected in their environment (Sayed, 2018).

In the first study of its kind, Burke and colleagues (2004) evaluated the use of Social

Stories with typically developing children who were experiencing sleep disturbances. Results

indicated that there was an immediate and significant decrease in problem sleep time behavior in

the four children in the study (Wright & McCathren, 2012). Social Stories can be used to help

children understand that other people have perspectives that may differ from their own and that

others have information that is helpful to them (Wright & McCathren, 2012). The goals of Social

Stories are to share accurate social information and to promote social understanding (Sayed,

2018). Social stories intervention was used with some success when targeted behavior such as

aggression, screaming, tantrums, grabbing toys and inappropriate table manners (Kuoch &

Mirenda, 2003; Rowe, 1999; Scattone, et al. 2002; Toplis & Hadwin, 2006; Sayed, 2018).

Strategies

Adults and children need to have a set of strategies that will enable them to manage

situations and achieve their goals while helping others to achieve their goals as well. Being

skilled in social problem solving provides children with a sense of mastery that is needed to cope

with stressful life events (Vestal, & Jones, 2004). Conflict resolution training at an early age can

help them expand the realm of prosocial responses to choose from when confronted with

interpersonal conflicts (Spivack & Shure, 1974; Vestal & Jones, 2004).

The children's coping strategies in stressful conditions involve mental and/or physical

action and can take the form of denial, regression, withdrawal, impulsive acting out or

suppression, as well as problem solving, negotiation, conciliation, or humor (Veijalainen et al., 2019). Children's persistent coping strategies should be encouraged via engagement in play activities and enriched materials through providing adult support (Veijalainen et al., 2019).

The developing strategies in stress-related situations can include elements of help- or comfort-seeking, goal-directed strategies, distraction and physical forms of venting or tension release in attempt to overcome problems (Diener & Manglesdorf, 1999). Children begin to develop certain coping patterns with specific stressors through habituation and adaptation. Some coping strategies are more effective and more socially acceptable than others (Veijalainen et al., 2019). Self-regulation is not something abstract and theoretical, and these concrete coping strategies would allow teachers to work concretely with children in enhancing their self-regulation skills further (Veijalainen et al., 2019).

The current findings suggests that intervention on emotion regulation strategies should start before the school age (Nuske et al., 2018). Studies show that emotion regulation strategies can be verbalized (Dias et al., 2000) and recognized (Cole et al., 2009; Dennis & Kelemen, 2009) by three- to four-year-old children (Vikan et al., 2013). Findings (Dias et al., 2000) have indicated that three- and four-year-olds' proposals for how to stop being angry or sad include such strategies as *Play with someone, Go to mother, Go to my room*, and *Don't think about it* (Vikan et al., 2013). Preschool is an age with rapid growth in emotional understanding, as is shown, for example, in children's ability to identify emotions from drawings and pictures of peoples' faces and the insight that emotions are different in terms of their causes and consequences (Cutting & Dunn, 1999; Pons et al., 2004; Vikan, Karstad, & Dias, 2013).

Methods

Participants

This study was conducted in one preschool classroom with 20 students. At the time of the research there are 6, 4-year-old students and 14, 5-year-old students. Out of the 20 students, 17 are full day and 3 half day students. There were 8 girls and 12 boys. There were 4 students with an IEP for speech only, 1 student with an IEP for behavior and academics. The family dynamics of the preschool classroom consists of 16 students that have two parents, 3 students come from single parent families, and 1 student lives with a foster family. The preschool classroom has a 40% poverty rate. The classroom has 99% Caucasians and 1% Hispanic or Latino. The lead teacher is also the researcher. In this preschool classroom there is a full-time associate and a half day 1:1 para.

The research site was a preschool classroom, located in our only elementary school with 250 students. The preschool in which this study is conducted is one of 3 preschool classrooms. The research site offers a full day preschool, which is from 8:00-3:50, four days a week. The preschool is located in rural central Iowa in the United States. The elementary school consists of 98% Caucasians, 2% Hispanic or Latino. The school district has a 28% poverty rate. Of the student population in the elementary 10% receive special education services.

Data Collection

The intervention consisted of adding intentional social emotional learning each school day. The Second Step Curriculum for preschool was implemented during the mornings, Tuesday through Friday. The lessons were about emotional management and lasted for the duration of the school year, which was 4 weeks. The lessons presented were Identifying Feelings, Strong Feelings, Naming Feelings and Managing Anger. Second Step Lessons were conducted in large

group and small groups. Social emotional books were added each day see Table 2 for the list of books that were used during this study.

All parents filled out a questionnaire in the beginning of the year during enrollment. Parents also filled out a questionnaire post intervention to assess the impact of the intervention on their child's emotional regulation at home. Students were given a pre intervention assessment and again post intervention. The observational data was collected during free choice play by lead teacher for 4 weeks. The observations were recorded in the GOLD data system. Recess was observed as well since this is an unstructured 20-minute, time each day. Journal was kept daily with reflections of the day. This journal included children's comments, self-assessment for instructor, and overall thoughts of the day. The GOLD Objectives that were used in the collection of the data. These objectives were Manages Feelings, Responds to Emotional Ques, Solves Social Problems, Interacts with Peers, and Follows Limits. The researcher received an interrater reliability certificate after taking a course on reliability of observations and how the observations they are scored in the GOLD data system.

Rubrics were used to summarize the data from the parent questionnaire and the student journals. The triangulation method was used in this study. Questionnaires and student interpretations of their journals were used for the triangulation method.

Findings

Data Analysis

A dependent samples t-test was conducted to determine if there is a change in student's ability to regulate their emotions using strategies following the intervention of incorporating social emotional learning. Baseline assessment of the student's ability to name, draw, describe, and talk about their emotions shows a 37%. Parent questionnaire on social emotional shows a baseline of 70%. Baseline for GOLD data on social emotional shows 50% below and 50% meet the requirements for being on target.

A dependent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant change in student's GOLD social emotional scores following the intervention of adding social emotional lessons, literacy, and calm down strategies. The baseline was taken from the winter GOLD social emotional data revealed students were able to meet the benchmark 4.17 of 6 ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.05$). After the 4-week social emotional intervention students were able to meet 5.94 of 6 ($M = 5.94$, $SD = 1.37$). The results of the dependent samples two-tailed t-test revealed a significant difference between the baseline and final GOLD assessment, $t(94) = -18.58$, $p < .001$. The social emotional intervention increased student's social emotional GOLD data.

A dependent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant change in student's Journal reflections following the intervention of adding social emotional lessons, literacy, and calm down strategies. A baseline journal assessment revealed students were able to accurately describe an emotion on an average of 37 of 100 ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 2.99$). After the 4 weeks of intervention the students were able to accurately describe an emotion on average of 91 of 100 ($M = 9.10$, $SD = 2.99$). The results of the dependent samples two-tailed t-test revealed a significant difference between the baseline and final assessment, $t(18) = -7.92$, $p <$

.001. The intervention of adding social emotional lessons, literacy, and calm down strategies increased student's awareness of emotions (e.g., Figure 1).

Figure 1
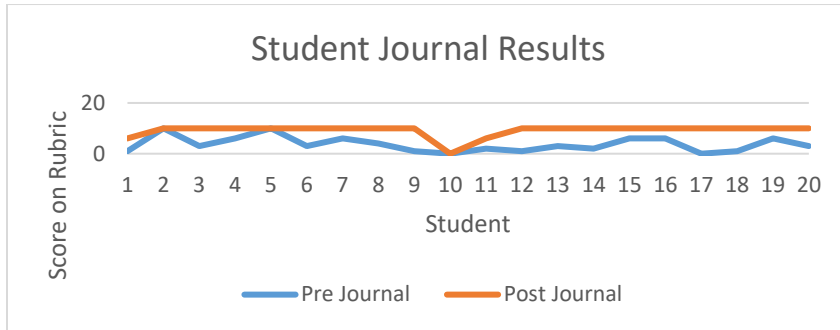
A dependent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant change in student's social skills at home. A questionnaire was given to the student's parents at the beginning of the year, this was the baseline of our data. The baseline revealed that parents scored their child an average of 4.1 of 6 ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.59$). After the 4-week social emotional intervention presented in school, parents scored their child an average of 5.05 of 6 ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.47$). The results of the dependent samples two-tailed t-test reveal a significant difference between the baseline and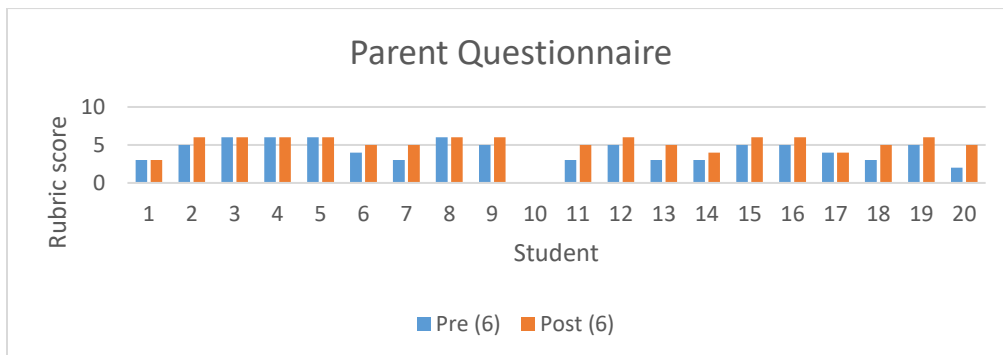 final questionnaire, $t(18) = -4.80$, $p < .001$. The social emotional intervention increased student's social skills at home (e.g., Figure 2).

Figure 2

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of social emotional learning and literacy, increased preschool student's awareness of strategies to control their emotions. The baseline data from the student's journaling, determined that some of the students were able to name emotions, During the intervention, students participated in the implementation of social emotional learning in large group and small groups for 5 to 10 minutes each day. The teacher used parts of the Second Step Early Learning curriculum during large and small group. The teacher named the focus emotion, showed what facial expression this emotion looks like. Teacher says, "When you are angry your eyebrows slant down in the middle, your eyes are smaller and scrunched, you might grit your teeth, and your arms are tight and make a fist". She had the students repeat and show the emotion on their face and body. A picture was shown as a discussion item to talk about how that child is feeling. During small groups, the teacher and students matched up the feeling cards. During journal time the students were asked to draw a picture of something that makes them angry. After the journal writing the teacher chose a social emotional book (Table 3) to read during large group. These activities were presented daily for 4-weeks. The teacher used teaching moments throughout the day to incorporate social emotional learning. During center time the teacher would place herself in an area where she could model sharing, conflict resolution, and proper communication skills. Before the baseline there was no intentional classroom instruction on social emotional learning. After the intervention students were asked to draw a picture of something that makes them angry and what can you do when your body feels angry. Most students were able to describe what they would do if they felt angry. The results of the journals were scored on a rubric and graphed (e.g., Figure 1).

The teacher observed students during free choice, outdoors, large group, and small group. The teacher/researcher took notes about the student's actions and scored them on the appropriate level in the GOLD data system. Students were observed walking over to the break area without being told to. When asked the student replied, "I need a break, I am getting frustrated, my tower keeps falling". Before the intervention, the same student growled and pushed the toys off the table when frustrated. All students gained the awareness of emotions on the GOLD data during the 4-week intervention period see Table 1.

The parent questionnaire showed an increase of awareness after the 4-week intervention compared to the baseline before the intervention. Several parents commented that their child tells them they are angry, frustrated, and need to take breaths. A parent also commented on how their child talked to them about smelling the flowers and blowing out the candles. A strategy the teacher talked about with the students to take breaths and breath out during the intervention. The parent's answers on their questionnaire were placed on a rubric and graphed (e.g., Figure 2).

Limitations of the Study

This study has potential limitations. One limitation of this study was the small size of participants. The study was conducted with 20 students with one student leaving after the 2nd week of the intervention. The 1:1 para left the classroom too, taking away an extra adult that modeled positive behavior strategies. This left the researcher, who has been trained with social emotional learning, and the associate who has not had the proper training in social emotional learning. The associate was not intentionally modeling the proper conflict resolution or extending conversations.

Another limitation to this study was the presence of COVID-19. School regulations during this time stated students had to wear masks and maintain a safe distance between each other. By the end of the intervention these requirements were lifted. The fact that students were unable to see the different expressions that were modeled for each emotion, may have made it difficult for them to fully understand when another student was feeling a certain emotion.

Further Study

Further study in the area of social emotional learning is necessary. The data that was collected in this study was from one preschool classroom in rural Iowa. It is important to look at social emotional learning in a larger study size, and having a controlled classroom compared to a classroom that was given the intervention. Gathering data, starting at the beginning of the year to the end of the year would give a better picture on the full effectiveness of the intervention. Further study in social emotional learning would benefit from following the study group for several years, to see the long-term benefits of the social emotional learning across grades.

Conclusion

The purpose of this action research project was to determine if students would be able to manage their emotions when provided with social emotional learning, intentional modeling, and literature. With the focus on the social emotional health, it is important for educators to look at how they can impact student learning as they design instruction and discipline strategies. While students may be in the same classroom, they may not be at the same level of development. Educators need to consider how they can support each student at their level. When educators add a social emotional curriculum, literacy, and model appropriate strategies, students can increase their awareness of their emotions and begin to use different strategies to calm themselves down. Based on the findings of this study preschool classrooms would benefit from incorporating social emotional learning each day.

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Table 1

GOLD data 5 objective recording form.

GOLD DATA: Social Emotional											
Students	Objective		Objective		Objective		Objective		Objective	
	Manages feelings. 8		s to emotional cues. BM 3 yr =3-5, 4 yr=5-6,		s social problems BM 3yr=4-7, 4 yr=5-7, 5 y		acts with peers. BM 3yr =3-4, 4 yr = 4-6, 5 yr		s limits and expectations. BM 3 yr=4-6, 4yr=5-7, 5	
	Winter	Spring	Winter	Spring	Winter	Spring	Winter	Spring	Winter	Spring
1	3	4	3	4	3	4	5	4	3	3
2	6	8	5	7	6	8	6	8	6	7
3	5	7	4	6	5	7	4	7	5	7
4	6	8	4	7	5	7	5	7	5	7
5	6	8	5	7	6	8	6	7	6	8
6	3	6	5	6	4	6	3	5	5	6
7	3	5	3	7	5	8	5	6	4	5
8	4	6	4	7	6	7	5	6	4	8
9	3	6	4	5	4	5	3	5	4	6
10	0	ND	1	ND	0	ND	0	ND	0	ND
11	3	5	4	6	4	6	4	6	3	5
12	3	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	5
13	3	4	3	5	3	5	4	4	2	5
14	3	5	3	4	4	5	3	3	3	5
15	4	8	5	7	5	8	4	6	4	8
16	6	8	5	7	6	8	6	7	5	8
17	3	4	3	4	3	5	3	4	3	5
18	4	5	4	6	4	6	3	4	2	5
19	4	7	4	7	5	6	4	6	4	6
20	5	6	4	6	4	6	4	4	4	5

Table 2

Social emotional children's books

Book Title	Author/ Illustrator
Glad Monster Sad Monster	Ed Emberley and Anne Miranda
Lots of Feelings	Shelley Rotner
The Way I Feel	Janan Cain
I'm Frustrated	Elizabeth Crary
Beautiful Oops	Barney Saltzberg
Emily's Tiger	Miriam Latimer / Leo Landry
When I Feel Sad	Cornelia Maude Spelman/ Kathy Parkinson
On Monday It Rained	Cherryl Kachenmeister/ Tom Berthiaume
Alexander and The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day	Judith Viorst/Ray Cruz
When Sophie Gets Angry, Really Angry	Molly Bang
Cool Down and Work Through Anger	Cheri Meiners/Meredith Johnson
When I Feel Frustrated	Michael Gordon
Be Kind	Pat Zietlow Miller/ Jen Hill
A Little Spot of Anger	Diane Alber
Let's Talk About Feeling Angry	Joy Berry
Sometimes I'm Bombaloo	Rachel Vail/ Yumi Heo
Fill A Bucket	Carol Mc Cloud
Is Your Bucket Full?	Tom Rath and Mary Reckmeyer

Appendix A

Rubric used to organize parent questionnaires for fall and spring.

Parent Questionnaire	Takes Turns Yes (1) Sometimes (2) No (0)	Plays cooperatively with peers. Yes (2) Sometimes (1) No (0)	Handles frustration well Yes (2) Sometimes (1) No (0)	Total Points (6)
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				

Appendix B

Rubric used for student journaling.

*Students will be asked to draw a self-portrait of them feeling a particular emotion. The student will receive points according to the reply given to the teachers.

	Names the emotion (1 point)	Draws the emotion. (2 points)	Explains the emotion. (3 points)	Gives a strategy to regulate that emotion. (4 points)	**Total Points (10)**
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20					

Appendix C

Form used to organize each Social Emotional Objective chosen for the study from GOLD.

GOLD DATA: Social Emotional

Students	Objective: Manages feelings.	
	Benchmark: 3yr=3-6 4yr=5-7 5yr =6-8	
	Winter	Spring
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		

4-year-old
3-year-old
5-year-old