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Social-Emotional Learning in Pre-Primary and Primary Education

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In fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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Abstract

Students entering the school setting have a need for explicit instruction to develop their social and emotional competencies. The aim of this research was to study the effects of the *Mind+Heart Social Emotional Curriculum* as an intervention for pre-primary and primary students. This study consisted of preschool children (age 4) in a daycare setting and kindergarten and second grade students in a public school setting. Over an eight week period various data was collected: pre- and post-conversational dialogues, student journals, student self-assessments, and teacher observation logs of student behavior. The data presented a correlation between implementation and a reduction of negative student behaviors. Students exhibited an increase of understanding in the areas of emotions, self-regulation, and conflict resolution. Due to the observed positive impact of the *Mind+Heart Social Emotional Curriculum,* further research is recommended for a long-term implementation of this intervention.

Keywords: social-emotional, self-regulation, behavior, emotions

Many activities are challenging or impossible to complete without guidance and support. Imagine attempting to play an instrument for the very first time. Deciding where to place one's hands, how to produce a sound, and how to make sense of a sheet of musical symbols would certainly feel daunting. Imagine, too, getting behind the wheel of a car without ever having learned the functions of an automobile, let alone the laws of driving a motor vehicle. The exploration of skills like this may lead to disastrous consequences that could be avoided. A new reader may feel this same sense of impossibility when opening a book for the first time to a page full of unfamiliar language, strange markings, and an uncertainty of what direction to begin or end. A beginning reader would easily become frustrated at this task without being taught the rules for deciphering letters, decoding words, and understanding content.

Learning to play an instrument, driving a vehicle for the first time, and beginning reading, are all examples of skills that need to be learned, nurtured, and developed. Social-emotional development is another skill often overlooked for needing the same instructional strategies as the aforementioned tasks. Without supported guidance, children experience negative personal and social development. Every child experiences a myriad of feelings and emotions on a daily basis. Knowing how to appropriately and effectively respond to and control one's emotions is a necessary skill for life. Many children are unsure or unaware of how to communicate the way they are feeling. Confusion may cause inappropriate responses or reactions when a child is unskilled in deciphering others' feelings. Miscommunication leads to frustration, confusion, and sometimes aggression. As children begin to learn to describe their own emotions, they

develop the ability to interpret others' emotions and foster a feeling of empathy. Beginning to build these skills at an early age will help children throughout their lives when communicating with people in a variety of situations.

The educational setting is greatly affected with the absence of social-emotional learning instruction. Educators are seeing students enter the classroom ill equipped to form positive interactions and quality friendship because of a lack of social and emotional skills. The effects of this can result in conflicts with peers and adults leading to a disrupted learning environment Acquiring new skills, such as reading, can lead to great levels of frustration. The inability to express one's emotions in times of frustration can also impact the capability to acquire the new skill (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011).

Students are entering schools lacking the social and emotional skills needed to create and sustain positive relationships, regulate emotions, and respond appropriately to situations of a social nature. The lack of these skills may result in physical and verbal aggression, conflicts with peers and adults, and disruption to the learning environment (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011).

Teachers have noticed an increase in unwanted and undesired behavior responses. Educators questioned why this was occurring, and more importantly, what they could do to change a child's understanding of appropriate behavior responses to emotions. As teachers have little to no control over the types of behaviors children have entering

learning environments, it is believed that the use of social-emotional content in the educational setting will positively improve their behaviors.

This study was conducted using three different levels of cognition and development from preschool to second grade with a total of 35 participants. The four-year old preschool children studied were located at an in home daycare in a suburban neighborhood in the east metro area of Minnesota. Two boys and one girl took part; all of which are Caucasian. A kindergarten class in a rural Minnesota school district was observed. This class had 17 students in which nine were boys and eight were girls. This group of students included twelve Caucasian students, three Hispanic students, and two Somali students. The final group of participants consisted of second graders from a rural-combined district. This classroom contained nine girls and six boys. The classroom was primarily Caucasian aside from two Hispanic children. One male student was on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) through Special Education for an Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD). Two additional male students were at risk for EBD and were following a behavior plan for management. A female student was being assessed for high functioning autism during the study, and diagnosis was still pending at the conclusion of the study.

The research aimed to answer the following question: *How does the teaching of direct social-emotional skills affect students' behaviors in the preschool and primary setting?* A direct teaching approach was used to implement the *Mind+Heart Social-Emotional Curriculum*. Teaching of this curriculum was limited to the following units: Emotions, Self-Management, and Relationships.

Review of Literature

Currently students are entering schools lacking the social-emotional skills needed to create and sustain positive relationships, regulate emotions, and respond appropriately to situations of a social nature (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017; Gallagher, 2013; Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). This developmental insufficiency may result in physical and verbal aggression, conflicts with peers and adults, disruption to the learning environment, and negative impact on academic achievement in a preschool and/or primary school setting (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017; Gallagher, 2013; Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). Improvement of conflict resolution and self-management skills through social-emotional development may reduce the occurrence of these behaviors (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017; Gallagher, 2013; Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). In turn, a student's development of these skills is foundational for his or her overall academic, social, and long-term success (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Lantieri & Nambiar, 2012). This literature review will define and examine the importance of social-emotional competencies and learning, acknowledge the presence of inappropriate social responses in the classroom, discuss a need for early intervention to develop these skills, and identify the role that parents and educators have in developing appropriate social-emotional responses in children.

The Concept of Social-Emotional Competence

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined by the Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (as cited by Ashdown & Bernard, 2012) as the:

> developing capacity of a child from birth through five years of age to form close and secure adult and peer relationships; experience, regulate, and express emotions in a socially and culturally appropriate ways; and explore the environment and learn (p. 397).

Researchers Zins and Elias (as cited by McKevitt, 2012) add that SEL increases a child's capability to decipher and regulate emotions, strengthens the ability to problem solve, and promotes the creation of positive relationships. Students that are able to process empathy toward others' behaviors through social cues are more likely to respond to situations in a socially and culturally appropriate manner (Jones et. al, 2013). SEL also encomposes the ability to use self-cognitive regulation to focus, use self-control when driven by impulses, and redirect when dysregulation occurs (Jones et. al, 2013).

For these reasons, SEL is an essential element in aiding the social-emotional education of a child. In fact, Lantieri and Nambiar's (2012, p. 29) analysis of the importance of SEL for a school stated that "[It] is often called the 'missing piece' in school improvement efforts. [It] is informed by scholarly research". Lantieri and Nambiar (2012) go on to state that the use of SEL not only assists children to achieve more than just academics, but it also establishes the foundation for further academic engagement, provides them with a better awareness of themselves and others, and aids them in their abilities to make contributions to the world.

5 Core Competencies for Social-Emotional Development

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, known as CASEL, categorized five core social-emotional competencies to aid in increasing the readiness of students' futures socially as well as academically (as cited by Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011).   CASEL categorizes the competencies as self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (as cited by Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Durlak et al., 2011). The first of these competencies, self-awareness, involves the "ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior" (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017, para. 2). When a student is able to effectively demonstrate self-awareness, they can identify emotions, demonstrate self-confidence, and demonstrate self-efficacy. Self-awareness techniques may teach students to use an optimistic mindset in his/her approach to growing as a learner (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017).

A child's formation of self-awareness is linked to the formation of his or her social-awareness skills. To be able to not only see and understand another's viewpoint, but to have empathy toward another regardless of his or her background is an essential element in the social development of children (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017). This aptitude centers around the child's awareness of social and ethical norms within a school or community.

Self-management is another important aspect in the development of a child. According to CASEL's Core SEL Competencies (Collaborative for Academic, Social,

Emotional Learning, 2017, para. 3) self-management is an essential attribute for a student to possess because it is the "ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations" which is paramount to social interaction. Regulating emotions and thoughts helps the child to return to a homeostasis state caused from the dysregulation. This self-behavior management involves the ability to appropriately handle stress, the exercising of impulse control, and the ability to self-motivate (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017). This could also involve setting and working toward personal and academic goals (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017).

Relationship skills are another essential component to the social development of a child. CASEL defines relationship skills as "the ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed" (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017, para. 5). These relationship skills strengthen when a child forms and builds relationships with diverse individuals and groups (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017).

The final aspect of CASEL's five Core SEL Competencies (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017) involves responsible decision making. When a child demonstrates responsible decision-making, he or she makes choices based on several factors. The child may use social norms as a guidance for decision-making, along with judgements based on ethical morals and safety (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017). This decision-making builds the child's

understanding of rational consequences, as well as consciousness of his or her self and others (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017).

More and more, research is validating the belief that these competencies are the building blocks for children in their educational involvement which eventually will lead to his or her academic success (Caprara, Barbanelli, Pastorelli, Bamdura, & Zimbardo, 2000; Durlak et al.., 2011). A study by Bernard (2004) found that the correlation between social-emotional learning and education can foresee academic performance and life skills.   Bernard noted that five-year-old children performed at higher levels in reading when they were seen as competent in social-emotional skills. In fact, when a child masters these social-emotional competencies, there is a direct relation to an increase in school performance and overall well-being (Bernard, 2004; Durlak et al, 2011). On the other end, students that demonstrated low social-emotional skills were seen to have difficulties in personal, social and academic skills (Bernard, 2004; Durlak et al, 2011). The correlation between academic attainment and social-emotional abilities, or lack thereof, manifests the urgency of strengthening education around the development of social-emotional direct instruction in early stages of life (Bernard, 2004; Durlak et al, 2011).

The Presence of Inappropriate Social Responses in the Classroom

In today's classrooms there are many struggles to overcome, not only academically, but socially, emotionally, and behaviorally as well (Reinke et al., 2014). Some of these struggles, according to Docksai (2010), are due to the inability of some children to understand verbal and nonverbal cues given by others. This inability to relate

within the norm of social interactions impacts their ability to achieve academically.

According to Lantieri and Nambiar (2012), there is an increasing amount of research

which affirms that when children are aided in developing their social and emotional

skills, the positive effects in the future are evident. A person's brain growth from

childhood through their mid-twenties forms connections that rely heavily upon

day-to-day activities. For children, a vast amount of these daily activities occur at school.

Corrigan, Higgins-D'Alessandro, and Brown (2013, p. 40) describe schools as "social

incubators where children often spend more than eight hours a day." Given the amount

of time that children have to interact socially at school and the amount of time that

teachers are in direct contact with children each day during their formative developmental

years, one could argue that it becomes an obligation for teachers to help students

overcome any social-emotional challenges in order to enable them to have success at

their current grade level as well as in their future educational experiences.

Meeting these additional needs is evidenced by the findings of Jones, Baufford, and

Weissbound (2013) who stated that social-emotional competency is linked to success as

an adult. According to Walker et al. (2004), failing to address social-emotional issues at

an early age can lead to other issues in the future such as an inability to persuade a child

to act appropriately or to be able control his/her actions especially after the age of eight

(as cited by Kramer, Caldarella, Christensen, & Shatzer, 2010). Yet, how does one go

about meeting these needs? Teachers are often struggling themselves to determine how

to resolve issues of behavioral problems that interfere with the success of all children in

the classroom. Educators commonly state that the biggest obstacle in teaching is dealing

with student behavior issues (Corrigan et al., 2013; Pech, 2013; Schultz et al. 2012).

Pech's findings relate this to the social maturity of students. Gessel and Ilg (1946 as

cited by Pech, 2013) defined social maturity as a person's ability to appropriately adapt

socially showing such qualities as fairness, efficiency, cheerfulness, self-confidence,

dependability, courteousness, cooperation, being able to get along within a group,

kindness, being sympathetic, and the ability to adjust emotionally. Increasingly, these are

attributes educators might need to address and help develop within the classroom.

In relation to this, Corrigan et al. (2013) stated that there are two types of goals in

education that must be met. The first goal is that students have academic success by

learning, gaining knowledge, and being able to achieve. The second goal in education

centralized on social development by enabling students to develop into "mature,

productive, and ethical citizens" (Corrigan et al., 2013, p. 39). This means that learning

needs to go beyond academics. To do this, many schools are choosing to integrate

social-emotional learning.

Classroom teachers have the potential to make beneficial improvements to a

child's behavior (Reinke et al., 2014). The positive effects of these improvements do not

impact just the children with social-emotional behavior issues. When teachers are

successful with managing social-emotional problems, it impacts how the teacher feels

about his or her abilities making it less likely that he or she will leave the profession. It

also results in less disruptions in the classroom, which benefits the other students.

Providing teachers with information and skills to implement SEL that meet appropriate

and specific social and behavioral issues is an ongoing necessity (Reinke et al., 2014).

A Need for Early Intervention to Develop Social-Emotional Skills

The need for social-emotional instruction is critical in schools because many students are entering kindergarten with a low level of social-emotional competency (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011). According to Ashdown & Bernard (2012, p. 398), "The National Academy of Sciences reported that 60% of children enter school with cognitive skills needed to be successful, but only 40% have the social-emotional skills needed to succeed in kindergarten." This is a concern because research shows that children who are shunned socially have a much higher chance of troubles with adjusting in the future (Docksai, 2010).

"Early childhood is a critical period in social and emotional development" (Kramer et al., 2010, p. 303). The preschool years are a crucial time for a child to learn what behaviors are acceptable or unacceptable (Swit, McMaugh, & Warburton, 2016; Kramer et al., 2010). Poulou (2013) added that due to developmental changes that take place during this time, young children have a higher risk potential for emotional and behavioral problems. There are preschoolers, Poulou (2013) stated, who have the capability to deal with such issues, but many children cannot overcome difficulties making behaviors in preschool a foreshadowing of problems in the future. Gallagher (2013) assured that most children entering kindergarten do have the capability to see another person's point of view, can be cooperative when interacting, and are able to discuss with give and take. Gallagher pointed out that unfortunately these positive social skills do not just happen on their own. These skills, just like academic skills, need to be

nurtured and taught by adults who can be role models and educators of appropriate

social-emotional behaviors (Gallagher, 2013).

The lack of using social-emotional skills appropriately is not only a problem to a

child's mental development, but also for the child's overall development of their well

being (Durlak, 2011). Durlak stated (2011, p. 406), "extensive developmental research

indicates that effective mastery of social-emotional competencies is associated with

greater well-being and better school performance whereas the failure to achieve

competence in these areas can lead to a variety of personal, social, and academic

difficulties." These competencies, in turn, should provide a foundation for better

adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors,

fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved test scores and grades

(Greenberg et al., 2003). Over time, mastering SEL competencies results in a

developmental progression that leads to a shift from being predominantly controlled by

external factors to acting increasingly in accord with internalized beliefs and values,

caring and concern for others, making good decisions, and taking responsibility for one's

choices and behaviors (Bear & Watkins, 2006).

The Role of Parents and Educators in Social-Emotional Learning

Parental involvement is crucial to the social-emotional development of a child

(Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017; Corrigan et al., 2013).

Because social-emotional learning begins at home, parents are vital in aiding the

development of a child's understanding of these competencies. This is specifically

demonstrated by his or her modeling of appropriate behaviors and responses

(Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017). Eisenberg (as cited by

Van der pol et al., 2016) stated a parent's own competence in the social-emotional realm

directly affects his or her child's ability to display prosocial behavior. A study by Piaget

(as cited by Van der pol et al., 2016) found when a parent models mature social skills in

the presence of a child, the child learns to mimic and adapt to the prosocial, or socially

acceptable, behavior. This learning relationship begins as early as infancy. A study by

Schore and Schore (2008) determined that a child's brain development and emotional

responsiveness are linked to his or her first few years of social interactions. Parental

attunement and attachment to their child directly affects the child's social maturation and

development (Schore & Schore, 2008; Corrigan et al., 2013). In a study conducted by

Schore and Schore (2008), it was determined that for children who did not have an

attached relationship, prosocial experiences can be created to repair or form healthy

attachment and brain development (Schore & Schore, 2008).

Research into parental discipline styles and level of responsiveness has provided

enlightening information regarding this subject. An effective style of parenting, known

as authoritative parenting, encompasses prosocial-emotional values and skills,

demonstrates reasoning, appropriate discipline, and empathy. A mother may tell her

child how to act, but will also explain the reasons why. For example. you must hold my

hand in the parking lot because the traffic is dangerous. Through this style, parental

values and beliefs are tailored and modified to meet the needs of the child. This results in

the potential for greater success (Rowinski & Wahler, 2010; Wahler & Williams, 2010).

For a student who does not have a naturally occurring mentor or has an absent parent,

authoritative and vigilant parenting techniques are critical to positive social-emotional

development. These children benefit more from involved-vigilant parenting/mentoring,

even when the parent or mentor is not the child's biological relative (Hurd, N., Varner,

F., & Rowley, S., 2013).

Positive interactions between students, teachers, and parents help promote

appropriate modeling for relationships, increase student involvement, and are examples

for appropriate social behaviors (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional

Learning, 2017). It has been shown through research that a parent who is involved in the

education of his or her child has a better grasp of the social-emotional difficulties that the

child may face. Spoth, Randall, and Shin (as cited by Corrigan et al., 2013) supported

this by stating a parent is then better prepared to aid the teacher's attempts in promoting

positive behaviors and responses, as well as minimizing negative behaviors that may

hinder academics (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017).

Social-Emotional Competence: Specific Interventions and Researched Programs

One way to aid teachers' attempts to promote positive social-emotional behaviors

and responses is by utilizing one of the many social-emotional curricula available. The

success and/or research regarding specific benefits of implementation of each program

varies. There are several studies that found positive outcomes. One meta-analysis by

Berkowitz and Bier (2007) found that character education can and does work. Berkowitz

and Bier analyzed 109 existing character education programs for prekindergarten through

twelfth grade (2007). Out of the 109 programs, 73 were found to be scientifically sound.

Further analysis concluded that "64 out of 73 scientifically sound studies showed

program effectiveness" (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007, p. 32). Berkowitz and Bier (2007)

determined that character education programs improved problem solving skills, ethical

decision making and understanding, moral reasoning, and reduced egocentric tendencies.

Durlak et al. (2011), supported this claim of program effectiveness. Research of 213

school-based SEL programs in kindergarten through senior high school students found

there was an average of an eleven percentile point increase in academic performance

when compared to schools that did not participate in a SEL learning program (Durlak et

al., 2011). However, McKevitt (2012) cautions that many of these programs make claims

of being effective or being based on evidence without having data or proof to support

such claims. Part of the problem, McKevitt states, is that terminology and criteria used

by the variety of agencies that rate programs can be very different. Regardless of specific

terminology or criteria used, the key to successful implementation of social-emotional

curriculum is consistency and frequency of the implementation (Ashdown & Bernard,

2011)

   According to Joseph and Strain (as cited by Ashdown & Bernard, 2012) and the

Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning (2017), the most effective

programs for SEL should have specific criteria. Elements of an effective program should

include daily implementation, conscious design, well-ordered sequencing, explicit

teaching, and methodical lesson plans focusing on the development of social skills and

emotions through active learning. Ashdown and Bernard (2012) added that those

programs starting in early education (preschool) have shown increased positive

outcomes.

Conclusion:

Social-emotional learning is an essential part to the formation of the whole child. A student with strong SEL skills performs better in his or her academic years as well as being better prepared for the future (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017). Students benefit from explicit instruction at school through SEL curriculum as well as through the support and parental modeling of skills at home.

Today's preschool and primary classrooms have a need for the implementation of social-emotional learning. This need is the result of a frequent lack of development in the social-emotional skills in children. Schools are having to expand curriculum to incorporate developmental needs of students previously viewed as the sole responsibility of parents and religion such as values and morals (Binfet, 2015). For example, Gallagher (2013) states that traditional relationship skills were first fostered in the home and faith communities. Using the definitions of the five core social-emotional competencies set forth by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2017) and understanding the important roles these competencies have in current and future social and academic success as documented in this literature review, will assist educators in establishing necessary skills in children for future social and educational benefit (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011).

Methodology

This study was conducted throughout a period of eight weeks using *Mind+Heart Social-Emotional Curriculum* (Proud to Be Primary, 2018). Each week included three sessions of direct instruction and student activities that ranged between 20-40 minutes of

time, depending on the content of each session. Lessons included the unit topics of

emotions, self-management, and conflict resolution. This program of study was chosen

after reviewing several social-emotional curriculum options. It used a proactive approach

with guided direct instruction to explicitly teach skills related to the focus of this study.

The units in the program were student-friendly for multiple developmental levels.

Activities and visuals were engaging and diverse for children. The *Mind+Heart*

Social-Emotional Curriculum is also aligned with the Five Core Competencies developed

by the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). This

provided a research-based foundation for the implementation of units of study. The

creator of this program has made the curriculum available for online purchase through

Teachers Pay Teachers to allow educators to easily access the materials.

Data was collected for this study using a student "My Feelings and Me Journal"

(Appendix A), "My Self-Regulation Journal" (Appendix B), teacher observation logs

(Appendix C), student feedback surveys (Appendix D), conversation dialogues prompts

(within each *Mind+Heart Curriculum* lesson), and artwork within several activities.

Prior to implementing the curriculum, parental/guardian passive consent

(Appendix E) was obtained for all participants. There were no children unable to

participate in the study. To begin the study, baseline data was collected. A prompted

conversational dialogue was used to interview (Appendix F) students and assess their

prior knowledge relating to emotions and self-management. Student knowledge was

recorded using a standardized recording sheet among the three practitioners. Each

student received a numerical score for his or her responses. Scores were given using the

following criteria: 0 - subject responded "I don't know", 1 - subject provided an incorrect

or inappropriate response, 2 - subject responded partially correct and/or appropriately, 3

- subject responded appropriately and/or correctly.

Throughout the duration of the research window, instructors kept an observational

record of negative behaviors witnessed during class. For example, any disruptive,

argumentative, or defiant behavior that hindered the learning environment was

documented. Undesirable behaviors and conflicts were initially observed with intentions

for students to solve issues on their own. When this was not successful, the instructor

intervened implementing skills and language directly from the program. These

observations occurred at times outside of the social-emotional lesson instruction. The

goal of these observations was to determine if the skills obtained during the lessons

transferred to times of conflict within the school day. Vocabulary from the study, such as

body language and facial expressions, was incorporated into other content areas to

familiarize students with the terminology in a variety of authentic scenarios.

During the first and second weeks of instruction, the unit titled "Emotions" was

the central focus. This section was instructed through six sessions. Students learned to

define and identify emotions and body language through a series of activities. Lesson

one titled "Identifying and Labeling Emotions", focused on reading two scenarios where

children were asked to decide what emotion the child in the vignette was demonstrating

or feeling. Children drew upon prior knowledge to generate possible explanations and

solutions. Then, children were shown pictures of real people showing common emotions

in photographs. The topics of body language and facial expressions were thoroughly

discussed. At the conclusion of this instruction, children demonstrated their

understanding by drawing facial expressions in a mini-book that showed an outline of a

child and a corresponding emotion. For example, children could depict the emotion

embarrassed by drawing a closed mouth and red cheeks on the outline of the child.

In the following session, a continuation of lesson one, students expanded their

understanding of emotions and body language through the use of a written journal. The

journal was introduced with intentions to begin responses during session three.   A

modification was made for students who were unable to provide written responses

independently, especially those in preschool. An adult scribed the child's oral response

as needed. For students developing their writing skills, the instructor provided a written

visual to assist in independent writing. The rest of the lesson was used to solidify the

understanding of emotions and body language through the use of an "Emoji-tions"

Go-Fish game. Each card had a pictorial representation of a cartoon face showing

different emotions. The deck contained two cards of each emotion where children would

need to locate the matching pair in their own hand or seek the pair from another

participant. Children had to ask for the cards, as in traditional playing-card go-fish, but

when asking for the "sad" card, the student also had to act out the emotion in order to

earn the card to make pairs. This showed student understanding of facial expressions and

body language associated with each emotion. The game was played until all pairs were

matched.

Session three furthered the unit study of emotions with starting lesson number

two, called "Labeling Experiences with Emotions". The lesson began with a new set of

discussion starters that asked students to reflect personal experiences and share what

made the student feel happy or sad. The second question encouraged students to identify

a time where they may have felt more than one emotion at a given time. This question

required students to use a deeper thought process in order to identify the emotions,

compare the two emotions, and explain the situation in which the emotions occurred.

After students had a chance to share internal feelings, a set of scenarios was given to

students to empathize with fictional characters and identify how others may be feeling in

a given situation. The lesson concluded with journaling time in the "My Feelings and Me

Journal" emphasizing on happy and mad emotions. Each page included a writing

prompt, such as, "I feel happy when…" along with a portion of the page reserved for a

drawing depicting the personal experience.

　　　　The second week of instruction of "Emotions" began with session four using a

sorting game. Students used written words to match with real pictorial versions of the

emotions to strengthen student understanding of empathy. The lesson concluded with

journaling time in the "My Feelings and Me Journal" with the prompt, "I feel scared

when..". Session five introduced the concept of expressing emotions appropriately.

Students used discussion starters and scenarios relating to an event in which students

would decide an appropriate response. Journaling reflections continued with an entry on

feeling proud. The final lesson in the unit of "Emotions" discussed the cause of emotions

within the body and how to react. Students responded to discussion starters and played a

teacher-made board game called, "Express Yourself Board Game". Children drew cards

with varied tasks ranging from describing a personal experience, naming emotions, or acting out an emotion for the other players.

The second unit of study centralized on self-management skills. Three sessions were dedicated to practicing these techniques. The introductory session started with discussion starters and scenarios relating to anger and frustration responses. Direct instruction focused on creating a chart as a whole group. The chart was divided into quarters. The chart, titled "What Is Self-Regulation?" on one-fourth of the paper and "Emotions That Need Self-Regulation" on the next fourth, leaving the third and fourth spots blank. The instructor defined self-regulation and then encouraged students to brainstorm emotions that would require self-regulation. The next session built on the prior lesson's chart, by adding the third quarter titled "Our Reactions to Difficult Emotions" and the fourth quarter titled "Ways We Can Self-Regulate." Children continued to share ideas for handling difficult situations. After whole-group work, students played a game called, "Act It Out", that utilized task cards prompting an emotion and how the student responded to the emotions. Lesson one of the "Self-Management" unit concluded in session three with students looking back on personal experiences with self-regulating. Students were introduced to a new journal, the "Self-Regulation Journal." The journal had a similar set-up to the "My Feelings and Me Journal" with a prompt and space for students to draw a picture. Students responded to the prompt, "Today, ____so I___". The open-ended prompt encouraged students to reflect on a feeling they had and the response to the emotion. Younger students were again given support to complete the task. The following lesson, lesson two, provided students with

ideas on how to regulate emotions and calm down when presented with stressful

situations in life. Whole group instruction centered on developing a chart titled, "Ways

to Calm Down". The curriculum provided pre-made cards with calm down methods to be

used within this section of the chart. These ideas included things to do to calm down,

places to go, and ways to calm down the body. Students were taught a method of

calming the body down through "balloon breathing." The method taught students to

think of their stomachs as a balloon and feel the rise and fall of slow, deep breathing

rhythm. The second portion of the lesson included two scenarios for students to describe

how a character might respond to a situation using self-regulation. Then, students were

able to reflect on an emotion they felt that day and their response, as they did the previous

lesson. Part two of lesson two included a session on completing a "Ways to

Calm-Down" mini-book containing fill-in-the-blank sections to demonstrate how to

control behavioral responses. This related to the ideas given to students during whole

group instructions. The final two lessons in the "Self-Management" unit were titled

"Self-Control" and "Peaceful Problem Solving". The first lesson began with defining

self-control, along with two scenarios about characters that students needed to describe

how self-control was demonstrated. The rest of the lesson focused on sorting situations

that people can control in life and situations that people cannot control. Students read

and analyzed prompts such as the amount of tv they watched, the score of a hockey game,

or what another person thinks of them. Students had to determine what things they can or

cannot control. The last lesson of the unit shared examples of phrases people should say

versus things that people should keep inside. This activity was called "Think or Say."

Students decided which category items such as, "your friend's house is smaller than

yours" or "the flowers your mom planted are beautiful", should be placed. Then,

students were given a mini-book called, "I Am in Control!". Each page included a

traceable sentence about self-control. Instructors also hung posters with positive,

self-promoting phrases such as "You Are Amazing Just the Way You Are!" or "No One

Is Perfect. That's Why Pencils Have Erasers." This was intended to promote confidence

and to help students feel in control of emotions.

The third unit of study was "Conflict Resolution". This unit focused on peaceful

problem-solving methods. Because this had such a strong focus on classroom behaviors,

four sessions were dedicated to this topic. The first session included reading the book,

Peace Week in Miss Fox's Class. Then, students discussed two scenarios deciphering

what problem was being described and what solution was reached. Session two

introduced a peaceful problem-solving poster and an identical bookmark for students to

keep with them to reference when needed during a conflict. Both items stated a four-step

process of solving a problem: Step 1 - Stop and Stay Calm, Step 2 - Use An "I

Message", Step 3 - Find a Solution, Step 4 - Compromise and Apologize.   Another

option presented for students was a "Wheel of Choice" poster for students to decide the

most fitting solution to their conflicts. Some options included: asking for help, saying

"stop", apologizing, or talking it out.   The lesson concluded with a sorting activity called

"Peacemakers and Peacebreakers." Students decided where each predetermined act

would best fit. Examples included: "yell and scream, refuse help, share and take turns".

Part three of the conflict resolution topic included a session with a game called "What's

A Solution?"   Students came up with solutions to situations such as, "someone calls you a mean name" or "you and a friend want to play two different games." The final session instructed students to create a poster on ways to solve a problem using a given template. Students were asked to demonstrate their understanding of ways to solve a problem peacefully by showing an example on their poster.

This concluded the instructional practices used in the preschool, kindergarten, and second grade classrooms. Instructors used the final days to review previously taught materials based on needs seen within the classroom and professional opinion. The final session concluded this study with a repeat of the baseline assessment to be used as a conclusive representation of the knowledge acquired during this study. The data was collected in the same fashion as previously discussed. In addition to the baseline assessment, a student feedback survey was administered.

The data was reviewed informally throughout the study and formally at the conclusion of the research. Documents were shared to compile and study data collectively.

Analysis of Data

Data was collected for a total of eight weeks. Baseline data was collected the first week using an individual conversational dialogue form. The next six weeks consisted of the implementation of the *Mind+Heart Social Emotional Curriculum.* Throughout those six weeks, data was recorded focusing on behaviors observed in the classroom or daycare setting. The final week of research was used to collect post-intervention data using a conversational dialogue form identical to the baseline. The following tools were used to

collect data for preschool, kindergarten, and second grade: conversational dialogue

pre-assessments, teacher observation logs, student self-assessments of social emotional

behaviors, and conversational dialogue post-assessments.

Students were individually interviewed with conversational dialogue prompts as a

beginning assessment. The data reflects two questions from this process. In Table 1,

students responded to the following question: "How do you self-regulate when school

(daycare) is hard?" Student responses were coded in the following categories: "Gave An

Off Topic/Inappropriate Answer, I Don't Know, Encouraging Thoughts, Adult or Peer

Assistance, Find a Solution or Use Strategies, [or] Breathe."

Preschool students' responses were limited to two categories. Fifty percent of the

preschool responses were coded in the "Gave an Off Topic/Inappropriate Answer"

category. For example, one student provided the response "because it's hard for our

mommy and daddy to come and get us." It was determined that this response did not

specifically state a strategy for self-regulation, therefore it was coded in the Gave an Off

Topic/Inappropriate Answer category. The remaining fifty percent of the preschool

responses were coded in the "I Don't Know" category. Research practitioners felt this

was developmentally appropriate for baseline data given the fact that preschool students

had the least amount of exposure to social-emotional content.

Student Responses on Question 1: Pre-Asessment				
Response	Preschool	Kindergarten	Second	Total Responses
Gave An Off Topic/Inappropriate Answer	2	3	1	5
I Don't Know	2	3	10	15
Encouraging Thoughts		7		7
Adult or Peer Assistance		2	1	3
Find a Solution or Use Strategies		2	2	4
Breathe			1	1

Table 1. Student responses to the question: *"How do you self-regulate when school (daycare) is hard?"*

Thirty-five percent of kindergarten students had the same responses as their preschool counterparts, however, the presence of additional varied responses reflected increased exposure to social-emotional content. Twelve percent of the kindergarten students stated adult or peer assistance as a method to self-regulate when school is hard. The concept of finding a solution or using strategies also resulted in twelve percent of responses. Some of the replies included ideas of going to a quiet place, or recalling strategies previously taught within the classroom, like counting to five. The highest recorded response for kindergarten students involved students using encouraging and motivating thoughts to self-regulate. Examples of these responses were: "I keep on trying, just keep moving, [and] show grit." This accounted for 41% of the responses among the kindergarten students. Researchers determined that the school's Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) implementation may have attributed to the high number or responses in this category.

The data for the second grade pre-assessment of question one showed an unusually high amount of unsure answers (67%). Researchers determined that this could

be attributed to the respondents' fears of giving an incorrect response to the question.

Another possible factor contributing to the high responses may have been that students

were recorded using a digital device during the interview. Many students seemed

distracted or curious about this.   Twenty-seven percent of students provided a strategy to

self-regulate through the use of adult/peer assistance, finding a solution or using a

strategy, or implementing a breathing technique.

Overall, students in the pre-primary and primary setting were mostly unsure of

strategies that could be used to self-regulate (57%). Researchers believed that could be

due to the absence of prior direct instruction in social-emotional content and partially due

to the lack of developmental readiness for this concept and/or terminology. Upon initial

analysis of these results, researchers hypothesized a decreased percentage of unsure

responses after the implementation of the *Mind + Heart Curriculum* as an intervention.

The second question during the conversational dialogue was, "What do you do to

calm down when you are upset?" Table 2 shows the responses were coded into the

following categories: "I Don't Know, Counting, Use Your Words, Adult and Peer

Assistance, Quiet Space, Breathe, [and] Other Activity."

Sixty-six percent of preschool students shared the strategy of breathing as a way

to calm down. The remaining 34% of preschool students were unsure and stated an "I

don't know" response. Researchers hypothesized the terminology of "calm down" was

more familiar to students of this age level compared to the term "self-regulate", resulting

in a higher percentage of on topic and relevant comments.

Kindergarten students also provided a larger amount of responses for strategies to calm down. Ninety percent of the comments provided methods directly related to calming down. Of these reported responses, 33% gave ideas for other activities on which to focus. A couple examples of this included watching a movie or going to sleep. The second highest group of methods described included 22% of responses that demonstrated techniques for breathing. Finding a new friend to play with or asking the teacher for assistance were also popular responses (17% each). These statements were included in the Adult and Peer Assistance category.

Similarly, second graders listed other activities and breathing as the two most commonly used strategies for calming down. This accounted for 60% of the methods shared. Twenty percent of responses stating a desire to use a quiet space to calm down. One response indicated utilizing a special education resource room as a quiet area.

In the process of analyzing data collected from the three age levels, researchers determined the largest percentage of strategies stated were breathing techniques and changing to a different activity. This accounted for 53% of overall responses. Researchers thought this may be due to the use of the terminology of calm down, rather than self-regulate, as stated with the increase of kindergarten responses above.

Student Responses on Question 2: Pre-Asessment				
Response	Preschool	Kindergarten	Second	Total Responses
I Don't Know	1	2	2	5
Counting		3	1	4
Use Your Words		1		1
Adult and Peer Assistance		3	2	5
Quiet Space		1	3	4
Breathe	2	4	5	11
Other Activity		6	4	10

Table 2. Student responses to the question: "What do you do to calm down when you are upset?"

After the initial baseline data was collected, researchers began instruction with the *Mind + Heart Social Emotional Curriculum*. During the six weeks of instruction, researchers documented types and frequencies of behaviors witnessed through the use of teacher observation logs. Overall frequency of conflicts and negative behaviors were analyzed from week one to week six. Researchers were looking for evidence of a change in the number of conflicts and negative behavior occurrences in correlation to the implementation of the curriculum.

In the first week, preschool data showed a total of 14 negative behavior occurrences as shown in Figure 3. Throughout the next two weeks, negative behavior occurrences steadily decreased to 11 occurrences by the end of week three. During week four, the preschool data showed a dramatic decrease to only five occurrences. Overall, the total amount of preschool conflicts decreased by 93% over the course of the six weeks.
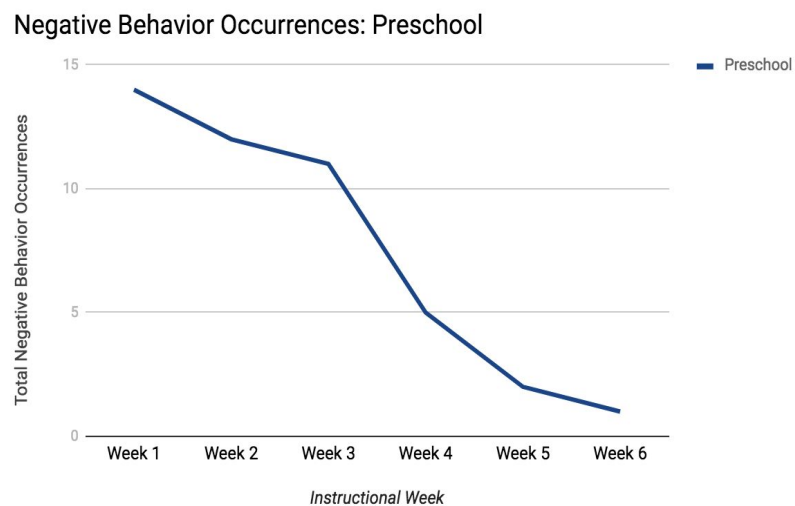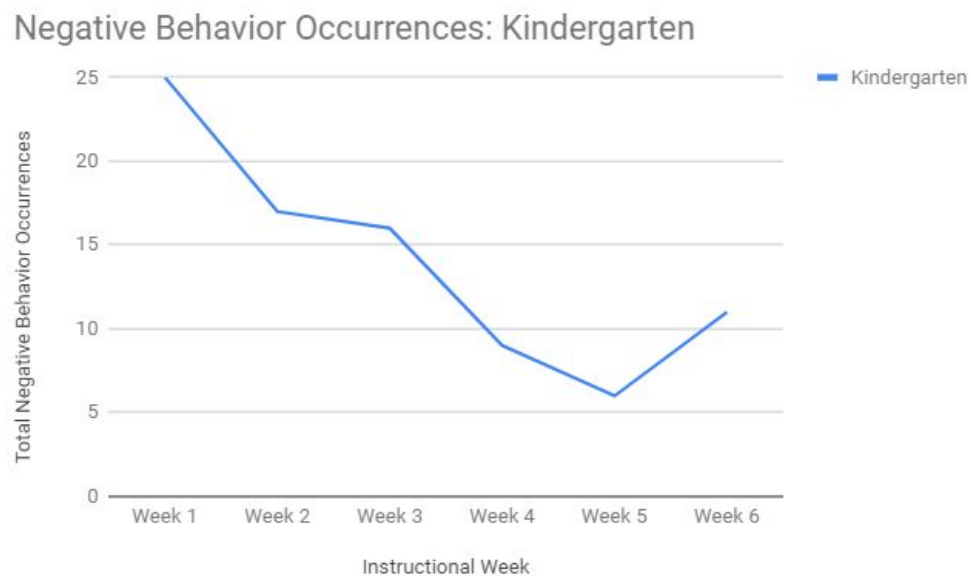

Figure 3. The frequency of negative behavior occurrences in preschool as documented in the teacher observation log for six weeks of *Mind + Heart Social-Emotional Curriculum* instruction.

Kindergarteners demonstrated a larger amount of conflicts during the first week of instruction compared to their preschool counterparts as depicted in Figure 4. Twenty-five occurrences were documented during the first week. Between week two and week four, a decrease of behavior and conflicts reduced from seventeen to nine observations. Data continued to decrease during week five, but had a slight increase during week six. Although week six did not follow the decreasing trend, it was noted there was an overall decrease from week one to week six of 56 percent.

Figure 4. The frequency of negative behavior occurrences in kindergarten as documented in the teacher observation log for six weeks of *Mind + Heart Social-Emotional Curriculum* instruction.

Second grade showed a unique trend in the data reported. In Figure 5, researchers noticed an increase in behaviors from week one to week three. This 200 percent increase could have been due to many factors, one being 27 percent of students in the class were

labeled with behavioral disabilities. Of the five occurrences during week one, sixty

percent of negative behaviors were from one student with Emotional-Behavioral Disorder

(EBD). The remaining forty percent involved students that were at risk for EBD. During

week two, nine out of the twelve occurrences, or 75%, were recorded from students with

EBD or at risk for EBD. This trend continued into week three. With the behaviors

recorded, instruction in correlation to the *Mind + Heart Social-Emotional Curriculum*

lessons were used as interventions to solve/correct behaviors. Another factor

contributing to the increase in behaviors could have been due to the fact that the student

with EBD was transitioning from one type of medication to another as treatment for the

disorder. From week three through week six, a dramatic decrease in behaviors was

noted. Observed negative behaviors and conflicts decreased by 87% during this time of
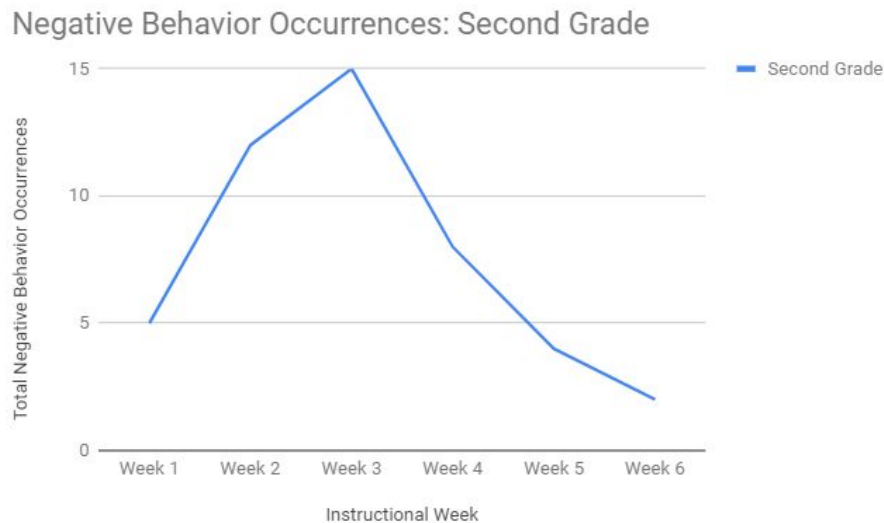
the instructional study.

Figure 5. The frequency of negative behavior occurrences in second grade as
documented in the teacher observation log for six weeks of *Mind+Heart
Social-Emotional Curriculum* instruction.

After comparing behavioral data individually for each age level, researchers

compiled the information to create a comparative analysis as shown in Figure 6. In all

three age levels, the total amount of conflicts per week decreased by the end of the study.

Furthermore, a significant decrease can be seen after week three in each age level.

Researchers hypothesize that this may be due to the implementation of the

Self-Management (self-regulation) lessons that were taught during week three. With

these lessons, students were explicitly taught strategies to self-regulate and calm down,

which may have affected the overall total of conflicts and negative behavior occurrences

for the remaining weeks. Researchers noted an average amount of negative behaviors

and conflicts amongst all participants to be 15 during the first week of the study. By the

end of the study, the average number decreased to just five occurrences. This decrease is

illustrated in Figure 7. The drop accounted for a 67 percent decline in the total reported
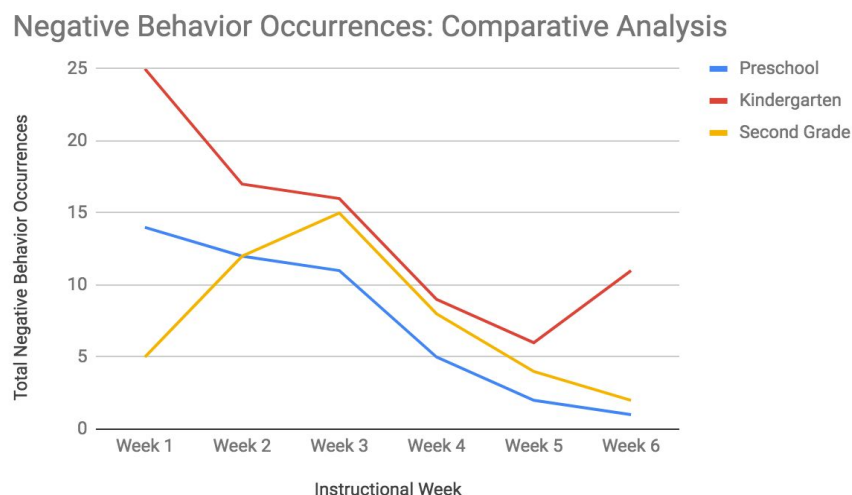
observations of negative behaviors and conflicts.

Figure 6. A comparative analysis of the frequency of negative behavior occurrences in preschool, kindergarten and second grade as documented in the teacher observation log for six weeks of *Mind + Heart Social-Emotional Curriculum* instruction.
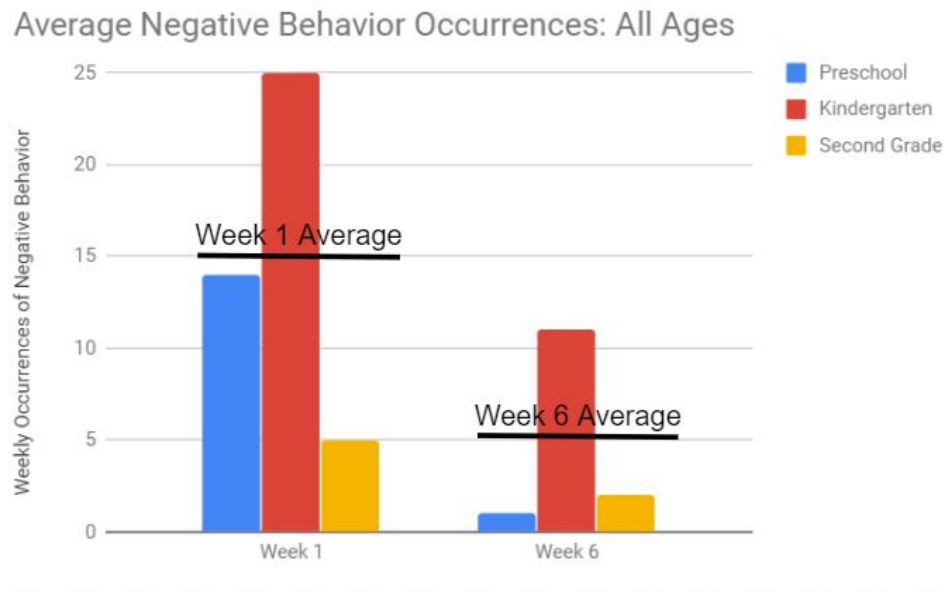
Figure 7. Average negative behavioral and conflict occurrences during the first and sixth week of instruction for preschool, kindergarten and second grade.

In addition to the total number of negative behaviors and conflicts, researchers also noted the types of behaviors witnessed during the six weeks of instruction. Negative behavior types were coded into the following categories: Inattentiveness, Crying, Verbal Aggression, Physical Aggression, Defiance, Disruption, Peer Relationships, Self-Injury, and Other. In some situations, more than one type of behavior may have occurred within a single incident.

In preschool, the category of crying was most frequent, accounting for 42.2% of all documented incidents as shown in Figure 8. Researchers speculated that crying was most prevalent in this age group due to the immature developmental level of the children. Following that, verbal aggression was noted at 24.4%. In addition, physical aggression and disruption created a combined percentage of 26.7%, close to one-fourth of all incidents reported.
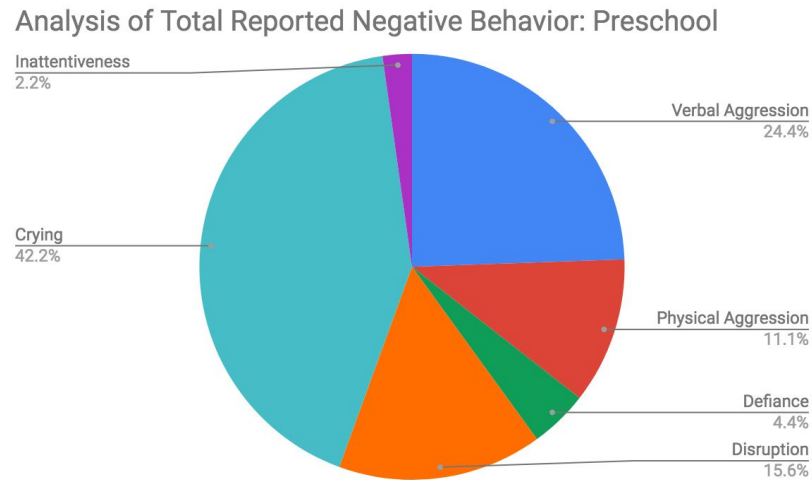
Figure 8. Types of negative behavior occurrences in preschool as documented in the teacher observation log for six weeks of *Mind + Heart Social-Emotional Curriculum* instruction.

The two highest types of negative behaviors within the kindergarten reports were the categories of Verbal Aggression (27.9%) and Disruption (33.7%) as shown in Figure 9. Researchers determined the large amount of disruptions involved one student in particular;

although it affected the whole group. This particular student was involved in 15 of the 29 disruption instances, or 52% percent of the total documented incidents. A new category developed in the kindergarten setting regarding occurrences with Peer Relationship conflicts. This accounted for 16.3% of the reported occurrences. Peer Relationship conflicts noted arguments during playtime activities and friendships. One documented example of conflicts dealt with one child becoming upset because another child claimed to have a different best friend. This resulted in hurt feelings. Although there were seven types of negative behaviors reported, researchers noted that physical aggression was the

category with the least occurrences. This may be attributed to the school's zero-tolerance
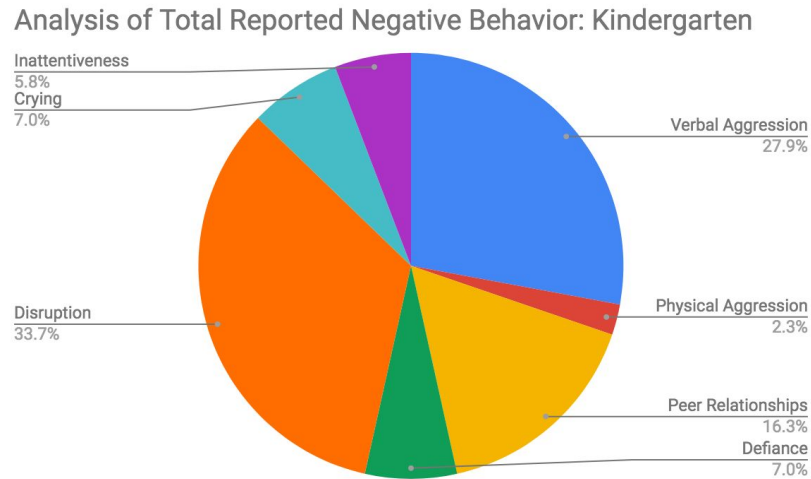
policy for physical aggression.

Analysis of Total Reported Negative Behavior: Kindergarten

Inattentiveness
5.8%
Crying
7.0%

Verbal Aggression
27.9%

Disruption
33.7%

Physical Aggression
2.3%

Peer Relationships
16.3%
Defiance
7.0%

Figure 9. Types of negative behavior occurrences in kindergarten as documented in the
teacher observation log for six weeks of *Mind + Heart Social-Emotional Curriculum*
instruction.

Second grade reported similar percentages of disruptive behaviors and verbal

aggression noted in Figure 10. Disruptions made up for 30.4% of documented negative

behaviors, and verbal aggression accounted for 23.9%.   There was an increase in the

number of physical aggression and defiance seen in this grade level. Researchers

hypothesized that some of these behaviors were related to the student with EBD and

students at-risk for EBD. Two new categories were witnessed in this grade level:

Self-injury and Other. A student was reported hitting himself as a coping mechanism for

self-soothing. This was a behavior that was addressed for safety right away. Another

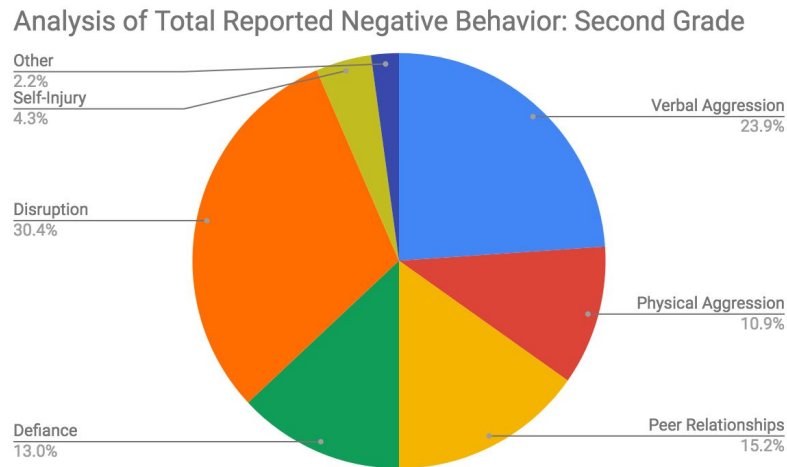student engaged in an act of stealing and lying to account for the category of Other.

Figure 10. Types of negative behavior occurrences in second grade as documented in the teacher observation log for six weeks of *Mind + Heart Social-Emotional Curriculum* instruction.

Overall, the two most prevalent categories between all three grade levels were disruption and verbal aggression, as shown in Figure 11. Researchers reflected on this trend and made a connection back to the initial reason for implementation of the curriculum. The *Mind+Heart Social Emotional Curriculum* contained units focused on conflict resolution and self-management. The data provided in Figure 11 shows these issues are widespread in all age levels.
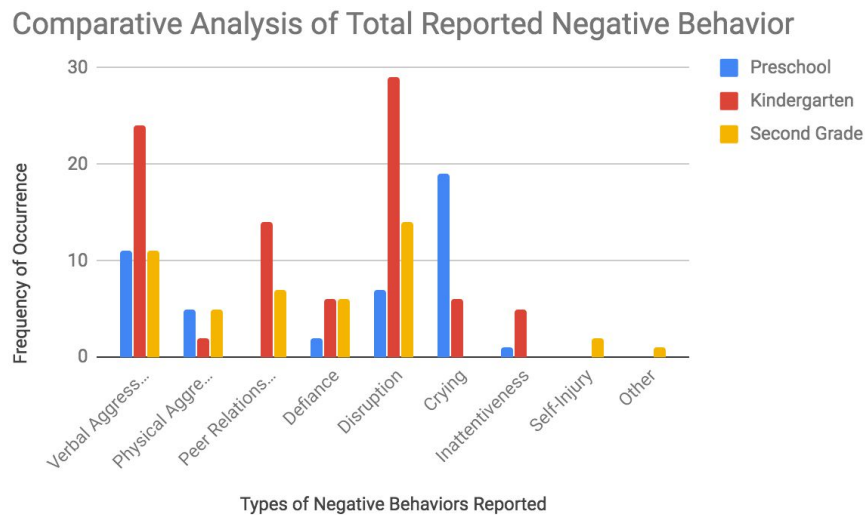
Figure 11. Comparative Analysis of the total reported negative behaviors amongst preschool, kindergarten, and second grade as documented in the teacher observation log for six weeks of *Mind+Heart Social-Emotional Curriculum* instruction.

The next data collection tool utilized was the Student Self-Assessment of Social-Emotional Behaviors. The purpose of this survey was to gain children's opinions of their own social-emotional behaviors. Children of each age level completed an analysis of his or her perceived behaviors. All prompts were read to students. Children were directed to color in their responses according to the key: Smiling Face = Yes, I agree, Straight Face = Sometimes, and Sad Face = No, I disagree, as seen in Figure 12. A modification for preschool students was made that provided one-on-one instruction having each prompt read to children with a reminder of the keyed responses after each prompt. Researchers collected data from prompts 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8, shown in Figure 13. Statements for each prompt are as follows: I care about other people's feelings, I am kind to others, I make safe choices, I respect adults and my friends, I can use strategies to solve problems with others, I know how to calm myself down. Surveys were given prior

to implementation of the *Mind+Heart Curriculum* and again after completion of the

Student Key:

Yes, I agree   Sometimes   No, I disagree
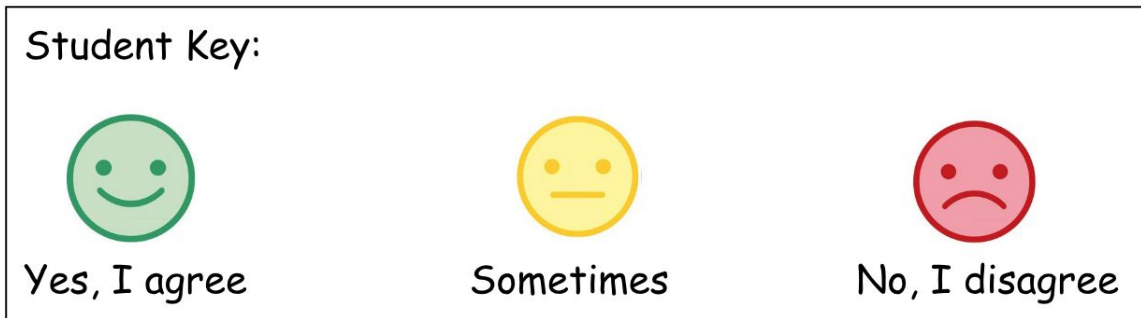
curriculum. A comparative analysis between the two surveys was made by researchers.

Figure 12. Key used in the Student Self-Assessment of Social-Emotional Behaviors.

I care about other people's feelings	🙂	😐	🙁
I am kind to others	🙂	😐	🙁
I make safe choices	🙂	😐	🙁
I respect adults and my friends	🙂	😐	🙁
I can use strategies to solve problems with others	🙂	😐	🙁
I like to share things with others	🙂	😐	🙁
I know how to calm myself down	🙂	😐	🙁

Figure 13. Questions used in the Student Self-Assessment of Social-Emotional Behavior (prompts 2-8 shown).

Overall, the pre- and post-surveys substantiated that after the six week

implementation of the *Mind+Heart Curriculum*, there was mastery or growth in areas of

study. Figures 14-16 show the areas of mastery and growth.

Preschool students' responses indicated they maintained or increased their

self-perception of mastery in all areas of data collected as depicted in Figure 14. This was

unique to the data set. Researchers believed preschool students are at a developmental

stage where they are more focused on a right or wrong answer. This makes it difficult for

them to reflect and respond honestly when there's not necessarily a correct answer.
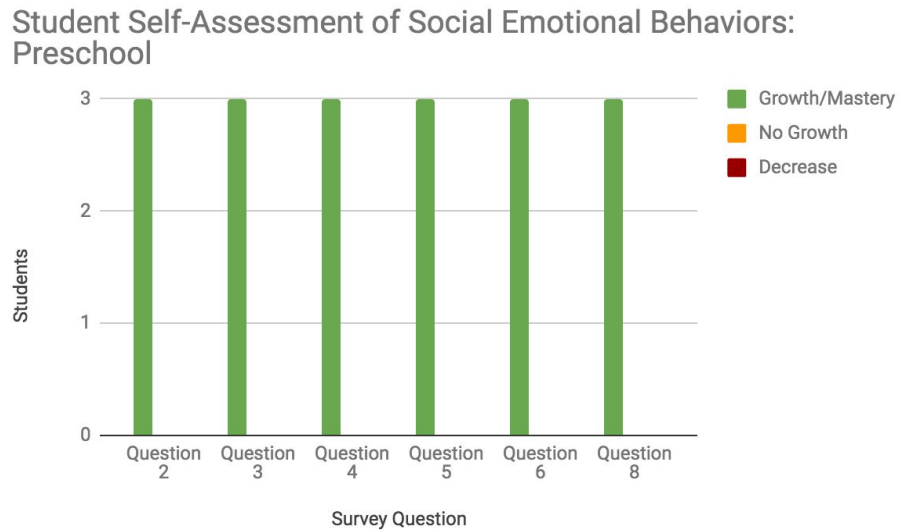

Figure 14. Growth analysis of preschool students' Self-Assessments of Social Emotional
Behavior (Pre and Post Data).

Kindergarten students, as depicted in Figure 15, also showed a large amount of

growth or mastery. However, the slight presence of no growth and decrease should be

noted. Researchers felt that these two categories were present due to the students'

increased understanding of the social-emotional content included in the assessment after

the implementation of the curriculum. Students may have been able to answer these

prompts more honestly with an increased understanding. Therefore, students may have

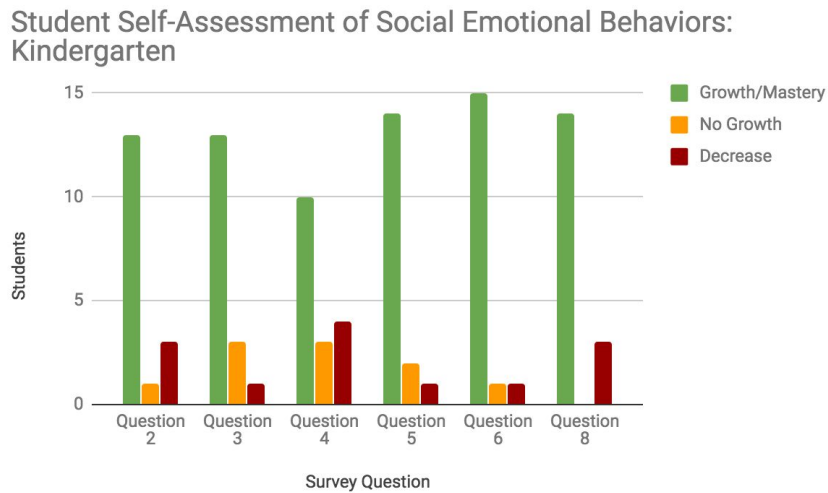shown no growth or a decreased perception of their abilities.

Figure 15. Growth analysis of kindergarten students' Self-Assessments of Social Emotional Behavior (Pre and Post Data).

The majority of second grade students reported an increased growth or mastery as shown in Figure 16. Although many students rated themselves at a "3" in the pre-assessment, researchers felt that the students who gave themselves a "3" in the post-assessment were more accurately rating themselves because they had a better understanding of social-emotional skills. Much like the kindergarten data, researchers noted there were some respondents that indicated no growth or a decrease in mastery. This could be due to many reasons, including a further understanding of social-emotional content or possibly the way the child felt on the day of the assessment.
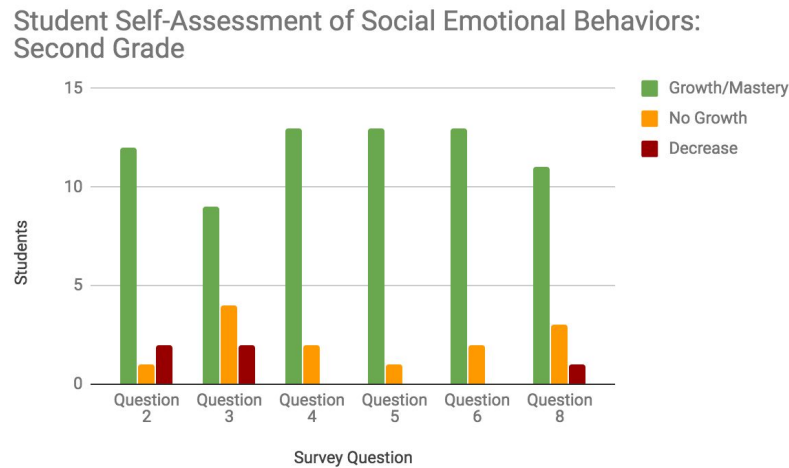
Student Self-Assessment of Social Emotional Behaviors:
Second Grade

Figure 16. Growth analysis of second grade Students' Self-Assessments of Social Emotional Behavior (Pre and Post Data).

Concluding the instructional component of the study, a post-assessment interview (conversational dialogue) was conducted during week eight. Students were again asked to answer the question, "*How do you self-regulate when school (daycare) is hard?*". Researchers noticed a dramatic drop in the number of "Off An Topic/Inappropriate Answer" or "I Don't Know" responses as noted in Figure 16. Preschool students were able to give responses of techniques to self-regulate at daycare by seeking adult or peer assistance, using a breathing technique, and finding a quiet area. In kindergarten, one student gave an off topic/inappropriate answer, but researchers wondered if it was due to a language barrier as the student is of English Learner (EL) status. The student may have been attempting to answer the question, but stated, "I don't tell friends, I tell a teacher when I have question." This response did not provide a clear self-regulation strategy. Again, the highest category in kindergarten was the use of encouraging thoughts (refer to Figure 1 and Figure 16). Researchers believe that this category remained the highest due

to a strong foundation in PBIS along with ongoing practice, and with the implementation

of the curriculum. Another interesting aspect of the data shows a significant decrease in

the number of "I don't know" responses. In the pre-assessment data, 18% of

kindergarten responses were coded in the I don't know category. However, on the

post-assessment data, the percentage dropped to 0%. The remaining responses

incorporated strategies that were explicitly taught in the *Mind+Heart Curriculum*, such as

breathing and counting techniques.

In second grade, a majority of students gravitated to breathing techniques as a

method for self-regulating when school was hard. Twelve percent of the respondents

chose to find a quiet area to self-regulate. Although 18% of answers indicated an "I don't

know" reply, researchers felt the apathetic attitude of those respondents may have

affected their willingness to provide an accurate answer. Other participants shared

encouraging thoughts, counting strategies, and methods to seek adult or peer assistance as

their preference (refer to Table 16*)*.

Overall, for each of the three age levels, the category of breathing techniques was

the highest predilection of self-regulation (30%). Encouraging thoughts (27%) and adult

or peer assistance (21%) were also noted as popular strategies chosen by students.

Student Responses on Question 1: Post-Asessment				
Response	Preschool	Kindergarten	Second	Total Responses
Gave An Off Topic/Inappropriate Answer		1		1
I Don't Know			3	3
Encouraging Thoughts		7	2	9
Adult or Peer Assistance	1	4	2	7
Find a Solution or Use Strategies		2		2
Breathe	1	3	7	11
Counting			1	1
Quiet Area	1		2	3

Table 16. Post-Assessment student responses to the question: *"How do you self-regulate when school (daycare)is hard?"*

Lastly, students were again asked the question, *"What do you do to calm down when you are upset?"* At the conclusion of the *Mind+Heart Curriculum*, all preschool students were able to provide an example of how to calm down as seen in Table 17. Students shared breathing techniques, encouraging words, and seeking adult or peer assistance as their choice of calming strategy.

Student Responses on Question 2: Post-Asessment				
Response	Preschool	Kindergarten	Second	Total Responses
Encouraging Words	1		1	2
Inappropriate/Off Topic			1	1
Use Your Words		4		4
Adult and Peer Assistance	1		2	3
Quiet Space		1	1	2
Breathe	1	2	8	11
Other Activity		4	4	8
Walk Away		2		2

Table 17. Post-Assessment student responses to the question: "What do you do to calm down when you are upset?"

Kindergarten students were each able to provide a relevant strategy to calm down, as with their preschool counterparts. Thirty percent of children decided on using their

words for a method to calm down. Another thirty percent chose other activities as a method to change their focus, such as playing with another friend, watching tv, or reading a book. Others noted walking away, breathing, or finding a quiet space to calm down.

Second grade students provided several different methods for their choices of calming down. Many gathered toward the Balloon Breathing technique that was an explicit focus in the *Mind+Heart Curriculum* (47%). Others chose different activities to focus on, seek assistance from peers or adults and use encouraging words for calming approaches.

Researchers were encouraged to see a plethora of techniques students provided in attempts to calm themselves down when the students' emotions are escalated. Breathing techniques, such as balloon breathing, accounted for 33% of all pre-primary and primary students in this study. Twenty-four percent of participants stated their choice of soothing as using another activity to distract from the irritant. It was reassuring for researchers to conclude that the material presented in the *Mind+Heart Curriculum* resonated with students and provided them with several positive options that they found meaningful to draw upon in times of distress.

Discussion

 "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all" (Aristotle, n.d.).

What does our research mean?

The primary purpose of our action research project was to answer the question: "How does the teaching of direct social skills affect students' behaviors in the preschool and primary setting?" Our goal was to show that children in preschool, and those in

kindergarten and second grade would be positively impacted by explicit instruction of a

social-emotional curriculum. It was hoped that the *Mind+Hear*t *Curriculum* would

provide students with strategies to better handle situations of conflict and directly teach

methods of self-regulation to be used during school and in their daily lives. The research

completed was important for several reasons. Our main concern was that children are

coming to school ill-equipped with skills to deal with social and emotional

circumstances. This can interfere with a student's ability to focus on academic goals.

Based on what we were seeing in our classes, the literature we reviewed and data

collected, we believed there was a strong need for social-emotional instruction for

students to develop skills needed to cope with conflicts and irritants.

The data from our research showed a decrease in negative social-emotional

responses. Furthermore, the data showed an increase in comprehension and usage of

social-emotional terminology and strategies. There was also an increase in positive

behavior responses from the three age levels observed: preschool (age 4), kindergarten,

and second grade.

Our action research project supported our belief that implementation of a

social-emotional curriculum, specifically the *Mind+Heart Curriculum*, would have a

positive impact on student behaviors for preschool children, those in kindergarten and

second grade. The results of our action research project have molded our pedagogy and

reaffirmed our belief of the importance of teaching of the whole child, not just the

academic necessities. Results have made us reflect upon what and how we teach, and we

have determined that it is essential for us to incorporate social-emotional teaching

strategies into our curriculum as the benefits are evident. Although this study was conducted in a given eight-week time period, we determined that the instruction would be more beneficial had it been implemented throughout the school year. We feel the more exposure to additional skills through the remaining units in the *Mind+Heart Curriculum* would greatly improve the social-emotional development of each child. Further units include studies in growth mindset, kindness, respect, relationships, and social awareness.

When students have the skills to positively express themselves and to appropriately regulate their emotions and behaviors, they are more likely to use those tools in times of distress or conflict. This enables them to resolve personal issues and social dilemmas effectively, allowing them to work better with others and accomplish tasks in a more timely manner. This, therefore, would directly benefit individual student learning and the learning environment of the whole class. It would also reduce the amount of time the teacher would need to devote to student conflicts and behaviors that interfere with academic instruction, optimizing this time. Student benefits would not be limited solely to the classroom environment. Having a solid social-emotional instructional base has the potential to extend beyond the school walls into interactions at home and in the community. It also has the ability to benefit children in successfully interacting throughout their academic years as well as their potential careers and personal lives.

Action Plan

In future practice, we would like to extend the study from eight weeks to a year-round program. We would increase the number of participants, especially in

preschool, to provide a larger amount of data. In addition to a larger sample size, we would like to focus this study on age levels that are more cognitively equivalent to each other, such as preschool with kindergarten or second grade with first grade. To extend this study, we would work collaboratively with the students' next grade level teachers to continue the program. Hereafter, we would also extend the length of time for each unit in the *Mind+Heart Curriculum*. Our focus would limit the number of units with preschool students. We intend to expand the focus to include other units from the *Mind+Heart Curriculum* in kindergarten and second grade.   Changes would be made to the process of collecting data with the teacher observation log in order to make it easier for instruction to occur. We would use a trained, third-party adult to document student behavior while instruction is being conducted. Another option we could utilize would be a camera to record the classroom setting for the teacher to review at a later time. In the future, we would also try to use a digitally linked teacher observation log to instantly reflect on data on graphs or spreadsheets, instead of only at the completion of the study. Another change we would incorporate would be to adjust the student self-survey for preschool and kindergarten by allowing an oral response.

Potential Future Action Research Projects

Future research needs to occur in the area of connecting social-emotional education occurring at school with student home life. We believe that this could create a powerful link to transfer and strengthen skills in the environments where students spend the most time. A broader scope of research is needed to include various social-emotional curricula for pre-primary and primary students. This would determine if the benefits

observed in this research were indicative of the specific curriculum or of social-emotional content. Furthermore, additional research is essential for a long-term implementation and its behavioral effects on elementary students.

In conclusion, we felt this research showed strong benefits to the development of social-emotional competency for pre-primary and primary students. The positive behavioral changes observed were believed to have been directly related to the instruction of the *Mind+Heart Curriculum*. This promising conclusion supports our desire to improve the development of the whole child.

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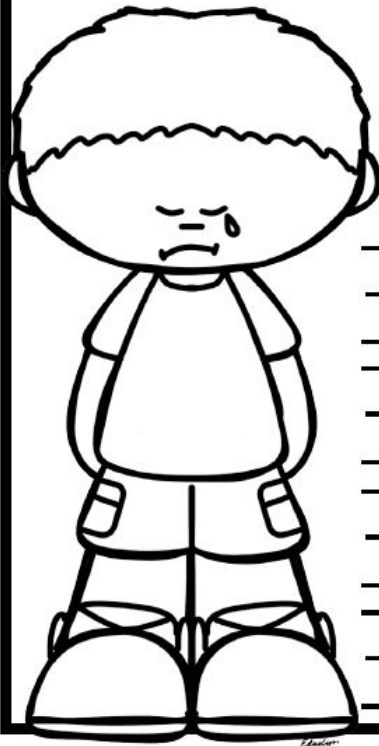Vygotsky's Legacy : A Foundation for Research and Practice, Guilford

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Appendix A
"My Feelings and Me Journal"

I feel sad when…

I feel happy when...
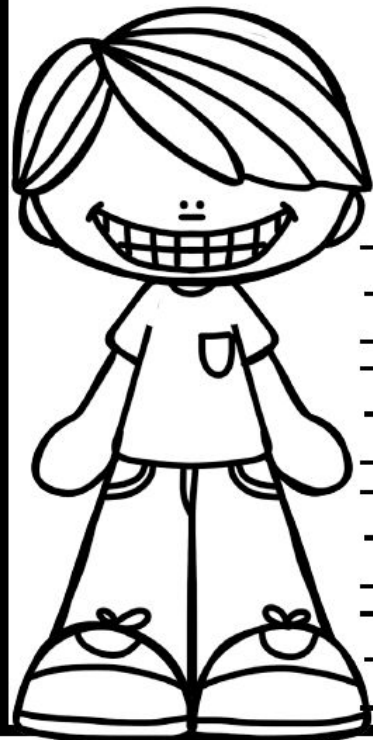
I feel mad when…

I feel scared when...

I feel proud when…
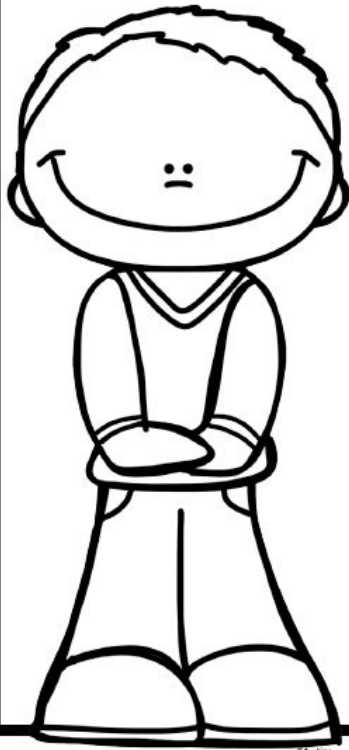
Appendix B
"My Self-Regulation Journal"
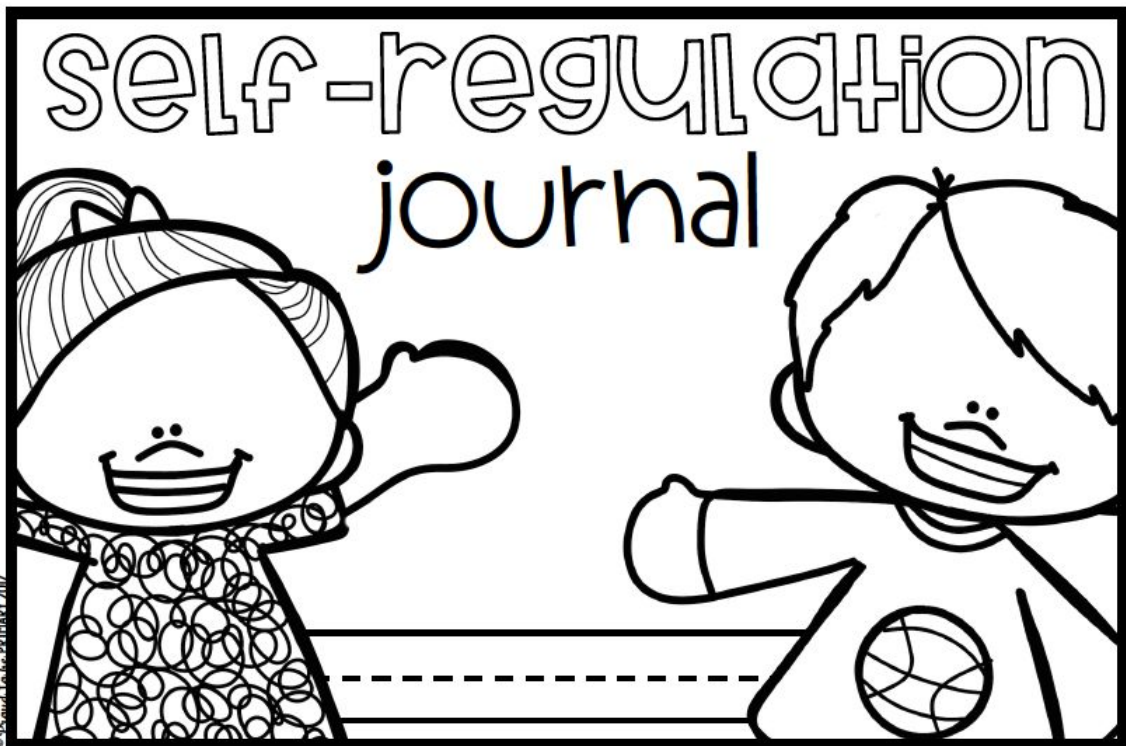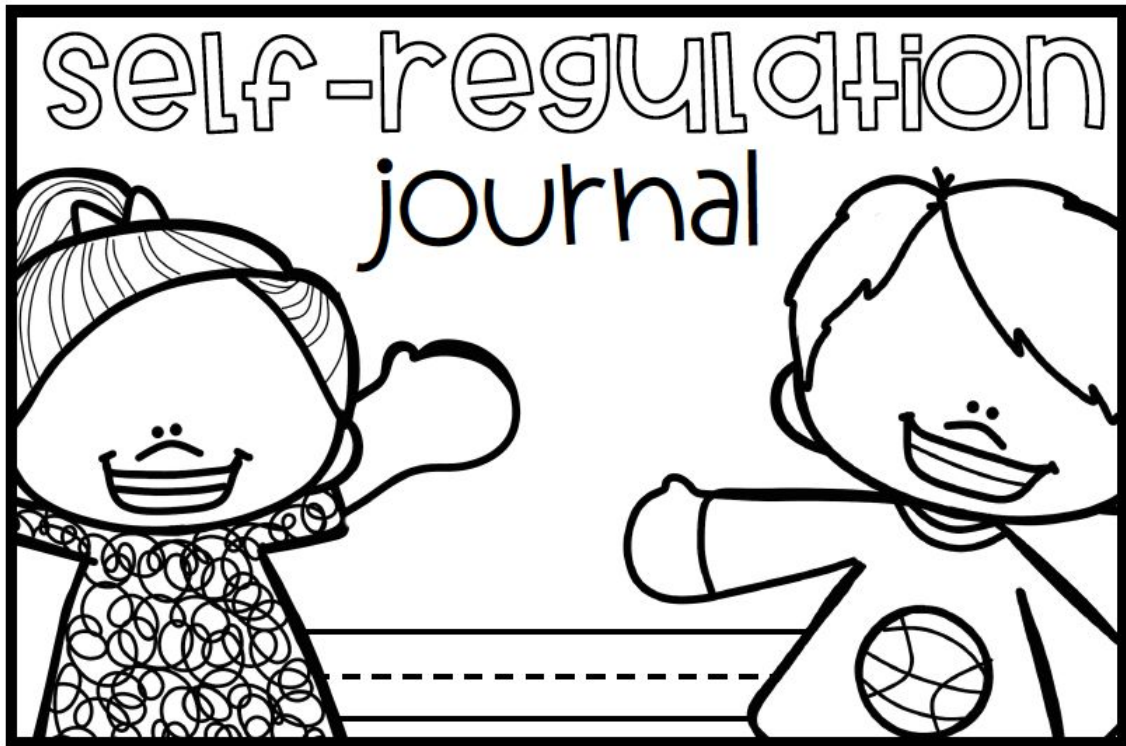
Today _____

so I _____

Today _____

so I _____

Appendix C
Teacher Observation Log

Teacher Observation Log: SEL

Date/Time	Location	*Students Involved	**Behavior Code	Narrative Description	Teacher's response

*Student Codes
P (1-3): Refers to Preschool Students
K (1-17): Refers to Kindergarten Students
S (1-15): Refers to Second Grade Student

CR: Conflict Resolution
SR: Using Self-Regulation
   Strategies
IF: Identifying Feelings
EM: Showing Empathy
AA: Asking an Adult for
   Assistance

**Behavior Codes

PA: Physical Aggression
VA: Verbal Aggression
SI: Self-injury
DF:Defiance
DR:Disruptive
PR:Peer Relationships
I:Inattentiveness
C:Crying
O: Other/Undefined

Appendix D
"Student Feedback Survey"

Name:

Social Emotional Learning

Student Key:

🙂	😐	☹️
Yes, I agree	Sometimes	No, I disagree

	Yes	Sometimes	No
I can tell how other people are feeling	🙂	😐	☹️
I care about other people's feelings	🙂	😐	☹️
I am kind to others	🙂	😐	☹️
I make safe choices	🙂	😐	☹️
I respect adults and my friends	🙂	😐	☹️
I can use strategies to solve problems with others	🙂	😐	☹️
I like to share things with others	🙂	😐	☹️
I know how to calm myself down	🙂	😐	☹️
I listen to what other people have to say	🙂	😐	☹️
Mistakes help me grow	🙂	😐	☹️

Appendix E
Parental/Guardian Passive Consent Form
Social-Emotional Learning in Pre-Primary and Primary Education

Parental Permission Form

December 1, 2017

Dear Parents,

In addition to being your child's second grade teacher, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education. As a capstone to my program, I need to complete an Action Research project. I am going to study the impact of teaching a social-emotional learning program on children's behaviors because social-emotional learning is an essential part of the development of a whole child.

In the coming weeks, I will be implementing a social-emotional curriculum called *Mind + Heart* as a regular part of my direct instruction. This curriculum includes units on identifying feelings, maintaining relationships, and conflict resolutions. All students will participate as members of the class. In order to understand the outcomes, I plan to analyze the data obtained from the results of these units such as artwork, journals, conversations, role playing, and observations to determine positive and negative effects on behavior. All strategies implemented and assessments given are part of normal educational practice.

The purpose of this letter is to notify you of this research and to allow you the opportunity to exclude your child's data (teacher observation journal, student survey, conversational dialogues, *My Self-Regulation Journal*, *My Feelings and Me Journal*, and art work) from my study.

> **If you decide you want your child's data to be in my study,** you
> don't need to do anything at this point.

> **If you decide you do NOT want your child's data included in
> my study,** please note that on this form below and return it by
> December 8, 2017. Note that your child will still participate in the
> *Mind + Heart Social Emotional Curriculum,* but his/her data will
> not be included in my analysis.

In order to help you make an informed decision, please note the following:

- I am working with a faculty member at St. Kate's and an advisor to complete this particular project.
- Possible benefits for your child may include: improved self-awareness, improved

social skills with peers and adults, improved communication, and improved emotional responses. Through reflection, some discussions may shed light on personal experiences and emotions.

- Risks are minimal. Children may experience uneasy emotions when learning and discussing personal feelings. This risk is minimized by promoting a safe environment that allows children to share freely at their discretion.

- I will be writing about the results that I get from this research. However, none of the writing that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any students, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular student. Other people will not know if your child is in my study.

- The final report of my study will be electronically available online at the St. Catherine University library. The goal of sharing my research study is to help other teachers who are also trying to improve their teaching.

- There is no penalty for not having your child's data involved in the study, I will simply delete his or her responses from my data set.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Jill Freeman at jfreeman@nrheg.k12.mn.us or (507) 416-2114. You may ask questions now, or if you have any questions later, you can ask me, or my advisor, Julie Williams at julie.williams@isd728.org, who will be happy to answer them. If you have questions or concerns regarding the study, and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____
Jillian Freeman   Date

OPT OUT: Parents, in order to exclude your child's data from the study, please sign and return by December 8, 2017

I do NOT want my child's data to be included in this study.

_____   _____
Signature of Parent   Date

Social-Emotional Learning in Pre-Primary and Primary Education

Parental Permission Form

December 1, 2017

Dear Parents,

In addition to being your child's kindergarten teacher, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education. As a capstone to my program, I need to complete an Action Research project. I am going to study the impact of teaching a social-emotional learning program on children's behaviors because social-emotional learning is an essential part of the development of a whole child.

In the coming weeks, I will be implementing a social-emotional curriculum called *Mind + Heart* as a regular part of my direct instruction. This curriculum includes units on identifying feelings, maintaining relationships, and conflict resolutions. All students will participate as members of the class. In order to understand the outcomes, I plan to analyze the data obtained from the results of these units such as artwork, journals, conversations, role playing, and observations to determine positive and negative effects on behavior. All strategies implemented and assessments given are part of normal educational practice.

The purpose of this letter is to notify you of this research and to allow you the opportunity to exclude your child's data (teacher observation journal, student survey, conversational dialogues, *My Self-Regulation Journal*, *My Feelings and Me Journal*, and art work) from my study.

> **If you decide you want your child's data to be in my study,** you don't need to do anything at this point.

> **If you decide you do NOT want your child's data included in my study,** please note that on this form below and return it by December 8, 2017. Note that your child will still participate in the *Mind + Heart Social Emotional Curriculum,* but his/her data will not be included in my analysis.

In order to help you make an informed decision, please note the following:

- I am working with a faculty member at St. Kate's and an advisor to complete this particular project.
- Possible benefits for your child may include: improved self-awareness, improved social skills with peers and adults, improved communication, and improved emotional responses. Through reflection, some discussions may shed light on

personal experiences and emotions.

- Risks are minimal. Children may experience uneasy emotions when learning and discussing personal feelings. This risk is minimized by promoting a safe environment that allows children to share freely at their discretion.

- I will be writing about the results that I get from this research. However, none of the writing that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any students, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular student. Other people will not know if your child is in my study.

- The final report of my study will be electronically available online at the St. Catherine University library. The goal of sharing my research study is to help other teachers who are also trying to improve their teaching.

- There is no penalty for not having your child's data involved in the study, I will simply delete his or her responses from my data set.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Paige Larson at palarson959@stkate.edu or (507) 444-8232 . You may ask questions now, or if you have any questions later, you can ask me, or my advisor, Julie Williams at julie.williams@isd728.org, who will be happy to answer them. If you have questions or concerns regarding the study, and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____
Paige Larson   Date

OPT OUT: Parents, in order to exclude your child's data from the study, please sign and return by December 8, 2017

I do NOT want my child's data to be included in this study.

_____   _____
Signature of Parent   Date

Social-Emotional Learning in Pre-Primary and Primary Education

Parental Permission Form

December 1, 2017

Dear Parents,

In addition to being a daycare provider, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education. As a capstone to my program, I need to complete an Action Research project. I am going to study the impact of teaching a social-emotional learning program on children's behaviors because social-emotional learning is an essential part of the development of a whole child.

In the coming weeks, I will be implementing a social-emotional curriculum called *Mind + Heart* as a regular part of my direct instruction. This curriculum includes units on identifying feelings, maintaining relationships, and conflict resolutions. All children will participate as members of the group. In order to understand the outcomes, I plan to analyze the data obtained from the results of these units such as artwork, journals, conversations, role playing, and observations to determine positive and negative effects on behavior. All strategies implemented and assessments given are part of normal educational practice.

The purpose of this letter is to notify you of this research and to allow you the opportunity to exclude your child's data from my study (teacher journal, student/child survey, conversation dialogues, *My Self-Regulation Journal*, *My Feelings and Me Journal*, and art work).

> **If you decide you want your child's data to be in my study,** you don't need to do anything at this point.

> **If you decide you do NOT want your child's data included in my study,** please note that on this form below and return it by December 8, 2017. Note that your child will still participate in the *Mind + Heart Social Emotional Curriculum,* but his/her data will not be included in my analysis.

In order to help you make an informed decision, please note the following:

- I am working with a faculty member at St. Kate's and an advisor to complete this particular project.
- Possible benefits for your child may include: improved self-awareness, improved social skills with peers and adults, improved communication, and improved emotional responses. Through reflection, some discussions may shed light on

personal experiences and emotions.

- Risks are minimal. Children may experience uneasy emotions when learning and discussing personal feelings. This risk is minimized by promoting a safe environment that allows children to share freely at their discretion.

- I will be writing about the results that I get from this research. However, none of the writing that I do will include the name of daycare, the names of children, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular child. Other people will not know if your child is in my study.

- The final report of my study will be electronically available online at the St. Catherine University library. The goal of sharing my research study is to help other teachers who are also trying to improve their teaching.

- There is no penalty for not having your child's data involved in the study, I will simply delete his or her responses from my data set.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Anna Kugler at ackugler@stkate.edu or (612) 388-4439. You may ask questions now, or if you have any questions later, you can ask me, or my advisor, Julie Williams at julie.williams@isd728.org, who will be happy to answer them. If you have questions or concerns regarding the study, and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739.

 You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____
Anna Kugler   Date

OPT OUT: Parents, in order to exclude your child's data from the study, please sign and return by December 8, 2017

I do NOT want my child's data to be included in this study.

_____   _____
Signature of Parent   Date

Appendix F
Conversational Dialogue Questions
(Used in Pre- and Post-Interviews)

Discussion STARTERS - *emotions lesson* #1

What are emotions? Why do we have them?

Discussion STARTERS - *emotions lesson* #1

What are facial expressions? What is body language?

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Discussion STARTERS - *self-management lesson #2*

How do you self-regulate when school is hard?

Discussion STARTERS - *self-management lesson #2*

What do you do to calm down when you are upset?