

Kennesaw State University

DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University

Dissertations

Student Works Hub

Spring 5-2-2024

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF CALMING CORNERS IN LANGUAGE ARTS MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

Freya Sneed

frs4677@students.kennesaw.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sneed, Freya, "TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF CALMING CORNERS IN LANGUAGE ARTS MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOMS" (2024). *Dissertations*. 19.

<https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/dissertations/19>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Works Hub at DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

**TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF CALMING CORNERS IN LANGUAGE ARTS MIDDLE
SCHOOL CLASSROOMS**

Freya Sneed
Kennesaw State University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Education in Teacher Leadership in the Bagwell College of Education

Kennesaw State University

Spring 2024

Dr. Chinasa Elue, Committee Chair

Dr. Nicholas Clegorne, Committee Member

Dr. Albert Jimenez, Committee Member

Abstract

Student stress and anxiety are at an all-time high. Following the pandemic, more research is needed to better understand what types of interventions can be supportive in helping students manage their emotional wellbeing. To better support them, the researcher worked with various English Language Arts middle school teachers to implement Calming Corners, a social emotional based intervention. In this qualitative action research study, students in sixth-eighth grades were offered the use of Calming Corners in their English Language Arts classes. This research examined whether the Calming Corners was effective in reducing stress and anxiety for the students in their educational setting.

Keywords: *Calming Corners. Middle school students. Language Arts.*

Acknowledgments

Above all others, I thank Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, without whom none of this would have happened. With God, all things are possible – Matthew 19:26.

To begin with, I would like to thank my incredible committee. I especially want to thank my chair, Dr. Chinasa Elue, for her guidance and patience with me and for always helping me when I was confused or frustrated. Your assistance was invaluable, and I appreciate all of the help you gave me throughout this dissertation process. In addition, the guidance and support Dr. Nicholas Clegorne and Dr. Albert Jimenez gave was indispensable, and I could not have completed my program without their help.

I would like to thank my sister Kathleen Petka for pushing me to enter this program and earn this degree. Without her, none of this would have been possible. Working together these last three plus years has been very rewarding, and I am grateful for all she has done for me. I would also like to thank my mother and father whose love, support, and patience helped get me through these last few years while I was working on my degree. I want to thank my brother-in-law Jeff, who guided me throughout this program and offered assistance whenever possible, especially with my quantitative class.

I thank each and every single one of my siblings, nieces, and nephews in addition to my brother-in-law Max, who all regularly checked on me and asked me how I was doing. I have an amazing family I adore, and without their dedication to me and their support of me, I would not have been able to succeed and earn my doctorate. My nieces and nephews sacrificed a lot of playtime with me so I could succeed in my program, but I hope I have been an inspiration to them and we can spend much more time together now.

To my friends and coworkers who assisted me in any capacity throughout my journey, I thank you. When everything seemed impossible, you cheered me on and encouraged me, loved and supported me, and you helped make this happen. I also appreciate my coworkers who allowed me to conduct my research through their classes.

Finally, to my cohort members who worked with me, offered assistance and guidance, and who helped me in any way – I am so grateful for your help and friendship. It's been a privilege working with you.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my brother, Tobias Samuel Sneed, whose friendship, love, and support have always meant the world to me. You were my first best friend, and I miss you more than anyone could ever understand. I would give anything to spend more time with you. Thank you for being such an amazing brother.

My research and doctoral work are also dedicated to my parents, Harry Sneed and Freya Funk Sneed, who supported and encouraged me throughout each of my degrees. Thank you for offering guidance, proof reading, and giving suggestions when I needed them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Tables.....	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Background.....	1
Interventions to Support Emotional Needs of Students.....	3
Problem Statement.....	8
Purpose.....	9
Study Significance.....	11
Conceptual Framework.....	13
Research Design.....	15
Study Setting.....	15
Delimitations and Limitations.....	16
Definitions of Key Terms.....	16
Chapter Summary.....	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	18
Chapter Summary.....	36
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	38
Research Questions.....	38
Research Design.....	39

Setting.....	41
Sample Population.....	41
Demographics of Teacher Participants.....	41
Access to Site.....	43
Data Collection.....	43
Data Analysis Procedures.....	45
Trustworthiness.....	45
Credibility.....	45
Transferability.....	46
Dependability.....	46
Confirmability.....	46
Limitations and Delimitations.....	47
Ethical Considerations.....	47
Researcher Positionality.....	48
Self.....	48
Self to Others.....	48
Self to System/Society.....	49
The Paradigmatic Self.....	49
Worldview.....	50
Chapter Summary.....	52
Chapter 4: Findings.....	53
Emergent Themes.....	54
Theme One: Improvement in Student Behavior.....	54

Theme Two: Benefits of a Positive Classroom Environment.....	59
Theme Three: Increase in Teacher Empathy.....	60
Theme Four: Improvement in Teacher Support of Students.....	63
Chapter Summary.....	65
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	66
Research Question 1 Revisited.....	66
Research Question 2 Revisited.....	67
General Feedback of Calming Corners.....	69
Usefulness of Calming Corners to Teachers.....	74
Implications for the Field of Teacher Leadership.....	79
Implications for Policy.....	79
Implications for Practice.....	80
Recommendations.....	81
Areas for Further Research.....	83
Conclusion.....	84
References.....	86
Appendix A.....	96
Appendix B.....	97
Appendix C.....	99
Appendix D.....	100
Appendix E.....	101
Appendix F.....	103
Appendix G.....	106

Appendix H.....107

LIST OF TABLES

Table One: Emergent Themes.....54
Table Two: Calming Corner Collective Use Summary Information.....78

Chapter One: Introduction

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the emotional wellbeing of all people, but most especially, students. Since the onset of the pandemic, depression and anxiety levels are higher than ever, and students need more resources and interventions to support them in coping with stressful situations (Abramson, 2022). In fact, Abramson (2022) notes that since the COVID-19 pandemic began, it has been documented that there has been an increase in mental illness of children and the need for more psychological services and other types of supports. Hence, concern for students' mental health has increased since the onset of the pandemic (Bockmann & Yu, 2022). Because of the pandemic, there have been noted increases amongst students' mental stress, depression, physical and financial problems, and their experiences, both at home and in school (Bockmann & Yu, 2022). Further, the CDC (2021) reports that almost half of the nation's high school students reported feelings of hopelessness or sadness, which led to a decline in their engagement with their daily activities. Nearly half of the nation's high school students reported that they had felt either hopeless or sad since the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, and more than a third of them had struggled with mental health challenges during this time. Furthermore, the report highlighted that schools are critical in supporting the well-being and health of their students, as serve as partners in protecting students from adverse outcomes by offering services opportunities for physical, mental, social, and academic support. The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported that among the top disabilities and leading causes of illness in adolescents are behavioral disorders, anxiety issues, and depression, which can prevent students from doing well in school (*Adolescent Mental Health*, n.d.). Rahiman et al., (2023) posits that the pandemic has created difficulties with students' stress, anxiety, and mental health in addition to

psychological issues and other emotional problems. Managing stress in the school environment is critical and better strategies and resources are needed so students can navigate factors that may negatively impact their academic successes. Supporting students' emotional wellbeing is of utmost importance following the pandemic, given the impact it can have on their learning capacity. The WHO suggests that when students are dealing with disorders of anxiety and depression, it can have a strong negative impact on not only their attendance but on their schoolwork as well. Furthermore, if they withdraw socially, it could increase their feelings of loneliness, isolation, and depression, which could lead to suicide.

In this regard, it is also important to understand how students experience stressors within the school environment. For example, Winsor and Mueller (2020), they found that if students are stressed and dealing with depression or contemplating suicide, they are prone to different risk factors and rationales for their feelings. Students who are dealing with stress, anxiety, and depression are often too concerned with other issues to focus on school. They need resources and supportive outlets to help them cope with their stress and mental health. Winsor and Mueller (2020) write, "Students should not be viewed as being exempt from depression because of their high cognitive ability; in fact, in 2018 the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) reported that 10% of gifted adolescents were seen for symptoms of depression in clinical settings. Unattended to signs of depression are likely to worsen and can lead to diagnosable depression, other mental illnesses, or suicidal ideas, gestures, attempts, and the ultimate act of suicide" (p. 1630). When students are experiencing signs of depression, they need to be attended to so they can improve their mindsets. Students need assistance with regulating their emotions. Winsor and Mueller (2020) find that the problems children are facing inside of school hours are not the only ones that they are dealing with because they are struggling with mental and

emotional issues outside of school just as frequently. Using interventions can really assist students in managing their emotions and with dealing with their stressful situations and other problems.

Interventions to Support Emotional Needs of Students

To succeed in school and in life, students need to learn methods of coping with issues with which they may struggle, especially in the classroom. On its website, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) organization proffers that self-regulation and self-management are one's skills at successfully managing his/her behaviors, thoughts, and emotions in various situations so that one can attain goals. Managing stress is just one of these skills and developing motivation to achieve goals is another. Furthermore, CASEL reports that identifying when one is stressed and employing stress management strategies is an additional component of self-management (CASEL, para 2). Another explanation of self-regulation reports that it is an intentional utilization of personal skills one demonstrates to react to one's environment in order for the individual to achieve certain goals (Bockmann and Yu, 2023). Montroy (2014) writes that self-regulation means "a child must utilize her cognition, motivation and emotions to create a response in line with contextual expectations" (p. 299). CASEL further stresses that because of the need for students to be able to manage their own emotions, interventions must be put in place.

One such intervention that can be supportive of students' emotional needs is Calming Corners. Calming Corners, otherwise known as Peace Corners, Zen Zones, Cozy Corners, Relaxation Stations, etc., is a tool that can help students alleviate stress and anxiety. Calming Corners can be a physical location in the classroom that is offered to students to calm themselves down so that they are able to go back and focus in class. Through Calming Corners, students are

exposed to a small area of a classroom where they can sit, sometimes on a bean bag chair or some other more pleasant seat than regular chairs, and they can use sensory items to help them relax, de-stress, or just settle down before they become too upset. These corners may have fidget spinners, Play-Doh, calming music, peaceful signs, or posters, etc. to assist students in regulating their emotions. Seckman et al., (2017) notes that areas like sensory rooms and Calming Corners can work as a prevention tool and offer places for an upset individual to de-stress and self-regulate by utilizing sensory tools. Students are afforded an opportunity to de-stress from their problems during a class period before the issues get too difficult to combat. Maich et al., (2019) describe Calming Corners as a proactive approach to prevent problems in the classroom before they actually occur. Because it is inclusive, all students can utilize this intervention in the classroom. Students who are anxious, depressed, or stressed need methods to help them cope, and the use of Calming Corners can assist them with this. In addition, students should be able to hone their self-regulation skills through these stations, and it should build their emotional safety in the process. Maich et al., (2019) explain that the areas should be easily accessible as well as safe, and they should be utilized for a set amount of time. By taking short breaks from academic assignments in order to utilize Calming Corners, students can alleviate their stress and find comfort in the classroom.

Since the pandemic began, student attendance in school has worsened, and in fact, according to the Nation's Report Card (2023), in some cases, students' absences have doubled from 2020-2023. Absenteeism has become a real problem and one that must be addressed.

Bebernes (2023) writes,

“Schools across the country are finding that one of the most challenging hurdles to helping students recover from the disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic is

getting them to come to the classroom at all. Chronic absenteeism, which was a problem long before COVID-19, has become a crisis in the eyes of many experts. Up to 16 million children — a third of the total U.S. public school population — missed at least 10% of the 2021-22 academic year, according to an estimate by the nonprofit group *Attendance Works*. That’s double the number of chronically absent students during the 2018-19 school year” (paras. 1-2).

The article continues with the fact that students are skipping classes because of their emotional and mental health problems. In addition, they no longer feel engaged in some classes since their education was disrupted by the pandemic. A different approach is required to let students know that they have support in school and advocates who value them. Educators need to do everything in their power to keep students in their classrooms, and by allowing students who are struggling with mental health issues a chance to decompress and an opportunity to be shown that they matter to their teachers, students may be more willing to attend school.

Yoder (2014) defines social-emotional competencies as “the skills, behaviors, and attitudes students and adults need to effectively manage their affective, cognitive, and social behavior” (p. 2). Yoder (2014) goes on to define safe and supportive learning environments as ones that promote safety and are supportive in various ways, such as in the physical environment and through the relationships built with teachers and other educators. According to Cross et al., (2022) even though society is in upheaval right now, educators can assist students work toward stability if they just focus on the needs of their students. Students crave a safe and secure world that demonstrates concern for their well-being. Calming Corners can afford students an opportunity to have a safe learning environment, and through the use of this safe learning environment, students will be able to effectively manage their social behavior in addition to

improving their cognitive behavior. With all of their struggles and to prevent depression or other issues, adolescents need programs or assistance to improve their Social Emotional Learning (SEL). This has proven in numerous studies like the one by Reicher and Maticsek-Jauk (2017) where they found that SEL helps offer methods of combating the stigma of mental health issues. Making the inclusion of interventions such as Calming Corners a natural part of classes can assist students in improving their emotional and social competencies, which will also help students handle their everyday tasks in classrooms (Reicher & Maticsek-Jauk, 2017). In schools, interventions must be put in place to adequately help students manage their emotions and regulate them better so they can succeed in their academics. According to Yeager (2017), “SEL programs try to help adolescents cope with their difficulties more successfully by improving skills and mindsets, and they try to create respectful school environments that young people want to be a part of by changing the school’s climate” (p. 74). Winsor and Mueller (2020) offer that some students do not deal with the ordinary challenges and stressors well, and the stressors they contend with create a possibility that they will experience suicidal ideation or depression. By offering the use of Calming Corners, educators should be able to help their students achieve the right mindset, which in turn, will help these students succeed in classes.

In many ways, the pandemic has had a significant impact on students worldwide. In March of 2020, the circumstances changed for people across the world. In America, schools shut down, and education was interrupted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the closing of schools in our country, students were kept at home, unable to attend regular classes with their teachers and peers. While most teachers did everything in their power to continue working with their students through different methods online, there were no actual classes being held for much of America’s youth. The following school year, classes resumed online, but the security of

attending classes in person eluded many students for several more months, and during this time and in the time since, students have struggled tremendously with their emotional conditions. As a result, many educators are desperately trying to help these students improve in any way they can.

According to Abera et al., (2023), “Depression, anxiety, and stress (DAS) are common among high school students, and they have a negative impact on their academic performance and future lives. Pandemics, such as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), exacerbate these issues” (p. 1). Rahiman et al., (2023) found that the pandemic had a significant effect on students in multiple areas of their lives, including academics, and the results ranged from problems with academic stress, online learning complications, and test anxiety. Because of this, teachers and other educators need to do all they can to assist their students in their management of stress and anxiety. Even though educators do not have any ability to control what goes on outside of their classrooms, they do need to assist their students every way they can while they can. Educators can serve the students’ academic and emotional needs while their students are with them, so educators need to take advantage of the time they have with their students. Walsh et al., (2023) writes that schools are a perfect location to target students’ mental health issues because around the world, anxiety and depression have grown to the point that suicide is a leading cause of death in adolescents. Having teachers who care about their students’ well-being is paramount to student success, and educators need to find methods of assisting their students in their improvement in their emotional states. If students are too stressed or too anxious to learn, they will not garner any knowledge from their teachers and will be no better off than when they entered their classrooms. Students who are dealing with anxiety have more on their minds than the curriculum of their classrooms, so being able to focus on class can become an issue.

Nationwide, policies can be changed or enacted to address students' needs, especially as it pertains to their mental and emotional situations. In order to improve students' abilities to focus in class and to improve their emotional states, teachers can implement the use of Calming Corners in their classrooms. Nationally, training can be added for teachers and counselors and any other educators. Counselors and other educators can collaborate with mental health organizations and other stakeholders to create partnerships that will enhance students' mental and emotional well-being. Encouraging this collaboration between teachers and other stakeholders can bring about awareness as to the plight of students during the pandemic and post-pandemic times. The use of Calming Corners can decrease student stress in school, which could have an effect on students outside of the school buildings as well. So that mental health education can be implemented in curriculum, standards could be written, requiring teachers to address the mental health and emotional needs of students. Nationwide campaigns can reduce the stigma of mental health.

Problem Statement

The problem of practice is that student stress and anxiety have significantly increased over the last few years. As reported in the Population Reference Bureau, "In 2020, 12% of U.S. children ages 3 to 17 were reported as having ever experienced anxiety or depression, up from 9% in 2016" (para. 1). In fact, Billah et al., (2023) writes that when the pandemic began, "Students experienced inevitable changes in the trajectory of their lives, including lifestyles, relationships with family and community, and reliance on support" (p. 2). The changes affected all students especially hard with their academics as demonstrated by national test scores since the pandemic hit. ABC National News reports, "The steady decline, which occurred between 2020 and 2023, shows a drop in math and reading scores for the average 13-year-old and heralds a

troubling trend as students recover from pandemic-era virtual learning” (para 2). In addition, the Nation’s Report Card reports, “The percentage of students who reported missing 5 or more days doubled from 5 percent in 2020 to 10 percent in 2023” (para 11). The Nation’s Report Card also reports that there were “Lower eighth-grade reading scores in 33 states/jurisdictions compared to 2019,” so something clearly needs to be done to assist students in getting back on track (para 1). Reducing stress in the classroom using Calming Corners could be just one intervention.

Nails et. al (2023) write that “Several risk factors for mental health problems can be attributed directly to the COVID-19 pandemic event” (p. 7). Students are overwhelmed and filled with anxiety. Teachers need to address these issues by offering interventions in the classroom. Anxiety and depression are common issues students must cope with, but if they are not doing well mentally or emotionally, it will be difficult for them to focus on schoolwork. This is why it is crucial educators find methods to help students improve their mental and emotional states. Ye et al. (2023) writes, “Young students are a vulnerable group who may experience significant mental health challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic” (p. 2). Not having the right mindset in class can be a hindrance to students’ learning, and so teachers must act to help their students maintain the correct mentality or attitude for class.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was for English Language Arts teachers to explore how or to what extent Calming Corners assisted their students in supporting their emotional well-being. There is limited research available to show the benefits of utilizing Calming Corners in middle school English Language Arts classrooms, but from the research available at other grade levels, Calming Corners and Sensory Rooms have been found to be effective at helping individuals regulate their emotions and in being a proactive tool for teachers and students to de-escalate

stressful situations that might otherwise grow worse. Studies conducted by Lantieri (2008), Hetherington (2021), Skinner (2020), and Maich et al. (2019) all found that Calming Corners/Sensory Rooms/Comfort Rooms have been very beneficial for students and patients. In fact, Maich et al. (2019) conducted a study that shows that implementing relaxation stations, otherwise known as Calming Corners, can offer students safe locations in their own classrooms when they are dealing with stress and with feeling overwhelmed. Lantieri (2008) writes that social workers, school counselors, and teachers can all benefit from permitting students to use Calming Corners as this intervention may help with classroom management and assist individuals or even small groups. A study conducted by Pacheco and Xiong (2023) found that Calming Corners are so beneficial to students from kindergarten to sixth grade that they wrote a guide for teachers and parents to follow. Their guide has served as a helpful resource for educators and parents to assist students develop better relationships and more positive situations while promoting coping techniques for children to use.

Based on studies conducted of students in schools, Corners/Sensory Rooms/Comfort Rooms have many practical benefits, such as being low-cost and easy for students to utilize while the teacher or other authority can remain connected with the student and for being all-inclusive since any student is welcome to use them (Seckman, 2017). Izard (2016) writes that Calming Corners can create safe locations for students, which will improve the students' emotional status. In addition, they serve as proactive tools that prevent challenges from being exacerbated by students who cannot settle down in the regular classroom environment (Maich, et al., 2019). The use of comfort rooms spans beyond the field of education. For example, Cummings, et al., (2010) posits that the use of comfort rooms in their study at a New Hampshire Hospital improved patients' stress levels and met patients' needs. They found that their

utilization of comfort rooms empowered their patients to control stressful situations while alleviating anxiety. Because these rooms have been successful in hospitals, teachers have tried including similar types of measures in their classrooms for students. Hetherington's (2021) study was conducted in an elementary school, and the teachers who integrated Calming Rooms/Areas in their classrooms believed there were positive effects from their use. Teachers may be able to help students better regulate their emotions in class and at the same time, improve their academic success.

Study Significance

This study is significant due to the fact that it aims to support teachers who are searching for ways to support the emotional wellbeing of their students in the classroom following the COVID-19 pandemic. Kaya and Akgül (2021) explain that for various reasons, such as learning speed, increased time on computers, and deficiencies with their learning needs, children had completely different experiences with online classes than their peers. Meade (2021) proved through research that the emotional, mental, and social health effects of the pandemic had worsened and there was an increase in depression and anxiety in adolescents compared to levels from before COVID-19. Pfeiffer and Stocking (2000) believe that students have special characteristics that make them more vulnerable to emotional or social problems. Although students were dealing with depression, stress, and anxiety before the pandemic, COVID-19 has only exacerbated the problem. According to Aldridge and McChesney (2018), student emotional well-being and mental health can be improved through school climate. By implementing Calming Corners in classrooms, the climate improved, which in turn, improved students' well-being and mental states. After studying the effectiveness of Calming Corners, teacher leaders can share their insight and help other teachers assist struggling students. Teacher leaders can convey

their information to other educators and students in the building. As Duce (2020) writes, “the role of the teacher leader is not only leadership between teachers but to be the students (pupils) leader, too” (p. 96). By sharing the information garnered from this research, the teacher-leader will have an influence on other teachers and on the students. Teacher-leaders can implement professional development for their peers and share their best practices regarding their own experiences with Calming Corners. By putting students first and by supporting them with the Calming Corners, teacher-leaders can create positive learning environments that help students achieve success.

From this research, it is clear that teachers should find better methods of helping their students regulate their emotions. According to Jones et al., (2014), “Part of the teacher’s role is to give students the tools they need to interact with and meet the demands of the social and instructional environment of school” (p. 1). Helping students cope with their emotional needs and focus on their learning is crucial for teachers. Based on this study, teachers will be better aware that they need to help their students with their emotional states, and if they can give their students short brain breaks, that will assist them in their mindfulness, which will eventually help them with their academics. Students will learn better coping mechanisms for dealing with their stress and anxiety. Students should be able to do better in their studies if they are able to regulate their emotions more appropriately. After all, as Sisk (2022) reminds educators, “the emotional intensities of ...students affect not only their learning but the way they live and see the world” (p. 103).

The results garnered from this research may have a significant impact on the local educational landscapes because people within the district can begin giving professional development to help teachers address the issue of student anxiety, and teacher-leaders can

develop opportunities to teach others about Calming Corners and other methods of helping students alleviate their stress. Members of the community can come in and work with local healthcare providers or with mental health organizations. Within schools, the policies may be changed to where there is additional consideration for students battling anxiety and stress-related issues. More support services from counselors, school therapists or psychologists, and local mental health groups may be incorporated to benefit students as well.

At the state level, there is a need for educators to receive training and professional development so that they are better equipped to assist students who are struggling. As a result, more programs could be implemented to support students and their issues with anxiety and other mental health issues after the results of this study are released. More resources could be offered to local schools so that there are greater numbers of counselors on campuses and so that the counselors have better services and a greater number of services available to their students. There could be more training offered and professional development courses implemented if the data shows that students benefited from the use of Calming Corners. The state could offer community workshops or could offer resources for teachers. In addition, more professional development should be offered at state conferences.

Conceptual Framework

Lev Vygotsky is widely considered the father of the social constructivist movement. In fact, as explained in *Language in Action: Vygotsky and Leontievan Legacy Today*, when it comes to educational and psychological research, Vygotsky has been one of the central figures in the recent shift from cognitive research to social and cultural research in the West (Alanen & Pöyhönen, 2008). Gupta (2017) writes, “Constructivism is a theory that asserts that learning is an activity that is individual to the learner. This theory hypothesizes that the individual will try to

make sense of all information that they perceive and that each individual will, therefore, ‘construct’ their own meaning from that information” (p. 186). Because of this, student-centered learning is key. Gupta (2017) also posits that “Constructivism is an approach to teaching and learning based on the premise that cognition (learning) is the result of ‘mental construction’. In other words, students learn by fitting new information together with what they already know. Constructivist believes that learning is affected by the context in which an idea is taught as well as by students’ beliefs and attitudes. Constructivism is a learning theory found in psychology which explains how people might acquire knowledge and learn” (Gupta, p. 183, 2017). Social Constructivists believe that both culture and language are the methods humans use to understand truths and to communicate and experience reality (Akpan et al., 2020). Vygotsky proffered that in human intellectual development, both culture and language play a part in how people see the world. While learning is delivered through language, it is understood by people’s experiences and interactions.

Regarding Vygotsky’s work, Screiber and Valle (2013) write the following:

Vygotsky’s work emphasizes the impact of social and cultural influences on students, the ways their varied backgrounds and experiences shape students’ learning, and the ways students understand and interpret concepts. Vygotsky believed that learning does not just take place within the individual. He argued that learning is a social and collaborative activity where people create meaning through their interactions with one another (p. 396).

According to Schreiber and Valle (2013), Vygotsky believed that the learning context itself was crucial in order for individuals to shape knowledge. Vygotsky was a staunch proponent of having individuals experience something in order for them to learn it, and he also stressed the need for teachers to create learning environments where students create their own understanding

and knowledge based on these active learning experiences (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). One branch of Constructivist thought from Social Constructivism is that knowledge is separately created through one's own experiences (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). Social Constructivists believe that they create their own knowledge and their own meaning through their interactions with their surroundings and through their interactions with others. According to Agopian (2022), "In the constructivist classroom, the teacher is not a transmitter of knowledge but a facilitator and a guide whose role is to create an environment that helps students assume ownership of their own learning" (p. 86).

Research Design

For this research study, a qualitative research design will be used. This study will utilize an action research design to determine whether the use of Calming Corners is an effective intervention for students who are struggling emotionally or mentally. Action research allows focuses on moving observers and participants into being social investigators themselves (Gunz, 1996). In this way, the researcher can understand the situations better and will have a richer understanding of their experiences. Reflection is an important element of action research, and by evaluating teachers' personal practices in the classroom, participants may uncover ways of assisting their students.

Study Setting

The study will be conducted in the researcher's own middle school that is located in the southeastern part of the United States. The school is one of the larger schools in the district, and it has been designated a Title I school for years although it lost its Title I status for a single school year in 2022-2023. For the current school year, there are 1,400 students whose breakdown

is 43% African-American, 27% Hispanic, 23% Caucasian, 4% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 4% of the students are considered two or more races.

Delimitations and Limitations

A possible delimitation to this study is the amount of time chosen for the research. The study will last four weeks, and this may not be enough time to properly determine whether or not the Calming Corners are effective interventions in the classroom. Some limitations could be the small sample size of classes and small number of teachers participating. There may be some time constraints for the study as well. Because the location is the researcher's own middle school, context could possibly be a limitation. Neutrality of the results may possibly be affected from the bias of participating teachers.

Definition of Key Terms

Anxiety: According to the American Psychological Association, “anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure.” (American Psychological Association, 2021)

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. (World Health Organization, 2021)

Educational Intervention: According to Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, an educational intervention is “a set of action items that a teacher or administrator can take to improve a child's academic progress.” (Mar, n.d.)

Stress: According to the WHO (2023), “Stress can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives. Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way

we respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to our overall well-being.” (World Health Organization, 2023).

Chapter Summary

To better assist students in her classroom and beyond with navigating their emotional wellbeing, this research aims to use Calming Corners in six different English Language Arts middle school classrooms to see if they are an effective intervention for students dealing with stress and anxiety. Since the onset of the pandemic, stress and anxiety levels are higher than ever, and educators need to assist their students in coping with their struggles. Finding resources for dealing with stress in the classroom is important for students who are dealing with mental health challenges. The next section, Chapter two, will provide a detailed literature review of relevant literature used to frame this study. Lastly, Chapter three will detail the research methodology that will be used for this research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to examine the use of Calming Corners in school classrooms and the importance of assisting students with their social and emotional wellbeing. Currently, there is more research needed to understand supportive ways teachers can help their students in navigating wellbeing. For instance, a study conducted by Kim and Ballin (2023) found that teachers can create more inclusive and more equitable classrooms by using interventions like Calming Corners. Gaessar (2018) writes that it can be an incredible challenge for students to develop their own sense of self, and Brackett (2016) found that American students need assistance with improving their emotional strength because children's emotions directly affect how they learn. David (2011) writes, "It is well known that for the individual ... child who spends most of her or his time in the regular classroom, one of the most important ingredients influencing not only academic achievements, but emotional and social well-being is the attitude of the others with whom he or she has to socialize" (p. 75). Maintaining a positive attitude when working with children is paramount for their emotional and social well-being as well as for their academic success.

Building Positive Relationships with Students

Developing positive relationships with students is imperative, and making students feel safe in the classroom can only enhance their learning experiences. Brackett (2016) posits that students' relationships with their teachers and even their peers can be affected by their emotions, and their cognitive and physical health can be affected by their emotions. In fact, Brackett (2016) purports that research has found that schools that implemented programs designed to assist students' emotional states had better results with their students' academics, student stress levels,

positive student attitudes, and their overall behavior. Strengthening one's social and emotional learning can also be beneficial because doing so can assist students and teachers to focus better and relax, helping them build resilience and improve their learning (Lantieri, 2008). Because of this, teachers need to assist children any way they can. Furthermore, from the research Lantieri (2008) studied, it was determined that when teachers and other adults assist children in developing good emotional and social skills earlier in their lives, it creates a giant difference in their lifelong well-being and overall health. Lantieri (2008) also writes that there is much demand for districts to implement programs that focus on students' emotional health and on preventing behavior problems in addition to focusing on students' academic successes. In general, Lantieri and Nambiar (2004) write that educational professionals are too frequently unaware of the consequences facing students from their adversity. Teachers, counselors, and administrators need to be more aware of what their students are going through on a regular basis. Lawson et al., (2018) believe that "Schools play an important role in the promotion of social and emotional competencies for all students" (p. 2). As result, all educators need to do as much as they possibly can to assist students with their emotional well-being.

Mindfulness Practice Amongst Students

Kane (2020) writes of the importance of children's use of mindfulness during adolescence as there are major changes in the brain during this time period. Tabatabii (2021) describes mindfulness as "a method of changing from the state of doing to the state of being. In other words, in this treatment method, the teenager should approach situations with openness, even if he realizes that such situations cause feelings like fear in him" (p. 22). Lantieri and Zakrzewski (2015) believe that mindfulness comes from the inside and works its way out and that each individual has an internal and natural ability to build positive relationship-type qualities

like kindness or empathy. If educators can assist students in being more aware of their emotions and actions, they will also be able to better regulate their feelings or emotions. In turn, this will affect their behavior in the classroom and will have an effect on their stress levels, abilities to focus, and on their relationships within the classroom. According to Kane (2020), there is evidence-based proof that mindfulness practices used regularly aid in creating well-being for everyone but for children in particular. Sisk (2021) writes that practices of mindfulness have benefits on students' executive functioning skills, which help them to manage their own behavior in order for them to obtain their goals. These skills include self-control and working memory. Rubenstein et al., (2012) believe that "when students have positive attitudes in the areas of self-efficacy, task meaningfulness, and environmental perceptions, they set realistic goals and self-regulate to accomplish a task" (p. 681). Through mindfulness, students can improve their executive functioning skills and can self-regulate, which can assist them in being more successful in school. When students use Calming Corners, their executive functioning skills can be sharpened, and greater success in the classroom can be achieved. Based on a study Kim and Ballin (2023) found that the use of Calming Corners helped students refocus and allowed teachers an opportunity to keep their students in their classrooms. Instead of having students wandering the buildings to take breaks or spending time in counselors' offices, Kim and Ballin (2023) wanted to prove that through the use of Calming Corners, teachers could keep their students in the rooms, maximizing instructional time, normalizing students' emotional trials, and creating a feeling of belonging all at the same time. Lantieri and Nambiar (2012) write that Calming Corners, otherwise known as Peace Corners, can assist students to "regain their inner balance and flow" (p. 5). These areas are set aside as special locations in the classroom so that students can sit there and recover from their emotions when they are overwhelmed, emotionally

out of control, anxious, stressed, or upset so that the alone time can ameliorate the difficult situation. Hilaire et al., (2023) write that Calming Corners were found to be inviting places in the classrooms that permitted students locations to just pause and for them to decompress when school became too overwhelming for them.

Students' Emotional Development and Challenges

Kane (2020) writes that with the changes in brain development, children may experiment with novelty seeking, which can be dangerous risk-taking for most children. Because children need to have new experiences, they should find outlets that are healthy and positive experiences. Adults should steer these advanced adolescents toward challenges that push them intellectually or physically while conversely keeping them safe. In addition to novelty seeking, Kane (2020) postulates that children need to develop skills of social engagement, and one safe idea is for students to seek out teachers who are empathic and who have similar interests as well as similar passions. Finding a mentor of the same traits can also be beneficial for these children. They can develop connections with these adults, and if their interests are unique, using technology for research to discover others with similar interests can be helpful (Kane, 2020).

Papandreou et al., (2023) write that the advanced mental abilities displayed by some children may actually negatively affect their relationships with others, especially their peers, and their social skills as well. Because some children often feel isolated, lonely, and marginalized, one coping mechanism many of them demonstrate is developing a condescending attitude. They are misunderstood because their way of compensating is not the way their peers would handle certain situations. In the long run, some of them feel their emotional needs are being neglected. Because of this, Papandreou et al., (2023) believe that having teachers develop more substantive

emotional relationships with their students can help these children build a more positive self-image, no matter their performances in class, because their identities will not be tied definitively to their successes in the classroom.

Perfectionism is another emotional issue some children must deal with in the classroom. Cross (1997) writes that “perfectionism is being dissatisfied with the difference between one's ideal performance and one's perception of his or her actual performance. This characteristic is also described as having unreasonably high expectations for one's performance” (p. 184). Kane (2020) also posits that some students often feel different and suffer from issues with perfectionism, which in turn is attributed to stressors other children do not often face. For example, combating issues of perfectionism can have a huge influence on the everyday lives of these children, so learning coping skills, especially stress management, is critical. Exploring in creative ways can serve as an outlet for some children when their lives can be very demanding, so Kane offers suggestions for different practices these children can use for mindfulness. She suggests using different techniques and lists them along with explanations for how to conduct each of these techniques and gives a description of how each technique can be useful for adolescents. Foust and Booker (2007) believe that “social coping strategies can also be emotion-focused, aimed at reducing one's own negative response to the stressor” (pgs. 45- 46). Foust and Booker (2007) further believe that any adult working with students should assist these children in alleviating the social stress that sometimes arises from their exceptionalities. These teachers and parents also need to help their students in capitalizing on the benefits of their traits. In addition, parents and teachers of young children should help them feel more comfortable with who they are and in using more positive techniques to maintain social relationships with other students. Rubenstein et al., (2012) make it clear that teachers also need to make sure that their students

find value and meaning in every assignment they complete. Doing so will assist students in enjoying school and appreciate being there more.

Zakreski (2018) suggests that students' differences hold both strengths and weaknesses, but all students must understand their differences and the need to appreciate the impact that these differences have on their behavior. Gaesser (2018) suggests that because children have complicated personalities, anxiety can manifest in many different ways, and partaking in various activities and understanding and managing their stress can support their wellbeing. In their study, Hilaire et al., (2023) found that when students used Calming Corners as an intervention, they were able to self-govern their own behaviors and were able to self-soothe so that they could do better in class. Developing management skills for these stressors can assist children in dealing with their challenges. Giving students tools such as Calming Corners to help them balance their anxiety and stress with their daily lives can help them improve their overall welfare.

Social Emotional Learning and the Pandemic

There has been a renewed interest in students' SEL as a result of the pandemic (Guilbalt & McCormick, 2022). Because of this, many educators feel that without focusing on students' Social Emotional Learning, they cannot ask students to focus on their academics. Students need to feel safe and secure in a classroom or learning environment before they can feel comfortable focusing on other materials or tasks such as reading and writing (Aldaghri & Oraif, 2022). Hilaire et al., (2023) write, "Considering the importance of collaboration, teachers, counselors, school psychologists, administrators, and staff, should form a partnership to systemically support students and families, by fostering an educational environment that promotes emotional safety and functionality" (p. 12). The classroom environment plays an important role in students' lives,

and making students feel safe helps them function better in the classroom, creating better success.

While there was some focus on students' SEL before the pandemic began, knowledge of SEL has grown exponentially and become more important for educators (Guilbalt & McCormick, 2022). One component of SEL that teachers need to consider is the resilience of their students. Zhu et al., (2022) purport that it's paramount to assist students' personal resilience and coping skills in school, particularly during times of crises, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to promote resilience with their students, teachers should assist them with identifying their own personal strategies they employed during previous negative situations. Teachers should also help their students realize their own personal strengths.

Reena et al. (2023) write that the COVID-19 pandemic created many changes in students' lives, which created more stress for students as well as changes in their mental health. Dorn et al., (2020) write that not only has COVID-19 affected drop-out rates and created learning loss, but it has caused emotional and social problems in various ways. For example, it has exacerbated social isolation and has created additional anxiety. Dorn et al., (2020) also write that the school systems in the United States were not created to deal with extended school closures such as the one created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Extra pressure was placed on all school staffs and faculties to help students and to continue their work with students. Korinek (2021) believes that since most teachers will work with students who have mental health issues, having strategies that work to assist the well-being of their students is important. Both teachers and students will be more successful and better prepared if they learn strategies that can help them.

Because students are struggling even more since the beginning of the pandemic, improving students' mental and emotional states has become paramount for many educators.

Hoofman and Secord (2021) write that students and their entire families suffered when they were forced to shift from their traditional schooling to online schooling and that this change in their everyday lives created new stressors. It became clearer and clearer that schools are not just in existing for children's academics. Soria et al., (2021) write, "The pandemic has had deleterious effects on students' mental health. Through proactive measures to support students' mental health, wraparound services to reinforce students' holistic wellbeing, and reform in the policies and practices undertaken by key stakeholders on campus, it may be possible to reduce the negative impacts of the pandemic upon students' mental health" (p. 42). Cressey (2019) writes, "when students bring a wide range of social, emotional, and behavioral needs to school, educators must respond with a variety of intervention strategies" (p. 64 - p. 65). To help students improve their mental health, Soria et al., (2021) suggest that educators take into consideration their students' needs by offering lighter workloads, flexibility with deadlines for assignments, and by giving students lower-cost or even free course materials. Incorporating activities that assist students in lowering their stress can also help students improve their mental health. Some examples could be offering students journals in which they can write as well as writing utensils, offering access to trained therapy animals, and giving students free art supplies with which to create (Soria et al., 2021). To properly assist students with their mental health, officials can require training of mental health prevention strategies, afford students with mental health services, and give support where necessary (Soria et al., 2021). Tabrizi and Sheikholeslami (2020) write that "students learn most of their required emotional skills in the classroom environment" (p. 639). Based on the research they conducted and through the literature they reviewed, Naff et al. (2022) found that state legislatures and more locally, school boards, need to implement programs and policies to ensure mental health support for students, especially since

the start of the pandemic. They believe funding should be set aside specifically for mental health support in schools and for mental health support personnel and mental health care providers who can work with students who receive referrals for their services (Naff et al., 2022). Through their studies, they further found that the effects of COVID-19 on students' mental health are still emerging, but based on the evidence they offer, the pandemic has been a huge disruption and will continue to hold negative impacts on students in the future (Naff et al., 2022). This is why the work teachers do with students is so important.

Zakreski (2018) writes of cognitive rigidity, a challenge in altering one's mental ideas, and emotional intensity, when people have atypical lasting emotional reactions to events. Students' differences have positive and negative effects, and these students need to understand that these differences do affect their behavior. Because of this, educators need interventions for dealing with students who have emotional intensity and cognitive rigidity. In order to combat cognitive rigidity, adolescents need to practice taking perspective or practice looking at other people's points of view on various topics. Being flexible cognitively must incorporate the traits of understanding and of considering other people's perspectives. This ability for young people to see beyond their own opinions and beliefs is of the utmost importance. Students can work through the collision of cognitive rigidity and emotional intensity in various ways and can overcome these issues but need to appreciate that their differences are not always permanent (Zakreski, 2018).

Students and Emotional Safety in the Classroom

Hebert (2018) writes of the importance of making students feel safe in our classrooms. Without the ability to feel safe, students will not want to experiment or risk making mistakes, so

teachers need to focus on encouraging them to be happy with who they are now and who they will become in the future. Focusing on the social emotional needs of students is imperative as educators cannot separate students' cognitive needs from their emotional or social needs. Without having both in the classroom, there will be no weight to academic lessons. There is some kind of emotional or social message with every academic lesson teachers convey to their students (Hebert, 2018). According to Norris (2003), in order for schools to improve their students' achievement, there needs to be an environment that promotes respect and assists students in becoming better citizens. Hilaire et al., (2023) found that "Examining the physical environment of the classroom...was a critical component of developing a calming academic environment to promote student learning providing implications for practice" (p. 11). The SEL of students needs to be considered with everything educators do with their classes. Rubenstein et al., (2012) also found through their work that students' views or perceptions of classroom environments can either create inspiring situations or can dishearten students in classrooms and that when working with a caring and compassionate adult, students were positively influenced. Students need caring adults in their lives and need to feel safe in the classroom in order to succeed emotionally and academically. Rubenstein et al., (2012) write that when it comes to learning environments, "Students' perceptions of school and home events, the nature of teachers' and parents' expectations and support, and the patterns of interaction among students, teachers, and parents have an impact on academic attitudes and behaviors (p. 680).

Middle School Students and Emotional Well Being

The stress middle school students feel can be overwhelming. In fact, Jones et al., (2019) believe that it is the responsibility of school counselors and teachers to create positive school environments and create situations where students actually want to learn. In addition, it is the

teachers' and counselors' responsibilities to be cognizant of students' needs, both academically and emotionally, such as their anxiety as it can prevent their students from achieving their full potential. Jones et al., (2019) also believe that students need interventions to deal with their stress in the classroom, and through research they studied, they found that stressed students benefited from using fidgets and other manipulatives as these objects assisted them with staying focused and with being able to work on their tasks for extended amounts of time or while needing to be attentive while staying in their seats for lengthy amounts of time. Jones et al., (2019) also write about students' use of mandala coloring sheets to alleviate their stress and anxiety in the classroom. Since mandala coloring sheets and fidgets and other manipulatives are included in most Calming Corners, the use of Calming Corners is a perfect intervention for students suffering from stress and anxiety.

The relationships students build with others can be affected by their feelings of being different (Cross et al., 2015). Students must deal with their challenges, and they need support from educators and other adults who can appreciate their traits and talents and who can understand that their situations are unique. In addition, they need educators who can help guide them and who can structure their learning environments in such ways that foster their relationships instead of hindering them (Cross et al., 2015). Furthermore, Zhu et al., (2022) discovered through their research that the quality of relationships between teachers and students indicated a lower number of mental health issues for the students and that when students and teachers have positive relationships, particularly during times of crises, such as the pandemic, students' basic desire for belonging were better met.

Student Success in the Classroom

Hilaire et al., (2023) write that “school environments have a large impact on student academic and behavioral success and socio-emotional well-being” (p. 10). Although there can be other factors that play into students’ Social Emotional Learning, physical and social factors associated with the classroom environment itself play a large role (Obaki, 2017). Korinek (2021) writes that it is inevitable that educators will be working with students who are dealing with mental health concerns in their classrooms. If these educators have strategies to employ in order to ameliorate their challenges, they will be more prepared in dealing with these students. Korinek offers practices based on research that will assist teachers in improving their students’ mental and emotional wellbeing inside of classrooms. Korinek (2021) believes that having a safe and supportive classroom environment is absolutely necessary in order for students to be successful. The classroom environment can be created through various methods, including social interactions, instructional procedures, teacher behaviors and teacher characteristics, the arrangement of the desks in the room, the other students in the classroom, etc. Korinek (2021) also writes that when designing positive learning environments, teachers should take into consideration the elements of management as well as structural and physical elements so that their students feel safe and welcomed in addition to feeling supported. From the literature they reviewed, Alvarez-McHatton et al., (2014) found that there was greater academic success when teachers had higher expectations for their students and when the relationships between students and teachers were positive. Based on effective classroom environments and on positive relationships teachers and students build, students can successfully cope with their emotional and mental challenges.

Climie and Altomare (2013) also found that the school environment itself plays a significant role on the success of students. Guaranteeing a safe collaborative and inviting culture in the school is an important factor for students in both their academics and for their social-emotional welfare. They go on to write that at the beginning of their training and regularly through their professional development, teachers need to learn how to assist students with their social-emotional needs and should invest in training programs for intervention and prevention as it applies to their students' social-emotional learning (Climie & Altomare, 2013).

Obaki (2017) believe that all of these individual factors can have an impact on student motivation, engagement in the learning process, and with students' social interaction. Children need to be able to move within the classroom, so the physical arrangement of the desks, tables, board, etc. can either prohibit student interaction or can enhance it. The materials in the room need to be relevant and sufficient and should help students with their creativity. Students need to feel comfortable and at ease as they check into different materials that should be able to help them produce new and creative ideas. By working and playing cooperatively, students learn in various fashions. Obaki (2017) believes that the physical arrangement of desks and other materials can play into their comfort as well as it can help students remain actively engaged, or it can leave them disengaged with the material. Teachers also need to be life-long learners who function as researchers and who can bring in different resources to use in the teaching of these students. Parents should also demonstrate an interest in their children's activities while in and outside of a classroom. The social behaviors students demonstrate will be based on their physical environments and on their interactions with others (Obaki, 2017). Most research conducted has had to do with behaviors at home and at school, but very little has been conducted on how

environmental factors in a classroom affect students' social behaviors. This is why research of Calming Corners is so important.

According to Jones (n.d.), there is an importance of having students actively engaged in classroom learning experiences through student-centered activities and discussions. Students need to feel safe in every aspect of their schooling, whether it be emotionally, socially, or cognitively. Building trust with students is paramount, and squashing engagement will cause students to tune out during classes. Students must be included, they must participate, and they must have time to reflect on the learning process in order to create a sense of community. Students need a place to feel respected and safe, and when they are encouraged to be curious and ask questions, that desire to learn will grow. Shaunessy (2000) writes that teachers need to “establish a classroom climate that promotes active engagement, student exploration, and student inquiry to further student achievement” (p. 14). Shore (2021) writes, “social-constructivist, inquiry-driven instruction closely complements an expertise-based view” (p. 3). In a constructivist classroom, teachers will mold their students and help them stretch their development through cognition, emotional development, and social development. Without this engagement in the learning process, students will not succeed. It is the teachers' job to provide their students with circumstances where they can express themselves in constructive ways. Tasgin and Tunc (2011) believe that students will be more willing to actively participate in their activities and lessons if they are motivated to learn. Creating environments where students develop that motivation is crucial to their success. Williams et al., (2013) believe that when students have positive emotions, they can expand their understanding and enhance their attention. In addition, they can improve their motivation when it comes to academic endeavors. When teachers create a positive atmosphere, it will help students develop a more positive view of

their future academic successes, and this will assist them preventing emotional fatigue and burnout in the classroom (Williams et al., 2013). In a study conducted by Leal-Sotoi et al., (2018), it was found that “Work engagement of teachers was positively and significantly correlated with learning-oriented classroom motivational climate perceived by students and with teaching practices with motivational effects reported by teachers” (p. 162). Gomez-Arizaga et al., (2020) found from their study that when middle school students were given opportunities where their learning revolved around play or hands-on experiences, they were much more motivated and maintained positive feelings regarding their lessons in general. When they were allowed to act out roles and dramatize their learning, the movement in class was regarded very highly. Phillips and Lindsay (2006) found that students who were encouraged and praised by their teachers were more motivated to succeed and developed approaches to their studies that were more creative. In addition, the types of support they were shown made a difference in their motivation as well. Maintaining a positive environment in the classroom and praising students to enhance their motivation has proven effective on the learning experience. Allowing students to feel safe and respected in the classroom enhances relationships in the classroom, which in turn, helps motivate students to want to learn.

Gazmararian et al., (2021) write that “among the innumerable societal upheavals instigated by the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the pandemic has caused an unprecedented disruption in our nation’s education system and the well-being of students” (p. 356). Daniel’s (2020) study suggests that COVID-19 is the biggest disruption and challenge to the educational system in history, and more interventions need to be employed to keep students in class. When schools were forced to close, teachers were forced to create online lessons and assessments that still included flexibility and challenged the students. Because governments had not planned for

an event like this, teachers had little time to prepare for teaching online classes. Had there been preparations made, students could have made sure they took home books and other necessary supplies. Teachers could have worked on closing up units before students left their buildings, and faculty and staff of different schools could have been trained. All of this created anxiety in teachers, parents, and students, and asynchronous learning became crucial so that lessons did not cease completely when the world shut down for several months back in 2020. Video lessons became rather effective during this time as long as they were short and could retain student attention. End of year assessments were canceled during this time, but parents worry their children are now behind because of remote learning. While cures for this are not offered in this article, the piece ends on a positive note about the return of teachers and students to their classrooms and states that all institutions will benefit in some way from the learning platforms put in place during the pandemic. They suggest that research continue to be conducted to find the best interventions to assist students with their mental health struggles. Abrams (2022) also believes that in general, more needs to be done for students. While she believes staffs and faculties of schools are being better prepared now to identify and support students who are in distress, and they are also finding ways of incorporating wellness supports into their systems and policies, there is always room for improvement.

Based on the research Grubic et al., (2020) conducted, “by increasing academic stressors in a population with heightened pre-existing stress levels and a potentially reduced ability to rely on typical coping strategies – such as family who themselves may be experiencing heightened distress – the COVID-19 pandemic has placed an unprecedented mental health burden on students, which urgently requires further examination and immediate intervention” (p. 1). Students who are already dealing with anxiety from the effects of COVID-19 need interventions

before they can be expected to focus on their academics. Naff et al., (2020) write that schools play critical roles in the needs of students' mental health because educators can regularly communicate with parents. Teachers themselves are crucial in students' lives because they can help with school-based interventions when it comes to mental health concerns. Naff et al., (2020) also believe that while counselors are well trained and fully equipped to deal with students' mental health concerns, there are needs for teachers and other educators in school buildings to assist these students as well. Finding interventions for these students is paramount and implementing Calming Corners in classrooms is one way for students to deal with their mental health concerns.

Gavin et al., (2020) posit that the COVID-19 pandemic has created the most substantial challenge globally in an entire generation. Gavin et al., (2020) also feel that adapting to the new situations created by COVID-19 has exponentially increased the amount of work needed to improve mental health concerns. Pfefferbaum and North (2020) write that the COVID-19 pandemic has created devastating situations for individuals and for the emotional and social functioning of people as a whole. Gazmararian et al., (2021) record that the results of their study indicated an alarming consequence of COVID-19 on students was the depression, loneliness, stress, and anxiety that they were feeling. After all of the upheaval from COVID-19 and from so many other difficult situations, many students share feelings of trauma. Hilaire et al., (2023) write, "One way to address shared trauma is for teachers and counselors to create empathic school environments that foster growth and learning as well as safety" (p. 2). Correa and First (2021) write, "Given that most students receive mental health support within the school setting during a community crisis, it is imperative to consider school officials working directly with students as they are essential in providing such supports; school counselors, teachers, and other

helping professionals in the school setting” (p. 6). Correa and First (2021) also found that their results demonstrate the need of offering mental health resources and services to students.

Furthermore, their study found that there should be guidelines set up for educators working with students when it comes to their mental health, and resources for school employees should be offered and fully developed (Correa & First, 2021). In fact, Camacho-Zuniga et al., (2021) discovered through their research that “Forming a collaborative network among faculty, administrators, and students and using online and information technologies facilitated a better teaching and learning experience and allowed implementing innovation in teaching” (p. 9). By creating this collaborative network of adults and students, educators will be better equipped to assist students who are struggling in and out of the classroom. All educators need to learn methods of helping students cope with their emotional and mental concerns and finding proper intervention methods is just one factor educators should consider. Eppler and Martin (2021) write that finding interventions to help students in classrooms “goes a long way, especially for children who have chronic behavioral difficulties. When the child begins to internalize the links between his/her strong feelings and unwanted behaviors, he/she can draw on strategies to interrupt the cycle” (p. 302). They write that when teachers consider students’ minds, actions, and emotions, they gain insight into the relationship of the children’s feelings and actions and can help the students understand these relationships better (Eppler & Martin, 2021). Lemberger et al., (2018) write that implementing fitting interventions for struggling students will help them thrive and to develop resilience in times of difficulty. The findings of Blankenship and Jones (2021) found that educational professionals must be aware of what students are going through mentally and emotionally since the pandemic started, and that they must find methods of adding support to help their students during this difficult time. In a study conducted by Liang et al.,

(2020), it was found that “mental health problems remain serious among the most of youth group during public health emergency... These results highlight the need for local governments to take appropriate mental health interventions based on the characteristics of youth groups” (p. 849). Lane et al., (2021) also believe that the pandemic and subsequent lockdown had negative effects on students across the globe and feel that there are long-lasting and substantial consequences to their mental health as a result of this. Their study was designed to help educational professionals target and develop interventions to assist students improve their mental and emotional wellbeing. Terepka et al., (2021) found that due to the effects of the pandemic, there is a need for regular training and collaboration amongst different groups in the communities so that pre-existing issues and newer mental health concerns can be addressed. Without the collaboration of educators and students together, students may not receive the help they need and may continue to struggle. Implementing interventions such as Calming Corners in classrooms should alleviate the struggles of students, and students should be able to focus on their education more. Overall, there should be some improvement for teachers and students alike through this intervention.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the need for teachers to develop interventions for their students who are dealing with stress and anxiety in the classroom. The literature reviewed for this particular chapter also investigated COVID-19's negative effects on students in the classroom as well as different interventions available to teachers and students to help make them more successful. The literature reviewed in this study shows the need for interventions to be put in place for students coping with their emotions. Since the onset of the pandemic, students have been struggling even more so than before with managing their emotions and finding methods of more effectively focusing on their studies. The use of Calming Corners in the classroom is one

intervention available to students who are needing breaks and needing opportunities to deal with their emotional regulations. It is one that should continue to be explored and utilized to assist students with their problems.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover the efficacy of Calming Corners in the middle school English Language Arts classroom. This study focused on the implementation of Calming Corners in several classrooms in a K-12 middle school setting. Based on the experiences discovered through this study, the researcher was able to justify the use of Calming Corners in other classrooms and can now guide other teachers in implementing Calming Corners in their own classrooms. This study utilized an action research design to determine whether the use of Calming Corners is an effective intervention for students who need social and emotional support.

Research Questions

This study was guided by two research questions. The research questions were:

RQ1: *How do teachers perceive middle school student interactions with the Calming Corners in Language Arts classrooms?*

RQ2: *How do middle school Language Arts teachers describe the impact of the Calming Corners on their teaching?*

With these research questions, the researcher interviewed English Language Arts teachers who implemented the Calming Corners in their middle school classrooms to see how they perceived the students' interactions with this intervention. The researcher ascertained if students utilized the Calming Corners at all and if they did, how effective the intervention was for them. The researcher wanted to learn how to best serve the emotional needs of her students. The community can now gain information about how to better serve its students when it comes to their social-emotional health. Through this study, the researcher aimed to find better ways of serving classroom students.

Research Design

A qualitative action research design was utilized for this study. According to Merriam (2009), “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Action research allows focuses on moving observers and participants into being social investigators themselves (Gunz, 1996). This method posits that during the observational interpretative stage, people must be observed, watched, or noticed from the exterior. To properly conduct participant observations, the researcher or investigator himself/herself needs to be a part of the group and not merely an observer (Gunz, 1996). Further, participation is a key component of action research (Adelman, 1993). Lewin theorized that action research had the power to inform social action and social planning, although it may be just a small part of the process (Adelman, 1993). There must be active participation from researchers who complete the work when it comes to exploring the problems they have identified. Once they have investigated these problems, they work as a group to make some decisions, all while paying attention to the consequences. They then conduct reviews of the progress. In this way, action research affords researchers an opportunity to choose a problem of practice and to discover possible solutions to its problems. Lewin also believed that the task of a researcher is “the discovery of the meanings actors gave to events while they were acting. The relationships among these meanings and the objective events would vary across individuals and across social contexts” (Adelman, 1993, p. 116). Because of this, the context behind the actors could be used to create meaning from their social surroundings.

Few studies have been conducted regarding the use of Calming Corners in schools, but the few that have been conducted were mostly completed in elementary school settings (Gainey,

2022; Hetherington, 2021). Some studies have been conducted in hospital settings, and quantitative methods were used with most. This study was different because it was conducted in a middle school setting and utilized qualitative methods. McCall (2023) writes that qualitative methods support researchers in obtaining a deep understanding on a topic, which cannot necessarily be done through quantitative methods. Qualitative methods can also be beneficial because they allow individuals to observe participants in their normal situations. By using qualitative methods, the researcher was able to comprehend the situations the way the participants go through them, and this gives the researchers a fuller understanding of how people in general experience life.

Mills (2018) writes that action research is a type of enquiry used to allow anyone in any profession or area to study and assess their work. Mills (2003) describes action research as:

any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how well their students learn. This information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment (and on educational practices in general), and improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved” (p. 5).

Mertler (2020) posits that in order for teachers to improve their own practices, they need to evaluate their personal practices regularly. Because reflection is a critical component of action research, this study will provide opportunities for participants to reflect on their practices and find methods of assist students better manage their stress and anxiety.

Setting

This research will be conducted at Newlin Middle School (a pseudonym), which has a population of over 1,400 students. The students are 43% African-American, 27% Hispanic, 23% Caucasian, 4% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 4% of the students are two or more races. Out of the 1,252 students who attended this school this past year, 166 were gifted. Before the pandemic, 51% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch. The school lost its Title I status for the 2022-2023 school year but has had it reinstated for the 2023-2024 school year. Newlin is located in the southeastern part of the United States.

Sample Population

The population of this school is 1,252, but the sample population consisted of two 6th grade English Language Arts classes, two 7th grade English Language Arts classes, and two 8th grade English Language Arts classes for a total of six classes. The number of students observed was roughly 700 between the six classrooms, and the classes observed consisted of 12 advanced classes, six co-taught classes, and six on-level classes. The teachers involved in this study vary in their years of experience.

Demographics of Teacher Participants

In order to protect real identities and to create anonymity, participants' names have been changed for the reporting of all information. Four of the six participants were female, and two were male. One participant is African-American, one is Asian, and four are Caucasian. Some are in earlier stages of their careers, and some have been teaching for decades. For the sixth-grade teacher participants, Debora is over the age of 60 and has taught for more than 40 years. Every year, she speaks of retiring but never does. She has been at this school for over 25 years and is the department head of the English Language Arts department. She completed the county's

teacher-leadership program several years ago and has a specialist degree. She is a Caucasian, Christian woman who is recently widowed and is the mother of two grown children. Elizabeth is in her early thirties and recently became a mother. She has taught 6th grade Language Arts for over 10 years at this school, the only school where she has ever taught. She is certified in the county's teacher-leadership program, holds a master's degree, and is also a Christian, Caucasian woman.

The 7th grade participants consist of one male and one female. Alvin, the male, is African-American and has taught at this school for 22 years. He is in his late forties, Christian, and the father of two children. One child is a freshman in college, and one is a junior in high school. He holds a juris doctorate in addition to a master's degree in teaching English education. Jennifer, the female 7th grade teacher who is in her mid to late forties, is Jewish, and has been teaching at this school for five years. She did not follow a traditional path of becoming a teacher and first worked as an interior designer who took time off from that profession to have two children. Once her children were old enough to attend school, she herself went back to school to become a teacher and earned her master's degree. She taught in Chicago for several years before she moved south with her husband and two children.

The two 8th grade teacher participants are newer to this school but have experience in other schools in other counties. David, the male, is in his mid-thirties, holds a master's degree, and has been teaching for fewer than ten years. He is a father who is actively involved in his children's sports. He teaches advanced and on-level students in both English Language Arts and Social Studies classes. The female participant, Samantha, is an 8th grade teacher who has been teaching for fewer than five years and is in her late thirties. She is a mother of two young

children and had taught high school before moving to this particular middle school. She holds a bachelor's degree but is considering working on her master's.

Access to Site

Access to the research site originated with the principal of Newlin Middle School. Once the principal granted approval, the researcher submitted a request for approval from her district's research and grants office to receive approval from them. Once the approval was granted, the researchers then applied to Kennesaw State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). After the research approval is given from both the district and Kennesaw State's IRB, the researcher will send an email to the prospective participants with the teacher informed consent letter. After the letters were signed and returned, the research will support the participants with setting up Calming Corners in their rooms. The research will supply all of the pieces of the intervention as well as a video with the directions for how students should use them.

Data Collection

Data will be collected primarily using semi-structured interviews in order to gain an understanding of teachers' first-hand experience with their students' use of Calming Corners. Surveys to gather demographic information from the participating teachers. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "Observation is one of the key tools for collecting data in qualitative research" (p. 166). In addition to observing teacher participants, semi-structured interviews will be conducted as well. This study will focus on students in middle school whose grades will range from sixth to eighth. The teachers involved in this study will be able to provide insights into their observations to help determine if Calming Corners is a beneficial method for students to use to regulate their emotions. All teacher participants will discuss with the researcher the process for this project and will be asked to complete a questionnaire before they begin. If they consent to

participate, they will designate a small area in their rooms to be used as Calming Corners, but the researcher will supply the materials for the stations. The data collection for this study lasted for a month due to county stipulations, and the teacher participants were checklists they completed weekly to record information about when the Calming Corners are used, how frequently during a class period, etc. After the research was finished, the researcher interviewed the teachers who participated (Appendix B) for their perceptions.

The researcher created a survey to collect teachers' opinions and ideas of students' Social Emotional Learning over the last few years since the pandemic began. More specifically, the survey contained questions about the use of Calming Corners. There was a section where teachers could write-in answers, but much of the survey was multiple choice questions. After viewing survey results, the researcher interviewed the participants individually. The data collection lasted from January to February 2024.

Following Creswell and Poth's five approaches for data collection, the researcher was able to obtain her participants' permission to interview them, and after writing an interview protocol, she used it to ask her participants questions so that she could take notes. She stored her information in digital files and transcribed them before using ATLAS.ti to organize and code the interview data. In addition to the open-ended interviews, she used participant's observations, casual conversations with each other, and their journaling to learn from their experiences. No participants were identified, and all documentation was kept confidential. The information gleaned from the research was stored electronically on a computer that required a password and username to open. While the findings of the research will be shared, no individuals will be mentioned by name, and no personal information will be released.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data was analyzed using open coding. Creswell and Poth (2018) posit that open coding utilizes, “the initial codes to sift through large amounts of data, analyzing for syntheses and larger explanations” (p. 204). As Saldaña (2009) recommends, there was fastidious attention paid to the language participants use, and the researcher conducted deep reflection on the patterns that emerged from participants’ experiences. In vivo coding was also employed as the participants’ exact words were recorded. Using axial coding, the codes were moved into bigger categories. ATLAS.ti, is being used for its coding and to support identifying themes.

Trustworthiness

In order to guarantee trustworthiness, the researcher used strategies that ensured credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to collect data from teacher-participants, there observations and interviews were conducted, and triangulation was used.

Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is the “confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings.” The researcher offered background information in order to afford others with a context of her Calming Corners research and assist readers with understanding and relatability. She used rich and full descriptions to describe her process of interviews, observations, discussions, journaling, etc. She adhered to well-known and appropriate research methods and used triangulation for various methods, such as moments, participants, locations, etc. The researcher utilized methods that guarantee truth and honesty from participants and offered background information about herself, including her experience and qualifications. In addition, she supplied a

rich and full explanation and description of the study. The researcher also afforded plenty of time for different parts of the process, including interviews, interactions with other participants, etc.

The researcher triangulated her data in order to reduce any kind of bias by the investigator. She also maintained an audit trail from the beginning of her study to the end, including any developments in the study. She also acknowledged her own personal bias, assumptions, and beliefs with the research topic. She described her methods while recognizing deficits and potential effects of the research.

Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is when one can show that research discoveries can be applied to other situations or contexts. Through the work, the researcher established transferability through thick descriptions. Everything was clear and transparent so that other researchers may be able replicate the study if they choose to do so. The researcher offered background information to assist anyone reading the research with reliability. In order to successfully share her findings, the researcher offered detailed descriptions of the experiences of the teacher participants with the Calming Corners, which will give readers a clearer understanding of the research.

Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) write that dependability is when one shows that their findings are constant and could be recurring. To guarantee dependability with this study, the researcher offered thick descriptions of every aspect of the research. The setting, participants, and the research process itself was extensively described so that another researcher could recreate the study if anyone chooses to do so.

Confirmability

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain it, confirmability is “a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest.” The researcher checked her biases to guarantee that they would not affect the research process. Furthermore, the researcher triangulated the data to eliminate any potential bias regarding the topic of Calming Corners. The researcher acknowledged any flaws in the study but also described potential benefits.

Limitations and Delimitations

Some limitations of the study were the small sample size of classes and teachers participating. Because there are so few teachers and classes participating, the results may not necessarily apply to the larger population in general. A lack of resources may also hinder the results as it may be difficult for the researcher to gain access to funding or to the actual pieces she wants to install in the Calming Corners. In addition, there may be time constraints as she is trying to complete the research before the winter break, and this may affect the reach of her study. Because of the location of the study and its being the researcher’s own middle school, context may possibly be a limitation. Bias of the participating teachers and researcher may create a limitation because the neutrality of the results could be affected. Possible delimitations could be the amount of time the research has chosen to conduct her study. It is possible one month is not enough time to ascertain the effectiveness of the use of Calming Corners as an intervention in middle school English Language Arts classes.

Ethical Considerations

Following KSU and district IRB policies, the researcher begin recruiting participants. If someone wishes to drop out of this study, there will be no consequences to them. Everything will be kept confidential, and no personal or identifying information will be shared. Anonymity and

privacy will be always employed during the study. All personal information regarding participants will remain confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study, and all participants will not need to fear having personal information disseminated. All participants will know ahead of time what will be required of them. They will be allowed to drop out of the study if they wish, without repercussions. Following the Code of Ethics guidelines of the American Educational Research Association, the researcher demonstrated the principles of ethical competence, integrity, social responsibility, professional, scientific, and scholarly responsibility (American Educational Research Association, 2011).

Researcher Positionality

Self

I am a Caucasian Christian woman in her late forties who was raised with a strong compassion for others. My six siblings and I went to Sunday School and church regularly when we were children, and we all brought up with a strong faith. We were also taught to look out for others. We were always taught to value our education, and we clearly do and want to teach others to feel the same way. We struggled financially when we were younger, so my siblings and I all worked to try to support our family. We were raised in a lower socioeconomic status. Despite our lack of money, my parents made sure we had everything we could want, and my siblings and I were able to play sports, receive music lessons, and several of us attended dance classes multiple times a week. Working with so many children at such a young age prepared me for my career, so in the long run, it was a blessing that we had this babysitting business. It taught us discipline and different methods of working with young children, and because of this, I have always done well with classroom management.

Self to Others

I believe most people see me as someone they can rely on and as someone who cares for them. I try to be there for anyone who needs me, and I am proud of the fact people realize that I can be trusted. In fact, I was recently chosen by a student as a “Trusted Adult,” which was a great honor. We have a group called Sources of Strength, and each student in the program was only allowed to choose one adult in the building, so I felt lucky that I was chosen. I am happy that my students view me as someone they can trust. Last year when a student was moving, he told me that he always felt safe and cared for in my classroom, and that was also something I was proud to hear. I want people, especially my students, to know they can count on me and come to me if they need help. I fully believe my friends feel the same way about me.

Self to System/Society

Because I have been teaching in the same school for twenty-three years, I have a positive reputation at my school and have established myself as a valued member of the teaching staff. My hard work was honored a few years ago when I was named Teacher of the Year at my school, and all of this leads to several implications. I have a reputation to live up to and feel I should not disappoint anyone. I think that when parents and students see that I will be working with them, they are relieved and happy about it. I work hard and do everything I can to support my students, and I believe everyone associated with my school knows this.

The Paradigmatic Self

Because I want to include the different perspectives of teachers and students in my research, I believe that interpretivism best associates with my positionality as interpreting the world is a key element of this belief. With the interpretivist paradigm, the ontological belief is one where reality is created socially and is constantly changing. I hope to speak and interact with various teachers and students in different social contexts so I can better understand their views.

As Glesne writes on page nine, “If your philosophical framework is interpretivism, your study design will tend to focus on in-depth, long-term interactions with relevant people in one or several sites.” I feel this is exactly what I will be doing and believe that the implications of using this framework will be that my final report will be very descriptive.

teachers.

Worldview

According to Guba (1990), a worldview is “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p. 17). The interpretive framework that best aligns with the researcher’s personal beliefs is social constructivism. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), in social constructivism, one should depend upon the way his/her participants look at the situation. In the chart Creswell and Poth (2018) offer, one can see that some possible goals of the researcher could be for him/her to comprehend their environment. According to Creswell (2014), social constructivists believe that individuals look through their own lives and places of work to find understanding of the world. Based on their experiences, they develop subjective definitions. Because there are multiple meanings, the researcher must search for the intricacies of views instead of forcing meanings into just a few ideas or categories. With social constructivism, the researcher must put stock into the participants’ views of the different situations that are studied. Some of the possible influences of the researcher may have to do with his or her background, and individuals’ values are respected. One of the best parts for the researcher is that she can use a literary style of writing with social constructivism, and information is gathered through analyzing texts and by conducting interviews and observing the world and people around them. The researcher’s main method of research will be through conducting interviews and in disseminating surveys for her subjects.

The researcher's beliefs align with the social constructivists' beliefs, and the researcher believes that individuals should be respected. Because of this, she respected all participants and did not judge them if they disagreed with each others' assumptions or thoughts. As far as methodological beliefs, the researcher observed the participating teachers and later interviewed them so that she could make sense of their statements while maintaining a narrative style of writing. When it comes to ontological principles, the researcher understands that based on her experiences with others or her interactions with others, she would find multiple truths or realities. The researcher understands that there is not one fixed answer to problems and that everyone will interpret experiences differently. In fact, the researcher challenges her students to think critically and differently, and she honors and celebrates their differences in opinions. With epistemological beliefs, the experiences of the individuals with whom she is working will create their own truth. Because there are many realities that are created from different people's experiences, this particular framework aligns with her beliefs as a researcher. Glesne (2016) believes that one of the most important aspects of our world is that it is complex and always changing and that people can make meaning of anything. The researcher appreciates that research can be created through the different experiences of individuals and because of this, she is excited about interviewing her participating teachers because she is curious to learn about any common occurrences from their experiences. According to Mertens (2014), in social constructivism, qualitative methods, including observations and interviews, are paramount.

Interpreting the world is a key element of interpretivism, and since the researcher plans on interacting in long-term situations/scenarios with people when she was working on her research, she felt this will better suit her than other frameworks. With the interpretivist paradigm, the ontological belief is one where reality is created socially and is constantly changing. The

researcher hopes to include different perspectives of students and possibly teachers in her research, and she will speak and interact with these people in various contexts so she can better understand them. As far as the epistemological beliefs go, the researcher will be developing her reality through those she researches and their personal experiences. She will need to observe her participants and ask them suitable questions so she can write a descriptive report. With the axiological tenets, the researcher feels that each individual is unique and should be honored as such, so she will consider each individual participant's point of view and set of beliefs. According to Mertens (2014), "Qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and document reviews are predominant in this paradigm" (p. 19). Because the researcher is interested in using all of these methods, the social constructivism/interpretive framework fits the researcher's needs better than the other paradigms.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a summary of methodology for her research, her worldview, who her participants are, ethical considerations, and who she is as an educator. The research is important to her as she has seen an increase in the stress her students have been experiencing since the COVID-19 pandemic started. As an educator who wants the best for all students, she is interested in finding interventions that will assist students in coping with their stress and anxiety and in helping teachers improve their teaching practices. She wants others to consider using Calming Corners in their classrooms as one intervention tool that will benefit students and teachers alike.

Chapter 4: Findings

The objective of this qualitative action research case study was to investigate the perceptions of teacher participants regarding the implementation of Calming Corners in English Language Arts classrooms for students at the middle school level. The researcher employed purposeful sampling, selecting six teachers to explore and understand their experiences and the potential advantages or disadvantages of incorporating Calming Corners in their classrooms. Data collection involved the use of weekly observation sheets to evaluate the impact of Calming Corners in specific English Language Arts classrooms. Following the collection and analysis of observation sheets, individual interviews were conducted with each participating teacher, and transcripts were recorded and analyzed to identify emerging themes. This chapter details the findings and interpretations from the experiences of the six English Language Arts teachers who each integrated a Calming Corner in their classrooms for the study. While there is some information available regarding the use of Calming Corners in other settings, grade levels, and areas, before this study was conducted, there was little information available regarding the use of Calming Corners in middle school English Language Arts classrooms. More specifically, through this study, there was an emphasis on how the integration of Calming Corners affects teacher instructional practices.

This study was guided by two research questions. The research questions were:

RQ1: *How do teachers perceive middle school student interactions with the Calming Corners in Language Arts classrooms?*

RQ2: *How do middle school Language Arts teachers describe the impact of the Calming Corners on their teaching?*

This particular chapter explicates the study's results. In addition, this chapter offers information regarding the study's participants, data analysis, and evidence in order to support its credibility.

Emergent Themes

From the data collected the following themes emerged: a) improvement in student behavior, b) benefits of a positive classroom environment, c) an increased amount of empathy of teachers for their students, and d) an improvement in teacher support of students.

Table One: Emergent Themes

Research Questions	Emergent Themes
1) How do teachers perceive middle school student interactions with the Calming Corners in Language Arts classrooms?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement in student behavior • Positive classroom environment
2) How do middle school Language Arts teachers describe the impact of the Calming Corners on their teaching?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in teacher empathy • Improvement in teacher support of students

Theme One: Improvement in Student Behavior

The behavior of students in a classroom can be difficult for teachers to manage but fostering positive student behavior within the classroom is fundamental for student achievement. Behavior can determine whether students can stay focused in class and on the subject matter or not. The behavior of one classmates can also determine whether or not other students can concentrate in class. Student behavior is a crucial aspect of classroom dynamics as it sets the tone for the learning environment and affects the academic and emotional outcomes of both individual students and the entire class. In recent years, educators have focused more heavily on

the importance of students' emotional well-being in the classroom, and through the use of the Calming Corner, students can improve both their emotional states and behavior. When students feel supported and understood, they are more likely to exhibit positive behavior and develop strong relationships with their peers and teachers. With better student behavior, classes will run more smoothly for everyone. One common theme that emerged from this study was the improvement of student behavior. When students were able to self-regulate, the behavior in the classroom improved, and this led to better classroom management and better grades for students. Elizabeth elaborates on this point further by commenting that this entire study made her realize that her students “do not have the tools by themselves to self-regulate their emotions.” Utilizing the tools in the Calming Corner helped them control their emotions, and they were able to behave better in general. Elizabeth said that as a classroom management tool, she believed it was “more enjoyable for a kid to...sit in a beanbag chair and play with a fidget or use a coloring page for a couple of minutes...or any of the little gadgets that you had in there.” Samantha felt similarly that one of her “most disruptive kiddos was able to self-regulate a good bit more, so that was extremely helpful during that class period because that [handling the negative behavior] would take a good chunk of time for me to deal with that sometimes.” Having the option of the Calming Corner saved her time and effort from having to deal with misbehavior in the classroom. She elaborated by saying, “I do think that with some of my kids who are kind of my high flyers, behavior wise, you know, it's hard for me to deal with that sometimes, but it's equally as hard for the other students who are kind of serious and who, you know, are trying their best and wanna listen. We waste a lot of time dealing with the misbehavior, and it takes a lot of effort. So I do think even, this is maybe a mean way to say this, but even the other students were less annoyed. You know, they get frustrated by certain children and by the behavior that they choose

to have. And so I think that even the other students were less annoyed and less frustrated at times when they were kind of in their time out.” She referred to the Calming Corner as a “win” because of this.

Jennifer also felt that she did see an improvement in behavior and in grades. She said, “So students who previously would not work for the, I mean, I'm talking for many months would not work when they were at their desk, they would grab a clipboard and then they would be engaged in the whole activity while they were in the calming corner.” According to her, she felt that students could use the items in the Calming Corner, but they would still be able to pay attention to her lesson at the same time, and academically, they showed improvement. She remarked, “It's just, it's an activity that really students can get lost in doing, but also have their ears open to what's going on around them.” She said it improved their engagement, which improved behavior, because instead of being focused on the social aspects of school or on instigating problems with their classmates, they were now focused on class and were in what she referred to as “the zone, working on whatever it is that I had asked them to work on. And so these would be students who have really had challenges to achieving that this year up until that point and, as a result, they're now learning and they're turning in work that they never turned in before and hearing me talk about things and participating in conversations that they were never participating in before, and therefore, it translated into better grades.” She also said that the “engagement and the comfort [the Calming Corner] brought my students was awesome, which in turn, helped with the behavior and the grades.” Elizabeth also noticed an improvement in her students' behavior and grades because she said typically, she has hyperactive sixth grade boys who cannot sit still and who are constantly fidgeting, and she is used to having to redirect them regularly. When these students started using the Calming Corner, however, they were able to

settle down and complete assignments, which in turn, helped them earn better grades. She claimed that “because they could focus better, they were able to do better academically.” Debora described the behavior of one child who had not passed her class once this year, but once he started using the Calming Corner and especially the beanbag chair, the student’s behavior improved, and he started completing his assignments. When he completed assignments and submitted them, he was able to pass her class for the first time this entire year. She truly felt that if he had not had this Calming Corner, he probably would have failed her class again, and she spent less time redirecting him during this time period as well. She admitted that they had had problems in the past and that her class had been “a struggle for him all year, and he passed on his own this time.” She allowed that the grade was not great, but it was a passing score, which he had not been able to do before he began using the Calming Corner. Because of the Calming Corner, she felt his focus lasted longer and his behavior improved all around. Alvin also noticed an improvement in behavior, and with one child in particular, he said, “There was less fidgeting with him. He’s the type of person who fidgets a lot, has the need to move around a lot, and that just completely seemed to dissipate once he’s able to sit in the Calming Corner and get started on his work.” In general, he said that his students “actually wanted to be there [in the Calming Corner] because it was soothing for them, and it helped them to get started on their work.” He also noticed that with one particular student who was always very fidgety, the Calming Corner gave him an opportunity to relax and not ask a lot of questions as he normally does. He usually wants to leave the room to get water, or he will ask questions about what they are going to do next in class, but Alvin said that “that behavior was completely eliminated because as long as he was in the Calming Corner doing his warm-up, there was no five-six questions. He just simply got to work, and as long as he was able to be in that corner, it seemed to eliminate those

behaviors and those habits that he had.” These same students were able to better concentrate, complete assignments, focus on their academics, and improve grades as well. Alvin said, “You're not going to complete your journals prompt for your warmups, which I check at the end of the week, and then you're, you know, more likely to get a bad grade. So if you're able to sit there and concentrate more, you could get your task completed within the given time frame, so it would have a positive effect on grades and task completion.”

Samantha also saw improvement in behavior with students in general but with one child in particular. This child regularly causes problems in her class, but she said that “for a kiddo like that who just has a hard time sitting still being quiet and is not quite as mature as his classmates, getting a minute away is helpful.” As a whole, she found that there were “fewer disruptions because if somebody was getting heated, or if somebody was getting upset, instead of jumping up and storming out, it was just kind of ‘I'm gonna remove myself for a minute.’ So I do think that that was helpful with, you know, having fewer disruptions here and there for sure.” In addition, she felt that having fewer disruptions in her class meant that she could accomplish more with her students during her class period. She said she can sometimes plan for something, believing the activity would take a certain amount of time, but if students are “speaking out of turn, or if [they] have a lot of back and forth across the classroom,” the activity would take longer. She is able to do more with her students in the allotted time frame because students would use the Calming Corner instead of arguing with classmates. David noticed that students who were upset were able to relax in the Calming Corner. Having more relaxed students equates to better behavior as well because these students are not angry or antagonistic and are not causing problems throughout the class period. He said, “Students appeared calmer after using the Calming Corner. We had fewer outbursts because students would go to the corner when they

were angry or upset.” When students are frustrated, angry, or upset, their ability to focus is hindered, which may affect their ability to learn. By using Calming Corners to relax and calm down, focus better, students can return to the regular classroom environment less anxious and able to focus better, which can help improve both academic outcomes as well as behavior.

Theme Two: Benefits of a Positive Classroom Environment

From the data collected, it is clear that a positive classroom environment is paramount for student success. Regarding student achievement and emotional well-being, teachers have a duty to establish a secure, well-organized, and supportive environment where students can flourish and develop. This belief is particularly relevant in the current context where students and teachers are encountering unparalleled difficulties amid the global pandemic. Most of the teachers involved in this study felt that with the incorporation of the Calming Corner, the classroom environment was very positive. Several noted that there was less squabbling among the students and that focusing on academics helped create a calmer class period for everyone. Samantha stated that the Calming Corner “just kind of helps the atmosphere, and it helps keep everything a little bit more positive and not go into a negative space...It’s just supposed to be, you know, a safe space. And I think that that was kind of a nice thing. And I think that we always want this to be a positive, safe atmosphere for the kids to walk into. And so I think that any time we can kind of use something that will help keep us on that even positive keel, I think that’s great.” On her data collection sheet, she wrote that the students understand that this is a safe space for her them. Samantha also pointed out that she has a student who typically has arguments or trouble with other students at lunch, and normally when they returned to the classroom after leaving the cafeteria, he would be antagonistic and would then fight with his classmates in her classroom. Once the Calming Corner was there, he would instead immediately head to that safe

space and would calm down on his own, creating fewer disruptions and problems while she was trying to teach. His classmates would just leave him alone so that he could collect himself, and the use of the Calming Corner ended up benefitting the entire class and not just him. Alvin considered the students' use of the Calming Corner as a positive change for them because not only did the children enjoy being there, but they were actually working while they were in the special area. He said, "It was a good thing. It was a positive switch because of realizing that children really enjoy being there and were being productive in doing so." Having more students on task at the same time helped maintain a positive atmosphere overall. Jennifer noted that the Calming Corner had a very positive impact because it created a safe space and made her students realize that they could feel secure and enjoy class. She felt that the Calming Corner created a change in the atmosphere of her room, and she believes that that small change created significant rewards for her and her students. Regarding the changes, Jennifer said, "It was a little bit of a shift in the tone of the room and, you know, small shifts like that can net big rewards." David recorded on his data collection sheet that the overall environment of the classroom was calmer and there was less "silliness" because of the addition of the Calming Corner. When students are not wasting time with puerile behavior or with something that does not matter, they are focusing better on their work.

Theme Three: Increase in Teacher Empathy

After examining the data from the interviews and weekly observation sheets, it was clear that teachers became more aware of their students' emotional needs. This experience enhanced their empathy towards their students and reminded them how important it is to offer this type of resource to their students and the impact it has on their students. The data showed that the Calming Corners helped the participating teachers to understand their students' emotions better

and to connect with them on a deeper basis. The teachers became more aware that some of their students they did not suspect earlier as struggling with their emotions really were needing help. Jennifer stated, “I think I just wasn’t quite aware of how much [my students] were going through emotionally, so my focus, of course, just like every teacher, is the content and the standards and the benchmarks that we’re...trying to meet, either via the state or our district...and so my focus tends to be there instead of on the whole child, and this made me more aware of what it is that they’re going through emotionally.” She also stated that the Calming Corner made her “more mindful that if in their hierarchy of needs, if they’re not okay emotionally, then they’re not able to set that aside and learn.” Alvin remarked that it is helpful that any time a teacher can “implement something that will allow you to understand as an educator that so many of the students come in and are coming to the classroom with not just academic or curriculum needs, but they also have emotional needs.” Recognizing student needs and adjusting plans to help students when they need it is imperative to their success. School is no longer just about curriculum; it is about the whole child and how educators can help students in a multitude of ways. Samantha pointed out that most of the time, teachers just simply see upsetting and disruptive behavior when teachers should be focused on the actual reason the children may be acting out in class. She stressed that they are acting out for a reason and that even though teachers know this deep down, they sometimes forget because they have too much going on during the day, and it just does not occur to them. Samantha said, “not all is well, and you know sometimes you can tell, but sometimes you can’t. And if a kid is being loud and obnoxious, you don’t always equate that with them not being in a good place. You just think, ‘You’re trying to get on my nerves,’” when that’s, you know, sometimes it is that, but not always.” She believed the Calming Corner was a helpful visual to remind her that all people are dealing with something

and that if a child is not acting the way a teacher would want, there must be a reason behind the poor behavior. She said, “Well, I think sometimes I just automatically assume that a kid is like, I don't, I don't know how to say this. I think that it just helped me recognize that they're overwhelmed sometimes, and I think visually seeing a child remove himself or herself from the desk and go somewhere else, it just, it lets you know.” Additionally, the Calming Corner helped her remember that teachers are not the only ones struggling with the bad behavior in the classroom and that other students are being disturbed by misbehavior. Other children may want to learn, so if they see someone acting out, they should all consider that there may be more behind it than what they see in person. Elizabeth discovered that a lot of her students “do not have the tools by themselves to self-regulate their emotions. As sixth graders, they are eleven and twelve, and I don't think that they've been taught the tools they can use on their own. If they didn't have objects or can take a couple of deep breaths, or just take a five-minute break. So I think that it made me realize that, you know, having these things in my classroom moving forward like I might want to keep these as a permanent situation because these little guys, they struggle with self-regulating their emotions.” Elizabeth also said that the Calming Corner made her realize that “there's a lot of kids out there who are struggling with their emotional well-being, and if they don't have that, it's hard from them to work on the academics.” David realized in a way he had not before that some of his students just simply need a chance to relax and take a break from their academics. He said his students used the Calming Corner much more than he expected them to, and he was pleasantly surprised. Debora has noticed a difference in all students since she started teaching over forty years ago, and she said that her male students are not as stoic as they used to be, and they “are having more problems emotionally than ever before

in the history of males.” Allowing these students to sit in the Calming Corner gave them an opportunity to deal with their emotions and get a handle on their situations.

Theme Four: Improvement in Teacher Support of Students

Through the use of Calming Corners, teacher support is enhanced by cultivating a positive relationship between teachers and students. As students struggle through their emotional experiences, they need a compassionate and empathetic teacher to support and understand their challenges. One of the major roles of teachers is providing students with a nurturing learning environment, especially one where the students feel safe, supported, and encouraged. In order to achieve this goal, it is imperative that teachers create strong support systems in their classrooms. These support systems are crucial in helping students through their academic journeys, but they are also critical in the students’ overall success and development in a classroom. When explaining what the Calming Corner was able to do for her students who were struggling, Samantha explained that the Calming Corner, at the same time, was actually able to help the other students who were not presently using the Calming Corner. She said that “when I had kids who would truly use [the Calming Corner] to self-regulate, I think that it was very helpful for them, for me, and for all the people around them.” She said that when these kids were settling down in the corner, they were not being disruptive, and the rest of her students were not having to deal with drama and were able to focus on their work. It afforded her an opportunity to support all of her students equally and not spend all of her time on the students who usually misbehave. Elizabeth said that she could consider her students’ point of view and believed that her students felt comforted by simply knowing that the Calming Corner was there, and it had a stronger impact on them than some adults would. She said, “Just knowing, like from their point of view, that it was here, and it wasn’t like an adult...that it really impacted them almost better

than maybe an adult because it's like objects, you know, and it's not someone talking at you if you're not in the place where you can receive the feedback."

Jennifer believes that "It's tough being a seventh grader, and so they were able to have a space where they were able to focus on their more, you know, more of their emotions." She went on to say that the Calming Corner gave her students a "place where they could just kind of recompose themselves and calm down, you know, because class is stressful." She also said that having the Calming Corner was a win-win situation for [her students] and it's a win-win situation for her because it made her job less stressful. She said that she likes it when teachers can "do what we know what the kids need and meet their needs." On her data collection sheet, she recorded that with the Calming Corner, she is able to keep emotional students in her room and verbally told me that by keeping them in her room, she can support them in ways she could not before. Instead of asking to leave to go to the counselor or to take a break outside of her classroom, her students are staying with her and are feeling supported by the Calming Corner. Alvin said that he liked that he was able to let students use the Calming Corner because they liked it and enjoyed being there, but he was able to use it to his advantage. Alvin said, "because of the corner and seeing how some of the kids were really liking and enjoying it, I just started using that to my advantage." He came up with a rotation by considering who could benefit from the use of Calming Corner and would in this way, let more students use it, thus supporting them to the best of his ability. He said, "I would tell them things like, 'You'll be here for five minutes,' and you know, there's only one corner. Wish I had more if I had the room. But you know, I had to start doing a little rotation, but I had to start thinking, depending on what I was giving instruction on, who can benefit from it." The Calming Corner created an opportunity for him to help his students so that they would do better in his class.

When writing her lesson plans, Debora said that she is now mentally thinking about the kids who will use the Calming Corner and thinks that they can listen better because of it. She said, “I do my lesson plans all at one time. I do think about it as I’m doing my lessons, and I go over it after I’m through, and I look, I go over every activity in my mind how it’s going to work. Mentally, I think about the kid, the kids that will use that as a way to listen better.” Through the Calming Corner, she is thinking about them and now supporting them in ways she feels she had not before. She said, “That’s helped me to reach them and help them in a new way, one I hadn’t used before.”

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to relay the findings of the teacher participants’ perceptions regarding the integration of Calming Corners in their English Language Arts middle school classrooms. The participants each held a Calming Corner in their classroom for a four-week period and observed the benefits the Calming Corner had on the students who utilized it. The research questions were answered based on the interviews conducted and the data collection sheets that were reviewed. Through the use of the Calming Corners, every teacher participant felt that a positive impact had been made in their classroom. All teachers said that the implementation of the Calming Corners helped them appreciate their students’ mental and emotional states more than they had before.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the findings that stemmed from the study regarding the participating teachers' perceptions of the intervention of Calming Corners in middle school English Language Arts classrooms. This chapter will unpack the findings from this study. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

RQ1: *How do teachers perceive middle school student interactions with the Calming Corners in Language Arts classrooms?*

RQ2: *How do middle school Language Arts teachers describe the impact of the Calming Corners on their teaching?*

This chapter offers the researcher a chance to analyze the findings and make connections to the research questions.

Research Question One Revisited

The first research question of this study was: *How do teachers perceive middle school student interactions with the Calming Corners?* Based on the results of the study, this particular question was answered in a positive manner. Every single participating teacher said that they would include a Calming Corner in his or her classroom again, and most of the teachers said that they would expand the size of the corner to make it even more beneficial for their students. They also want to add to the collection of items offered in the Calming Corners so that more students can use these materials at the same time throughout class.

Through the view of social constructivism, social interactions are imperative for student knowledge and comprehension. Individuals must construct their own understanding of reality through interactions with others and with their environment. Based on the ideas of social

constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), there is a need for fostering supportive and positive learning environments for students where there is collaboration in the classrooms because knowledge is built on students' exchanges and connections with others. The relationship between social constructivism and students' use of Calming Corners is that there is a mutual commitment to the social and emotional health of students. Both demonstrate an appreciation of a conducive learning environment that fosters emotional and social growth of its learners. While social constructivism emphasizes the impact of social interactions, the actual Calming Corners offer students a physical space to explore these interactions within themselves and with others.

Throughout this study, the Calming Corners helped create a supportive learning environment for the students who used them. Having a safe space in the classroom is crucial for students and their learning. Students were able to work more collaboratively after using the Calming Corners as they were more relaxed and less combative after utilizing this safe space. Before implementing the Calming Corner in her room, Samantha had a student who regularly argued with his classmates after lunch and just brought negativity from the cafeteria back to her room. He could not work with the other students and often got them off-task as well. Through the use of the Calming Corner, he was able to calm down and could complete his assignments without fighting with his classmates. In general, there was more collaboration between her students.

Research Question Two Revisited

The second research question of this study was: *How do middle school teachers describe the impact of the Calming Corners on their teaching?* Based on the social constructivist framework, the integration of the Calming Corners served several purposes. It acknowledged the complexity of learning as not only a cognitive process but an emotional one as well. By offering

students a space for emotional regulation, the Calming Corners recognized the importance of addressing emotional needs as an aspect of the learning process. Second, they served as a practical embodiment of social constructivism's emphasis on the emotional and social components of learning. Through the use of Calming Corners, students learned to recognize and respect their own emotional states, but this in turn fostered empathy for the emotional and social experiences of their classmates. In fact, Samantha spoke about one student who would automatically go to the Calming Corner after getting riled up in the cafeteria, and she said, "People knew, 'Hey, we're gonna leave that boy alone.' And because he gets on everybody's nerves, he's a problem for everyone, not just for me." His classmates noticed how much better he would behave and how much calmly he would act when he was sitting in the Calming Corner and even after his visit there. They worked with him so that he could feel better and do better in class. She went on to say, "He started doing his work, and so I think that, you know, I think that he utilized it very well, and I think it definitely helped him." In addition, aligning with the social constructivist theory, the Calming Corners served as a tangible reminder of the value placed on emotional well-being inside of the classroom walls. This helped create more of a supportive classroom culture where the students were able to feel appreciated and valued not just for what they could accomplish academically but also for their emotional states. In doing so, the Calming Corners helped enhance the development of empathy and support between teachers and their students, which created an environment where emotional well-being is just as important as academic success.

From the data, every single participant became more aware of their students' emotional states and now considers the whole child when writing lesson plans. The use of the Calming Corners increased the teachers' awareness of students' emotional well-being, prompting

adjustments in instructional strategies. Jennifer said that the Calming Corner afforded her students an opportunity to “feel seen and to feel safe. I think it communicated something from me to them about how I viewed them.” In his interview, Alvin stated, “the Calming Corner allowed for me to observe students’ behavior. As a result of it, I noticed that it had a positive impact, which then led to their overall well-being. I took note of that.” The relaxation area proved to be a regularly utilized resource, particularly benefiting students experiencing heightened anxiety or restlessness. In view of its positive impact on student welfare and conduct, the participating teachers are inclined to implement Calming Corners in their classrooms again in the future.

General Feedback of Calming Corners

With the local educational landscapes, the researcher and many of her colleagues have noticed that since the onset of the pandemic, there has been an increase in the amount of stress and anxiety students are suffering from, and because of this, there is now a greater need for resources that can assist students in their social, academic, and mental well-being. Throughout the last few years, many programs have been purchased to help students alleviate some of their stress and anxiety, and overall, teachers seem much more aware of the whole child in general. The researcher was so concerned with her students’ situations that she chose to create Calming Corners in different classrooms throughout her school to try to help students improve their mental and emotional states. She worked with her colleagues to determine the importance of these Calming Corners and assessed their overall impression of them. Most teachers noticed an improvement in their students’ stress and anxiety and determined that the Calming Corners were effective. Once the study was completed, she reflected on the work she and her colleagues had done because with action research, reflection is an integral factor.

The first day or so that the Calming Corner was installed, Debora said that every kid just had to try it out for himself or herself. She said it was the main topic of discussion with her students. During the first week, Debora noticed that very few students were interested in using the Calming Corner in her room. She did not stress the use of the Calming Corner as she felt it would be better to let the kids' use of it be natural and not forced. She wanted the kids to work the use of the Calming Corner out for themselves; it was more organic this way. In the beginning, she noticed that this was more of a novelty that most of the students wanted to try out for themselves because it was new and interesting. She said the whole class was excited about the beanbag chair especially, and they even commented on the color. It was subtle and not bright or loud. Debora said that students used the Calming Corner every single day since it was installed. Her students liked that the beanbag chair was soft and comfortable, unlike their regular chairs and tables or desks. They also simply liked the change in seating. Debora was especially pleased that two kids in particular used the Calming Corner daily and seemed to benefit from it daily. What really made her happy about it was that these two students in particular were very different. One is gifted, and one is at the other end of the spectrum with abilities. She found it interesting that both students needed the Calming Corner daily and seemed to gain from its presence and feel more comfortable in her classroom. The one boy was always very verbal and physically active in her classroom, but with the Calming Corner, he was able to settle down and focus in her class. He claimed he could hear her better from the beanbag chair. She allowed her students to work out their own schedule for when they could use the corner, and she was happy that there were no real fights over it and that everyone worked out the arrangement without difficulty. It was the students' decision to use the Calming Corner, and it was somewhere different they could go in the room and be more comfortable. She said that when she is working

on her lesson plans, she is now considering the whole child and how she can reach her students in more than just an educational way. She is now considering how her students are feeling.

Elizabeth was probably the most enthusiastic to have the Calming Corner in her room and eagerly implemented it with her students. She said that the fact her students simply knew the Calming Corner was there was helpful. If she could not “talk them down” when they were upset, they knew they could just go use the Calming Corner. They knew they were welcome to use the materials in the Calming Corner, and she believed they liked the fact that the materials are objects that would not talk back. From her observations, the beanbag chair itself was the most sought-after item as it provided the students with an opportunity to relax and get them to the point that they could complete assignments. In addition, she felt the Calming Corner helped certain students calm down when they could not sit still at their desks. They were able to sit and use the fidget spinners or other manipulatives, and it settled them. She did consider it a classroom management tool and felt it helped her run her classes better. She is used to talking to students in the hall or having her team teacher take students aside in certain classes, but with the Calming Corner, that did not happen. Students stayed in the room and just used the Calming Corner until they could settle down, and then they were not missing instruction. She said it was more enjoyable for the kids to just sit in the beanbag chair and use either the fidget spinners or the coloring books.

Alvin was very pleased with having the Calming Corner in his room as he felt it was extremely beneficial in getting his students to focus in class better and concentrate better on their work. He believed the students were able to gather their thoughts and then complete assignments more easily because they had calmed down and really reflected on things. He had high expectations of the corner because he had given students in the past manipulatives to help get

them to concentrate and to stop fidgeting in class so they could complete their work. Since this study was on a bigger basis, he felt it would be even more effective for his students. He had one student in particular who just fidgets constantly, but when that student sat in the corner, he would settle down and could complete his work. Alvin said that he wishes he could have had several Calming Corners in his room because it was so beneficial to his students, but since there was only the one, he had to come up with a rotation for students to use it. He said the corner was soothing for the students, and they could actually work. Alvin believes that the Calming Corner made him pay attention to his students' emotional states.

Jennifer was more than willing to try out the Calming Corner in her classroom. She was thrilled that the students were able to feel that they were in a "safe space where they could decompress and not leave my room." She said kids present with a variety of issues, but with the Calming Corner, they felt safe and did not have to leave her room. She liked that they could deal with their emotions but not miss instruction. She believes the Calming Corner prevented her from having to reteach material if a kid had left class to go the counselor. Jennifer also feels that the Calming Corner had a positive impact on her teaching because it improved her students' behaviors, and she did not have to pause her instruction to deal with students who were misbehaving. She also noticed that students who have accommodations and normally leave her classroom for various reasons were not needing to leave when they knew they could go to the Calming Corner instead. She said she is normally worrying about content and benchmarks, but with the Calming Corner, she became more aware of her students' emotional states. She said she always prided herself on being aware of what her students were going through, but she had students she did not suspect as being upset who came up to her and would tell her they needed to use the Calming Corner, and so she realized she was missing something with certain students.

Their need to use the Calming Corner made her see that they were upset when she did not know they were. Another key takeaway from her interview was that when she was implementing instructional planning, she knew that her students would not be ready to learn if they were dealing with emotional issues. She said, “Well, no one is really ready to learn when their mind and their heart or elsewhere, right? It's sort of a hierarchy of needs and for a functioning adult, I'm able to take what's going on in my emotional world and set it aside for the time being so that I can focus on the task at hand. But I think for a child of twelve or thirteen, that's very difficult to do.” Having the Calming Corner in her room helped students cope with their emotions better.

Samantha did not really know what to expect from the Calming Corners beforehand but based on the data collection sheets and the interview held after the study was completed, she had tremendous success with it. She had students who used the corner regularly, and she felt that it did improve student behavior and student focus in class, and she believes it led to better relationships, better behavior, and even better grades and attendance. Instead of having certain students check out of school early as they had previously done, these students now chose to stay and would sit in the Calming Corner instead.

David said he was surprised by how much his students seemed to like the Calming Corner and believes they were much more relaxed for class after using it. He noticed that boys seemed to use the corner more than females, and he realized that students typically used it later in the day during what he felt is his longest class. He noticed that in the beginning, students were not using the space at all. Later, he showed the introductory video that he had forgotten to show at the beginning of the study, and students did start using the Calming Corner once they understood better why it was there. He noted a few times that he felt there just was not enough space in his classroom, and he wished he had had more room to let the Calming Corner really

help his students. He did believe that the Calming Corner did help the students who used it, and he said he would use a Calming Corner again if he were given the chance.

At the end of the study, every teacher made it clear that they would implement a Calming Corner in his or her room again, and every single teacher felt that the Calming Corner used for this study was beneficial for his or her students. Out of all the options that were included in the Calming Corner, the beanbag chair was the favorite part of the designated space as all students who visited the corner utilized it. Within the Calming Corner, the coloring books and fidget items were used the most. The play-doh seemed to be used the least, but it was used in most rooms at some point. In general, all of the teachers were happy to have had the Calming Corners in their classrooms. Overall, it was a very positive experience for everyone involved, and every teacher seemed grateful to have been a part of the study. They all believed that their environment was more positive and that their students felt that they were supported through this intervention. In particular, before the study, Debora had had trouble connecting with a few students throughout the year and believed that by allowing her students to use the Calming Corner, her students were able to trust her more and felt more valued and included. Several participating teachers mentioned similar ideas and believed that they had connected on a deeper level with their students because of the integration of the Calming Corners. Being more aware of what students are going through is crucial for teachers to assist their students.

Usefulness of Calming Corners to Teachers

Although the teacher participants of this study teach middle school students who are roughly 11 to 14 years old, these young children adapted to the addition of the Calming Corners to their rooms flawlessly. While some teachers expected they would have to wrangle their students and force them to leave the Calming Corners or expected they would have students

fighting over who got to use them, these students were able to work out their own schedules and never fought over the corners at all, and yet the Calming Corners were used almost every class on a daily basis. Debora felt that one reason her students were attracted to the Calming Corner was because it was “something of a different place that they could go on their own. It was their decision. I wasn’t telling.” By allowing her students to choose to use the Calming Corner or not, students felt a sense of ownership and responsibility, and they never felt that they had to use it. Despite that, many of her students did use this designated safe space. She went on to say that she thought it was good that they “had a different choice, and it’s their business, and I’m not talking to them about anything [regarding their use of the Calming Corner].” In her interview, Debora explained that one reason she felt her students wanted to use the Calming Corner was because it was problematic and unenjoyable for her students to sit on hard chairs and at hard desks all day. She said, “It was difficult for them. It got tiring, and this was a change, and they liked that. And then of course, they got into how do we schedule, how are we going to sit in it? And I said no, I’m just gonna let you guys work that out. That’s how we started. So, it worked itself out. There’s been no arguments.” Debora allowed her students to just test out the Calming Corner on their own, and her students just naturally took to it. In her interview, she stated, “When you brought it in, everybody had to try it. I mean, you know, it was something new and everybody tried it, and it was really talked about.” After that, she noticed a pattern with two of her students in particular who really struggled before the implementation of the Calming Corner. This one specific student had not passed her class once this year, but once he started fidgeting less because of the Calming Corner, he was able to focus better in class and ended up passing her class. While she acknowledged that his grade was not impressive, she was happy that he at least passed for once, and she did attribute his success to the Calming Corner. Many of her students used the

Calming Corner and seemed to genuinely enjoy using it, and she was so pleased with its success that she said she is going to conduct her own research this summer and set up an even larger Calming Corner in her classroom next year. She said that before I introduced her to the Calming Corner, she did not know anything about them, but now that she understands how beneficial they can be, she wants to make another one that is even better for her upcoming students.

Elizabeth felt that just having her students know that the Calming Corner “was there helped a lot and just as another option for if they were losing it for whatever reason, and I wasn’t able to talk them down, that they could use any of the materials in it.” She did see her students using just about all of the materials in the Calming Corner but definitely noticed that the beanbag chair itself was the most popular item. Outside of that, she noticed most students using the poppits or the coloring pages. She noticed that the Calming Corner was used by a lot of boys, and she believes that “typically in sixth grade, those are the kids that we’re having to constantly redirect more frequently, especially the really hyperactive kids, the kids who can’t move from one task to another without us having to tell them a million times what we’re doing next. ‘Make sure you’re in your seat’ or whatever. So, I did see a big improvement on behavior as far as like those kids and also, it definitely helped them complete assignments, so I think it helped their grades, too.”

Jennifer felt that one of the greatest benefits of the Calming Corners was that she did not have to reteach content as often once the kids were using the Calming Corner because instead of leaving her room to deal with their emotions, they would instead stay on the beanbag chair and do mindless activities such as fidgeting with the poppits or spinners or like coloring. While doing so, they could still listen to her and not miss instruction. She especially loved that the students who normally leave her room because they have accommodations actually ended up wanting to

stay with her because they could relax and decompress while sitting on the beanbag chair and not miss her explanations about the material she was teaching. Because of this, she felt there was a positive impact on her instructional practices as she was “not having to reteach content that they would have missed before.” In addition, Jennifer said she had always taken great pride in being aware of her students’ emotional states, but when certain students asked if they may move to the Calming Corner, she realized that she was much less aware than she thought because these were students, she never would have suspected of being upset or full of anxiety. The Calming Corner helped her understand her students on a different level.

Alvin originally suspected the Calming Corner would not be such a success because he thought the kids would think of it as a place where they could just “kick up their legs.” Once they really started using it, however, he said, “I started making some observations that it was more than just an area to just kick up their legs.” He realized that the corner actually helped them get started with their work. Instead of coming up with excuses to leave his room for one reason or another, his students actually wanted to stay so that they could sit in the Calming Corner, and as a result, they got their work completed, which improved grades in his class. He said he used the Calming Corner to his advantage by allowing the students he felt could benefit the most from it to sit on the beanbag chair at certain times during class and not miss instruction. The rotation he came up with proved advantageous as multiple students each period were allowed to sit there and reap its benefits. He said that he wishes he had more room so he could install more Calming Corners and have more students using them at the same time.

David and Samantha both stated that they wished they had more space in their classrooms so they could add more Calming Corners because they know more students would use them if they were made available to them. Both David and Samantha felt that the Calming Corner helped

their students relax and not feel as stressed during class. Samantha felt that there was less instruction lost as students chose to stay in her room instead of leaving for various reasons. David felt that the entire experience was positive because his students were able to choose to use the Calming Corner whenever they wanted. He also liked that students chose to use it during their longest block of the day because after they relaxed for a bit, they could concentrate in class. Samantha said that it was helpful that the students could take a personal “time out” when they needed it, and she noticed that a lot of students needed that personal time. As was the case with all the other teachers, Samantha and David both plan on keeping the Calming Corner in their rooms so that their students can continue using them.

Table Two: Calming Corner Collective Use Summary Information

Participant by Pseudonym	Sex	Grade	Specific Tool Used	Day	Period
Debora	Female	6th	beanbag chair, colored pencils, and coloring pages	Monday, Wednesday, & Thursday	Intervention, 3 rd , & 4 th
Elizabeth	Female	6th	beanbag chair, colored pencils, and coloring pages, and poppits	Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday	Intervention, 3 rd , & 4 th
Alvin	Male	7th	beanbag chair and any fidget spinner	Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, & Friday	Intervention, 1 st , 2 nd , 5 th , & 6 th
Jennifer	Female	7th	beanbag chair and infinity fidget	Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday	Intervention, 1 st , & 6 th
David	Male	8th	beanbag chair, colored pencils, and coloring books	Wednesday & Thursday	Intervention, 5 th , & 6 th
Samantha	Female	8th	beanbag chair, liquid bubbler, fidget spinners, colored pencils, and coloring books	Monday, Wednesday, & Thursday	Intervention, 5 th , & 6 th

Implications for the Field of Teacher Leadership

In general, teachers need to be receptive to implementing new and different methods of reaching their students. Since the onset of the pandemic, many students' emotional states have declined, and teachers need to find ways to assist these struggling students. By being open to allowing students to try alternative seating environments within their classrooms, students will benefit greatly. The teachers involved in this study varied in their enthusiasm before the start of the research, and some were a little skeptical to allow their students to use the Calming Corners; however, every participating teacher now says he/she would use one for their students again in the future. One purpose of this study was to determine the teachers' perceptions of the impact the Calming Corners had on their students, and the participating teachers had only positive comments to make regarding the Calming Corners. In addition, they felt their daily instructional practices improved, which was a secondary purpose of this study. Most feel they understand their students better and feel their students have connected with them in ways they had not before. Students need to feel seen and understood, and the participating teachers determined that their students gained from this experience. Students who used the Calming Corners were able to relax when they were stressed or settle down when they were upset, and as a result, they were able to focus on their studies better and improve grades in class.

Implications for Policy

During a time when student stress and anxiety has become such a common occurrence and so severe for so many students, teachers need to discover more ways to assist their students and help them alleviate their stress and anxiety. Helping them improve their mental and emotional states is imperative, and anything teachers can implement in their classrooms to help their students should be considered. The use of a Calming Corner is just one intervention

available to students and teachers, and based on the positive results of this particular study, more district officials and administrators should encourage the use of Calming Corners in the classrooms. Through this intervention, students are afforded an opportunity to improve their overall well-being, which in turn, can help them be more successful academically. Based on this study, the use of Calming Corners was directly connected with noticeable declines in behavioral issues while simultaneously also enhancing conducive learning environments. Despite these positive results, the formalization of Calming Corners through explicit policy guidelines remains insufficiently addressed. Establishing clear policies for the use of Calming Corners in educational settings is critical for fostering the mental and emotional well-being of students.

Implications for Practice

Every teacher who participated in this study discovered a positive view of the use of Calming Corners in the middle school English Language Arts classroom. All of the teachers were so pleased with the study that they want to implement them in their classrooms in the future. The only changes they want to make will be to increase the size of the corner. Some teachers want to add at least one more beanbag chair to their rooms, and some teachers want to add even more fidget spinners, poppits, coloring books, etc. so more students can utilize the materials at the same time.

Although Alvin's students did not use the Calming Corner the first week or so, once students did decide to give it a try, the Calming Corner ended up being used every single class period every single day. It was almost the same for David whose students did not try the Calming Corner the first two weeks. Once he showed the introductory video that he had originally failed to show, his students began using the Calming Corner regularly, especially in the afternoon classes. Jennifer was so pleased with the way the Calming Corner assisted her students that she

bought extra infinity fidgets for her students. All of the other teachers reported that they had students who used the Calming Corner regularly and demonstrated benefits from it. This designated safe area supported students in enhancing their concentration, reducing their restlessness, and promoting better overall behavior. In addition, it allowed students to relax and sustain emotional focus without having to leave the classroom for breaks outside of the classroom or for visits to the counselor. The research findings highlight the need for prioritizing student well-being and emotional stability for ideal educational results. Through the implementation of the Calming Corners, teachers felt their students demonstrated the benefits of the space for their personal mental and emotional success as well as for their academic performances. Because the overall classroom environment improved and student behavior seemed better, especially with students who normally misbehaved or caused problems, every single teacher participant said that they would want to continue using the Calming Corner with their students in the future and even discussed purchasing extra beanbag chairs and extra fidget spinners or coloring books and colored pencils.

Most of the participating teachers claimed that although they believed they were attuned to what their students were going through before the study, they all realized that there were students they had overlooked and did not realize needed help or needed breaks from their studies. They are more aware of their students' feelings and many of the teachers said that now, when they are writing their lesson plans, they are considering the whole child and not just the academic aspects of their classes.

Recommendations

While the implementation of Calming Corners at this particular school proved successful for the teachers involved, many of them mentioned that they wished the study had started at the

beginning of the year instead of more than halfway through. In addition, although the PowerPoint presentation was shown by most of the participating teachers at the beginning of the study, two teachers did not initially show it, and as a result, their students were not using the Calming Corners the first week or two. Once this became evident, the teachers were asked again to show the presentation, and after the students saw the purpose of the Calming Corner and the proper ways to use it, these students did begin utilizing this designated space. One recommendation would be that before allowing students to use a Calming Corner, all teachers make a presentation or show a video to ensure their students understand why it is even there. During her interview, Elizabeth stated, “The presentation that you made before, you know as an introduction to it, was really helpful because it gave everybody at one time an overview of what was an option to them.” She went on to say, “giving the presentation, there were clear expectations for why there was a Calming Corner, why it should be used, so it wasn’t like, ‘Ohh, you know, I’m just gonna go sit in the beanbag chair today.’ They knew that it was there for a reason, so I think presenting that little PowerPoint beforehand really set the expectations.” The video or presentation should include basic rules about when students may use the Calming Corner, how long may sit in the Calming Corner, what is included in the Calming Corner, how to treat the materials in the corner, etc. Physically having a teacher and/or student visit the Calming Corner and demonstrate proper use of the materials before allowing others to use the corner could help as well. Also, establishing that the Calming Corner, although voluntary, is a tool that may help students and that no one should be afraid to use it may help. In the beginning, some students seemed hesitant to use it because they did not want to be the first, so perhaps having the teacher demonstrate the proper use could help. If students see a teacher utilizing the space or materials, they may be more willing to try it out for themselves.

Because so many teachers realized after the study had started that the area, they chose in their rooms for the Calming Corner was too small, teachers should also test out multiple locations in their rooms before firmly establishing the location of the corner. During the interviews after the study, many teachers voiced that they wished they had had more room for the Calming Corners and that they wished they could add to the number of Calming Corners in their rooms.

Areas for Further Research

Creating more Calming Corners in more classrooms could help better prove the need for this intervention. Offering the Calming Corners to more subject areas would also be helpful. For this study, only English Language Arts classrooms were used, but there may be a need for a Calming Corner in classrooms of other subject areas as well. In fact, Elizabeth pointed out, “the kids enjoyed it, and I think that other classes were jealous that they didn’t have a Calming Corner.” For future studies, offering a larger number of teachers and students to participate could yield better or different results. If having Calming Corners readily available in different classrooms becomes the standard, some students may not be as timid to use them. More research will need to be conducted to see how to mitigate students’ perceptions on the effectiveness of Calming Corners for them. In addition, creating the Calming Corners at the beginning of the school year instead of over mid-way through could potentially encourage more students to use them. If it becomes a natural component of the classroom right from the beginning, perhaps it may be more readily accepted as a regular part of class.

Conclusion

The goal of this dissertation study was to determine the impact of Calming Corners on middle school English Language Arts classrooms through the lens of the teachers. It was the teachers' perceptions of the Calming Corners that determined the effectiveness of this particular intervention. Every teacher participant had positive results with the Calming Corners and felt that they were very beneficial for their overall atmosphere and for many of their individual students. In general, the fidget spinners and sensory tools were used more than the coloring books, and every single teacher stated that he/she would want to continue using Calming Corners in his/her classroom. Because of this study, all of the teachers involved feel that they are more aware of what their students are going through emotionally, and they are more aware that they need to try to reach their students on different levels. Through this study, the researcher was able to assist the other members of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) who participated by allowing their students to use the Calming Corners in their rooms. All participants had a positive view of the experience and feel their students benefited from utilizing the Calming Corners.

The results demonstrated a positive outlook of Calming Corners as the participating teachers felt their students were less stressed and better equipped emotionally in their classrooms after using the Calming Corners. The students who employed the Calming Corners appeared more focused and willing to behave, creating fewer disruptions in class. Although the participating teachers felt there was too little space in their rooms to take full advantage of all the Calming Corners have to offer, they all want to figure out a way to increase the size of the Calming Corner or to add another area in their rooms for a second or even third corner for their students. Teachers need to consider the whole child and should allow their students opportunities

where they can improve their mental and emotional well-being without having to leave the classroom.

References

- Abera, A. (2023). Psychological problems and associated factors among high school students during COVID-19 pandemic in Sawla town, Gofa zone, southern Ethiopia. *Heliyon*, 9(6).
- Abrams, Z. (2022, October 1). *Student Mental Health Is in crisis. Campuses Are Rethinking Their Approach*. American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/10/mental-health-campus-care>
- Abramson, A. (2022, January 1). *Children's mental health is in crisis*. Apa.org; American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/01/special-childrens-mental-health>
- Adelman, C. (1993). Kurt Lewin and the Origins of Action Research. *Educational Action Research*, 1(1), 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965079930010102>
- Adolescent mental health*. (n.d.). <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>
- Agopian, T. (2022). Online Instruction during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Creating a 21st Century Community of Learners through Social Constructivism. *Clearing House*, 95(2), 85–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2021.2014774>
- Aldaghri, A. A., & Oraif, I. M. (2022). The Impact of Online Teaching on Students' Engagement in Writing During the Pandemic of COVID-19. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 23(3), 216-229. <https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.1137290>
- Aldridge, J. M., & McChesney, K. (2018). The Relationships between School Climate and Adolescent Mental Health and wellbeing: a Systematic Literature Review. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 88, 121–145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2018.01.012>
- Alvarez McHatton, P., Farmer, J. L., Bessette, H. J., Shaunessy-Dedrick, E., & Ray, S. N. E. (2014). Investigating Middle School Students' Perceptions of Their Learning Environments through Drawings. *Middle Grades Research Journal*, 9(2), 37–56.
- American Educational Research Association. (2011). AERA Code of Ethics: American Educational Research Association Approved by the AERA Council February 2011. *Educational Researcher*, 40(3), 145–156. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x11410403>
- American Psychological Association. (2021). Anxiety. <https://www.apa.org>. <https://www.apa.org/topics/anxiety/>
- American Psychological Association. (2007). Stress: a major health problem in the U.S, warns APA. Available online at www.apa.org/Releases/stressproblem.html.

- Billah, M. (2023). Exploring mental health challenges and coping strategies in university students during the COVID-19 pandemic: A case study in Dhaka city, Bangladesh. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 11.
- Blankenship, D., & Jones, I. S. (2021). COVID-19 Student Mental Health Check. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 39.
- Bockmann, J. O., & Yu, S. Y. (2023). Using Mindfulness-Based Interventions to Support Self-Regulation in Young Children: A Review of the Literature. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 51(4), 693–703.
- Brackett, M. A. (2016). The Emotion Revolution: Enhancing Social and Emotional Learning in School: Enhancing Social and Emotional Learning in School. *Independent School*, 75(4). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1104679>
- Camacho-Zuñiga, C., Pego, L., Escamilla, J., & Hosseini, S. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' feelings at high school, undergraduate, and postgraduate levels. *Heliyon*, 7(3).
- CASEL. (n.d.). *What Is the CASEL Framework?* CASEL. <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/#self-management>
- CDC. (2022, March 31). *New CDC data illuminate youth mental health threats during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/p0331-youth-mental-health-covid-19.html>
- CDC. (2021). *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf
- Climie, E., & Altomare, A. A. (2013). Supporting Children with Mental Health Concerns in Classrooms. *International Journal for Leadership in Learning*, 1(1).
- Correa, N., & First, J. M. (2021). Examining the Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19 on K-12 Mental Health Providers, School Teachers, and Students. *Journal of School Counseling*, 19(42).
- Cressey, J. (2019). Developing culturally responsive social, emotional, and behavioral supports. *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning*, 12(1), 53–67. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIT-01-2019-0015>
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. (3rd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.
- Cross, T. L. (1997). Psychological and social aspects of educating gifted students. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 72(3-4), 180–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956x.1997.9681873>
- Cross, T. L., Cross, K. P., & Cross, J. R. (2022). Weltschmerz and Anomie: The Life and Times of Students with Gifts and Talents in the Early 21st Century. *Gifted Child Today*, 45(4), 238–243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10762175221112012>
- Csus.edu. (2024). <https://scholars.csus.edu/esploro/outputs/doctoral/A-Calming-Corners-Guide-Self-regulating-strategies/99258071863001671/filesAndLinks?index=0>
- Cummings KS, Grandfield SA, & Coldwell CM. (2010). Caring with comfort rooms: reducing seclusion and restraint use in psychiatric facilities. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing & Mental Health Services*, 48(6), 26–30. <https://doi.org/10.3928/02793695-20100303-02>
- Daniel S. J. (2020). Education and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Prospects*, 49(1-2), 91–96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09464-3>
- Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2020). COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime. *McKinsey & Company*, 1, 1-9.
- Eppler, W. N., & Martin, A. (2021). Creating safe schools by building safe relationships. *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 18(3), 300–306. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aps.1723>
- Foust, R. C., & Booker, K. (2007). The Social Cognition of Gifted Adolescents. *Roeper Review*, 29(5), 45–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2007.11869224>
- Gaesser, A. H. (2018). Befriending Anxiety to Reach Potential: Strategies to Empower Our Gifted Youth. *Gifted Child Today*, 41(4), 186–195. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1076217518786983>
- Gavin, B., Lyne, J., McNicholas, F., 2020. Mental health and the COVID19 pandemic. *Ir. J. Psychol. Med.* 1–7.
- Gazmararian, J., Weingart, R., Campbell, K., Cronin, T. and Ashta, J. (2021), Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of Students From 2 Semi-Rural High Schools in Georgia*. *J School Health*, 91: 356-369. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.13007>
- Glesne, C. (2016). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- Gomez-Arizaga, M. P., Valdivia-Lefort, M., Castillo-Hermosilla, H., Hébert, T. P., & Conejeros-Solar, M. L. (2020). Tales from Within: Gifted Students' Lived Experiences with Teaching Practices in Regular Classrooms. *Education Sciences*, 10.

- Grubic, N., Badovinac, S., & Johri, A. M. (2020). Student mental health in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic: A call for further research and immediate solutions. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 66(5), 517-518.
- Guba, E. G. (1990). *The Paradigm Dialog*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.
- Guilbault, K. M., & McCormick, K. (2021). Supporting elementary gifted learners during the COVID-19 pandemic: A survey of teaching practices. *Gifted Education International*, 38(1), 115–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02614294211070075>
- Gunz, J. (1996). Jacob L. Moreno and the Origins of Action Research. *Educational Action Research*, 4(1), 145–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965079960040111>
- Gupta, Poonam. (2017). Constructivism: A new paradigm in teaching and learning. *International Journal of Academic Research and Development*. 2. 183-186.
- Haugland, B. S. M., Raknes, S., Haaland, A. T., Wergeland, G. J., Bjaastad, J. F., Baste, V., Himle, J., Rapee, R., & Hoffart, A. (2017). School-based cognitive behavioral interventions for anxious youth: study protocol for a randomized controlled trial. *Trials*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13063-017-1831-9>
- Hébert, T. P., & Smith, K. J. (2018). Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Students. *Gifted Child Today*, 41(4), 176–176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1076217518788591>
- Hetherington, C., Cronin, S., Langworthy, S., & Michaels, C. (2021). Creating Learning Environments to Support Students Experiencing Stress: Qualitative Insights from an Extension-Community Partnership. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension.*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.54718/VATE1434>
- Hilaire, B., Campbell, L. O., Tinstman, J. L., Jaimie Stickl Haugen, & Frawley, C. (2023). Cultivating Supportive School Environments during and after Shared Trauma. *The Educational Forum*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2023.2232418>
- Hoofman, J., & Secord, E. (2021). The effect of COVID-19 on education. *Pediatric Clinics*, 68(5), 1071-1079.
- Inc, G. (2020, June 16). *U.S. Parents Say COVID-19 Harming Child's Mental Health*. Gallup.com. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/312605/parents-say-covid-harming-child-mental-health.aspx?version=print>
- Izard, E. (2016). Teaching children from poverty and trauma. National Education Association. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED594465>
- Jones, S. M., Bailey, R., & Jacob, R. (2014). Social-emotional learning is essential to classroom management. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 96(2), 19–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721714553405>

- Jones, T. (n.d.). Community in the Classroom: An Approach to Curriculum and Instruction as a Means for the Development of Student Personal Engagement in a High School Classroom. *Educational Perspectives O*, 44(2).
- Jones, T., Riggs, A., & Kuo, N.-C. (2019). Helping Middle School Students Acknowledge and Navigate Anxiety: An Action Research. *Current Issues in Middle Level Education*, 24(2).
- Kane, M. (2020). Enhanced Well-Being through Mindfulness: Supporting the Gifted Adolescent Journey. *Gifted Child Today*, 43(2), 116-123.
- Kaya, N. G., & Akgül, G. (2021). Evaluating online education for gifted students: Parents' views. *Gifted Education International*, 026142942110650. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02614294211065089>
- Kim, H. U., & Ballin, A. (2023). Pedagogical strategies to inspire teachers to teach all: How to change teachers' perceptions about students from being a problem to having a problem. *Equity in Education & Society*, 27526461231207403.
- Korinek, L. (2021). Supporting Students with Mental Health Challenges in the Classroom. *Preventing School Failure*, 65(2), 97-107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2020.1837058>
- Lane, J., Therriault, D., Dupuis, A., Gosselin, P., Smith, J., Ziam, S., Roy, M., Roberge, P., Drapeau, M., Morin, P., Berrigan, F., Thibault, I., & Dufour, M. (2021). The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Anxiety of Adolescents in Québec. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 51(4). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-021-09655-9>
- Language in Action: Vygotsky and Leontievan Legacy Today - Cambridge Scholars Publishing.* (n.d.). www.cambridgescholars.com. Retrieved October 5, 2023, from <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/product/9781847183163>
- Lantieri, L. (2008). Building inner resilience. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 17(2), 43- 46.
- Lantieri, L., & Nambiar, M. (2012). Cultivating the social, emotional, and inner lives of children and teachers. *Reclaiming children and youth*, 21(2), 27.
- Lantieri, L. (2004). Sustaining the Soul that Serves: Healing from Within. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 13(2), 120-124. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/sustaining-soul-that-serves-healing-within/docview/214193753/se-2>
- Lantieri, L., & Zakrzewski, V. (2015, April 7). *How SEL and Mindfulness Can Work Together. Greater Good.* https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_social_emotional_learning_and_mindfulness_can_work_together

- Lawson, G. M., McKenzie, M. E., Becker, K. D., Selby, L., & Hoover, S. A. (2018). The Core Components of Evidence-Based Social Emotional Learning Programs. *Prevention Science, 20*(4), 457–467. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-018-0953-y>
- Leal-Sotoi, F., Carmona-Halty, M., Dávila-Ramírez, J., & Valdivia, Y. (2018). Work Engagement, Teaching Practices with Motivational Effects, and Learning-Oriented Classroom Motivational Climate. *Revista Interamericana de Psicología, 52*(2), 162–170.
- Lemberger, T. M. E., Carbonneau, K. J., Atencio, D. J., Zieher, A. K., & Palacios, A. F. (2018). Self-Regulatory Growth Effects for Young Children Participating in a Combined Social and Emotional Learning and Mindfulness-Based Intervention. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 96*(3), 289–302. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12203>
- Liang, L., Ren, H., Cao, R., Hu, Y., Qin, Z., Li, C., & Mei, S. (2020). The Effect of COVID-19 on Youth Mental Health. *Psychiatric Quarterly, 91*(3). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-020-09744-3>
- Lincoln, YS. & Guba, EG. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Maich, K., Davies, A. W. J., & van Rhijn, T. (2019). A Relaxation Station in Every Location. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 54*(3), 160–165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451218767916>
- Mar, Z. D. (n.d.). *What is Intervention in Education? Insights for K-12 Educators*. Www.hmhco.com. <https://www.hmhco.com/blog/what-is-intervention-in-education>
- Meade, J. (2021). Mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and adolescents: A review of the current research. *Pediatric Clinics of North America, 68*(5). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcl.2021.05.003>
- Merriam, Sharan B. (2009). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mertens, D. M. (2014). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Mertler, C.A. (2020). *Action Research: Improving Schools and Empowering Educators* 6th edition. London: Sage Publications
- Mills, G. E. (2018). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Montroy, J. J., Bowles, R. P., Skibbe, L. E., & Foster, T. D. (2014). Social skills and problem behaviors as mediators of the relationship between behavioral self-regulation and academic achievement. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 29*(3), 298–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2014.03.002>

- NAEP Long-Term Trend Assessment Results: Reading and Mathematics. (n.d.).
Www.nationsreportcard.gov. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/ltr/2023/>
- NAEP Reading: State Average Scores. (n.d.). Wwww.nationsreportcard.gov.
<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/states/scores/?grade=8>
- Naff, D., Williams, S., Furman-Darby, J., & Yeung, M. (2022). The Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19 on PK-12 Students: A Systematic Review of Emerging Literature. *AERA Open*, 8(1).
- Nails, J. G., Maffly-Kipp, J., DeShong, H. L., Lowmaster, S. E., & Kurtz, J. E. (2023). A crisis in college student mental health? Self-ratings of psychopathology before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychological Assessment*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0001241>
- News, A. B. C. (n.d.). *Math and reading scores for 13-year-olds lowest in a decade, report finds*. ABC News. Retrieved June 28, 2023, from
<https://abcnews.go.com/US/math-reading-scores-decline-13-year-olds-report/story?id=100268256>
- Norris, J. A. (2003). Looking at Classroom Management Through a Social and Emotional Learning Lens. *Theory Into Practice*, 42(4), 313–318.
https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4204_8
- Obaki, S. O. (2017). Impact of Classroom Environment on Children's Social Behavior. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(1), 1-7.
- Papandreou, A., Mavrogalou, A., Periferakis, A.-T., Periferakis, A., Badarau, I. A., Popa-Velea, O., & Scheau, C. (2023). The Effects of COVID-19 on the Emotional and Social Stability, Motivation and Attitudes of Gifted and Non-Gifted Children in Greece. *Children*, 10(4), 706. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children10040706>
- Pfefferbaum, B., & North, C. S. (2020). Mental health and the Covid-19 pandemic. *New England journal of medicine*, 383(6), 510-512.
- Pfeiffer, S. I., & Stocking, V. B. (2000). Vulnerabilities of Academically Gifted Students. *Special Services in the Schools*, 16(1/2), 83. https://doi.org/10.1300/J008v16n01_06
- prb. (n.d.). *Anxiety and Depression Increase Among U.S. Youth, 2022 KIDS COUNTS Data BookShows*. PRB.
<https://www.prb.org/resources/anxiety-and-depression-increase-among-u-s-youth-2022-kids-counts-data-book-shows/>
- Qualitative Research: Characteristics, Design, Methods & Examples*. (2023, March 16).
<https://www.simplypsychology.org/qualitative-research-characteristics-design-methods-examples.html>

- Rahiman, H. (2023). Perceived academic stress during a pandemic: Mediating role of coping strategies. *Heliyon*, 9(6).
- Rahiman, H. U., Panakaje, N., Kulal, A., Harinakshi, & Parvin, S. M. R. (2023). Perceived academic stress during a pandemic: Mediating role of coping strategies. *Heliyon*, 9(6), e16594. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e16594>
- Reena, I., Hebert, E., Das, K., Doe, R., Hebert, S., & Gope, N. (2023). Anxiety and Depression among U.S. International Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Education*, 143(3), 89–99.
- Reicher, H., & Maticsek-Jauk, M. (2017). Preventing depression in adolescence through social and emotional learning. *CRES Special Issue*, 9(2), 110–115. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1162082.pdf>
- Researcher bias and Reflexivity*. (2016, December 6). Psychologyrocks. <https://psychologyrocks.org/reflexivity/>
- Rubenstein, L. D., Siegle, D., REIS, S. M., Mccoach, D. B., & Burton, M. G. (2012). A Complex quest: The development and research of underachievement interventions for gifted students. *Psychology in the Schools*, 49(7), 678–694. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21620>
- Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage Publications [Chpt. 1]
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Seckman, A., Paun, O., Heipp, B., Van Stee, M., Keels-Lowe, V., Beel, F., Spoon, C., Fogg, L., & Delaney, K. R. (2017). Evaluation of the use of a sensory room on an adolescent inpatient unit and its impact on restraint and seclusion prevention. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 30(2), 90–97. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcap.12174>
- Schreiber, L. M., & Valle, B. E. (2013). Social Constructivist Teaching Strategies in the Small Group Classroom. *Small Group Research*, 44(4), 395–411. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496413488422>
- Shah, M. A. (2022). Teachers as Reflective Practitioners: From Individualism to Vygotskian Social Constructivism. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 68(3), 297–307.
- Shaunessy, E. (2000). Questioning TECHNIQUES in the Gifted Classroom. *Gifted Child Today*, 23(5), 14. <https://doi.org/10.4219/gct-2000-752>
- Shore, B. M. (2021). Context Matters in Gifted Education. *Education Sciences*, 11.

- Sideropoulos, V., Midouhas, E., Kokosi, T., Brinkert, J., Wong, K. K.-Y., & Kambouri, M. A. (2022). The effects of cumulative stressful educational events on the mental health of doctoral students during the Covid-19 pandemic. *UCL Open Environment*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444/ucloe.000048>
- Sisk, D. A. (2022). Managing Emotional Intensities of Gifted Students in Interdisciplinary Study. *Gifted Child Today*, 45(2), 97–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10762175211071006>
- Soria, K. M., Horgos, B., & Roberts, B. J. (2021). The COVID-19 Pandemic and Students' Mental Health. *New Directions for Student Services*, 176, 37–45. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20404>
- Stake, R. E. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work*. The Guilford Press.
- Tabatabaii, Z. (2021). The effect of positive mindfulness training on social skills and emotional and cognitive empathy of gifted students with nonclinical depression. *Assessment and research in counseling and psychology*, 3, 41-52. 10.52547/jarcp.3.4.41.
- Tabrizi, Y. F., & Sheikholeslami, R. (2020). The Role of Perception of Classroom Structure on Students' Mental Health. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 15(10), 639–644.
- Tasgin, A., & Tunc, Y. (2018). Effective participation and motivation: An investigation on secondary school students. *World Journal of Education*, 8(1), 58. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v8n1p58>
- Terepka, A., Torres-Pagán, L., & De La Fuente, A. (2021). Schools on the Front Lines: School Based Health Centers amidst COVID-19. *School Psychology*, 36(5), 398–409. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000432>
- The NCES Fast Facts Tool provides quick answers to many education questions (National Center for Education Statistics)*. (n.d.). Nces.ed.gov. <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=1130>
- Too many kids are chronically absent. How can schools bring them back?* (2023, July 13). Yahoo News. <https://news.yahoo.com/too-many-kids-are-chronically-absent-how-can-schools-bring-them-back-153547903.html?guccounter=1>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 1. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1421493>
- Walsh, E. (2023). Perspectives of youth in Ireland on school-based mental health and suicide prevention: the MYSTORY study. *Health Promotion International*, 38(3).
- WHO. (2023, May 18). *WHO COVID-19 dashboard*. World Health Organization. <https://covid19.who.int/>

- Williams, K., Childers, C., & Kemp, E. (2013). Stimulating and Enhancing Student Learning Through Positive Emotions. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, 13(3), 209–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313220.2013.813320>
- World Health Organization. (2023). *Stress*. Wwww.who.int; World Health Organisation. <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress>
- World Health Organization. (2021). *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)*. World Health Organization. https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1
- Winsor, D. L., & Mueller, C. E. (2020). Depression, suicide, and the gifted student: A primer for the school psychologist. *Psychology in the Schools*, 57(10), 1627–1639. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22416>
- Ye, F.TF., Gao, X., Sin, KF. *et al.* Remote learning and mental health during the societal lockdown: a study of primary school students and parents in times of COVID-19. *BMC Public Health* 23, 1106 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-16040-9>
- Yeager, D. S. (2017). Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents. *Future of Children*, 27(1), 73–94.
- Yoder, N. (2014). Teaching the Whole Child: Instructional Practices That Support Social-Emotional Learning in Three Teacher Evaluation Frameworks. Research-to-Practice Brief. Revised Edition. In *ERIC*. Center on Great Teachers and Leaders. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED581718>
- Zakreski, M. J. (2018). When Emotional Intensity and Cognitive Rigidity Collide: What Can Counselors and Teachers Do? *Gifted Child Today*, 41(4), 208-216.
- Zhu, Q., Cheong, Y., Wang, C., & Sun, C. (2022). The Roles of Resilience, Peer Relationship, Teacher-Student Relationship on Student Mental Health Difficulties during COVID-19. *School Psychology*, 37(1), 62–74. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000492>

**Appendix A
Calming Corners**

Teacher: _____

Week: _____

Schedule	C.C. Used	M/F/O	G/A/OL/Sp	Grade Level	Day of Week	Time of Day
1 st period						
2 nd period						
3 rd period						
4 th period						
5 th period						
6 th period						
Intervention						

Key:	M/F/O=male/female/other	G/A/OL/Sp=gifted/advanced/on-level/SPED
Observations:		Notes:
Better classroom management?	y/n	
Fewer disruptions?	y/n	
Fewer absences?	y/n	
Better attendance?	y/n	
Better grades?	y/n	
No difference?	y/n	

Additional Feedback: Comments, Complaints, Suggestions, Other Ideas

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview # _____

Date _____/_____/_____

Script

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for working with me today. I am a graduate student in the Teacher Leadership Ed.D. program at Kennesaw State University. This interview will take about 20 minutes and will include twelve main questions regarding your experiences with the Calming Corner that was in your classroom. With your permission, I would like to record our interview so that I can accurately record the information you share. If you would rather stop at any point, please let me know. All of your responses are confidential and will remain confidential. They will be used only for my class and for educational purposes.

Right now, I would like to ask for your verbal permission and would also like you to know that your participation in this interview also represents your consent. In addition, I would like to remind you that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, so if at any time you need a break, would like to return to a question, or stop, please let me know. There will be no consequence if you decide not to finish the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin? Then if you have no objections, let us begin the interview.

Questions

1. How long have you been teaching?

- a) One-three years
- b) Four-nine years
- c) Ten-fourteen years
- d) Fifteen-twenty years
- e) More than twenty years

2. What grade level do you teach?

- a) 6th grade
- b) 7th grade
- c) 8th grade

3. What are your perceptions on the impact of the Calming Corner in your classroom?

How do you perceive the student interactions with the Calming Corner?

4. How do you think the implementation of Calming Corners went in your classroom? Was it successful or not? Will you please elaborate and answer why?

5. Please describe the impact of the Calming Corners on your *teaching*.

a. How did the integration of the Calming Corner have an impact on your instructional practices? What kind of impact did they have? *How did it change your instructional planning or instructional practices?*

b. *In what ways did this make you more mindful of the whole child? In other words, how did this make you more aware of your students' emotional states?*

c. *How did having the Calming Corner make you more mindful of student wellness when implementing instructional planning? In what ways did it make you more mindful of student wellness when implementing instructional planning?*

6. How was the Calming Corner used to your satisfaction?

7. What materials were used more than other items in the Calming Corners? Was there any item that was used more than others? Was there any item you noticed that was not used?

Why do you believe this may be?

8. In what ways did you see an improvement in behavior from the integration of the Calming Corners in your room? In what ways did you see an improvement in grades? In what ways did you see an improvement in attendance? Was there any other ways improvement was observed? Please explain.

Why do you think there was/was not improvement?

9. Did you notice more females than males utilizing the space or vice versa?

10. Did you notice a period and/or time of day that the Calming Corners were used more than others? If so, why do you suspect that particular period was used more?

11. Was your Calming Corner used more frequently near test dates? Was there any other factor that might have played into when the students used the corners?

12. Would you consider implementing a Calming Corner again? Why or why not?

13. Before we finish this interview together, is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix C

Teacher Consent Form

My signature below indicates that I have read the information provided and have decided to participate in the study titled “**TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF CALMING CORNERS IN LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOMS**” to be conducted at my school between the dates of February 14, 2024 through March 20, 2024. I understand that the signature of the principal and classroom teacher indicates they have agreed to participate in this research project.

I understand the purpose of the research project will be to help individuals manage their emotions through the use of Calming Corners as an intervention tool:

1. I will discuss perceptions of interactions of Calming Corners in my classroom and complete a weekly observational data sheet.
2. I will review the results of the use of Calming Corners together with the researcher to identify the impact (if any) it had on my instructional practices.

Potential benefits of the study are that through the integration of Calming Corners, individuals learn to manage their emotions. Teachers may improve their instructional practices.

I agree to the following conditions with the understanding that I can withdraw from the study at any time should I choose to discontinue participation.

- The identity of participants will be protected. Every response will remain anonymous.
- Information gathered during the course of the project will become part of the data analysis and may contribute to published research reports and presentations.
- There are no foreseeable inconveniences or risks involved to me for participating in the study.
- Participation in the study is voluntary. If I decide to withdraw permission after the study begins, I will notify the researcher of my decision.

If further information is needed regarding the research study, I can make contact with Freya Sneed at freya.sneed@cobbk12.org or at 770-578-2740.

Signature _____

Participating Teacher _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Principal _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Researching Teacher _____

Date _____

Appendix D

Teacher Recruitment letter

Hello! I am in graduate school, and I am piloting a study about utilizing Calming Corners as an intervention tool. I will create these safe spaces in four select academic content area classrooms and need two certified English Language Arts teachers per grade level. I want to create a designated safe space where students can go if they are anxious, upset, or overwhelmed and will supply all the materials for the Calming Corners. I will supply bean bag chairs along with sensory tools and art materials (coloring books, mandalas, free drawing paper) to create this safe space in your classroom. I am interested to see if the Calming Corners are used, and if so, which group of students use them more than others. The study will require you to hold a Calming Corner in your classroom for one month. I will give you weekly observational data sheets to fill out to see if the Calming Corners are being used and which group of students is using them more than the others. For example, I would like to ascertain if gifted students use them more often than on-level students. After the study is complete, I will interview you on Teams. The interview should not take more than 20 minutes. Your participation is 100% voluntary, and all names and data will remain confidential and anonymous.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating because I would be happy to give you more information.

Thanks so much and have a great day!

Freya

Appendix E

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF CALMING CORNERS IN LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOMS

Researcher's Contact Information: Freya Sneed, 404-510-9790, frs4677@students.kennesaw.edu

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Description of Project

*The purpose of this study is to see if Calming Corners work effectively as an intervention for middle school students as the researcher has noticed an increase in the anxiety and stress students are feeling since the beginning of the pandemic. The researcher is interested in teachers' perceptions of Calming Corners. **RQ1:** How do teachers perceive middle school student interactions with the Calming Corners? **RQ2:** How do middle school teachers describe the impact of the Calming Corners on their teaching?*

Explanation of Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study:

Participants will be asked to allow Calming Corners to be installed in their classrooms for the study. Teachers will observe students' use of the Calming Corners and will complete a weekly observation sheet to indicate if they are actually being used and by which group of students. Once the study is complete, teacher participants will participate in a brief interview on Teams so the researcher can gather their opinions of the Calming Corners. The interviews will be recorded for the purposes of transcriptions and coding. No personal information will be published as everything will be recorded anonymously. Participation in the study is voluntary. Participants may drop out of the study at any time without penalty.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no foreseeable inconveniences or risks for anyone participating in this study.

Benefits

Based on the results of the research, teachers may be able to utilize Calming Corners as an intervention for their students when their students are feeling anxious or stressed. Although there are no direct benefits to the participants, the researcher and teacher participants may learn more about the use of Calming Corners.

Compensation n/a

Confidentiality

The researcher will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, all information will be locked in a closet to which no one else has access or will be kept secured on a computer that requires a passcode to open. All identifying information will be deleted/destroyed at the end of the study.

The information will not be used or distributed for future research.

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, irb@kennesaw.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

Signature of Participant or Authorized Representative, Date

Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Appendix F

Calming Corners Presentation



CALMING CORNERS

WHAT IS A CALMING CORNER?

- It is a designated safe space students can use as an optional intervention tool when they are stressed, anxious, overwhelmed, upset...etc.





WHEN TO USE A CALMING CORNER

When you are feeling stressed, anxious, upset, overwhelmed...etc. you can voluntarily visit this space to help calm you down.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN A CALMING CORNER?



Art tools, sensory tools, breathing posters, bean bag chairs, etc.



HOW TO USE A CALMING CORNER

One person at a time may quietly use it!

You can stay in the Calming Corner for five minutes, ten minutes max.

Tools must stay in the CC area at all times.

EXPECTATIONS:

- You are still responsible for all of the instruction and information from your teacher.
- You cannot use the Calming Corners as an excuse for why you have not completed your work. All work must be submitted on time.
- Items do not leave the corner.

Appendix G

Calming Corners Presentation Narration

What is a Calming Corner?

-Calming Corners are an optional tool that allows individuals to regulate their emotions and learn coping skills.

When to use it?

-When you are feeling stressed, anxious, upset, overwhelmed, etc., you can visit this space to help you calm down.

What is included in a Calming Corner?

-art tools, such as colored pencils, markers, pencils, coloring books, mandalas, and free draw paper with a clipboard

-sensory tools, such as sensory fidget tubes, liquid motion bubbler, stress balls, sensory strings, and playdoh

-breathing poster

-and a bean bag chair for you to get comfortable and sit down

How to use a Calming Corner?

-You are welcome to use any of the tools provided. Please be courteous and take care of all materials. While you are in the CC, you should be quiet, and you should be focused on discovering ways to cope and regulate your emotions.

Reminder of Expectations:

You are still in school and are here to learn. You must behave in an appropriate manner. Use the tools in the correct way. This voluntary intervention tool can assist you with ways to cope with your emotions and help you regulate your emotions-which is a life skill that can help you in other areas as well.

Appendix H

Images of Calming Corners and Their Contents



