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Mindfulness and Social Emotional Skills in Preschool Children

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how mindfulness techniques impact the expression of social emotional skills in preschool children attending a full-day K4 program. I use a quasi-experimental design within the interpretivist paradigm. Data was collected from 23 students in my classroom who had parental permission to participate. I used a variety of methods to gather information. I observed and recorded student's social emotional behavior during literacy block, To gather caregiver opinion about their child's social emotional skills, I administered caregiver pre and post-surveys. Finally, I asked children themselves what they needed (water, movement, share, rest) and recorded their responses. These 3 forms of data helped me identify how mindfulness techniques (body awareness, feelings identification, movement, balancing, breathing and grounding) impacted the expression of social emotional skills in my students. In this proposal, social emotional skills are operationally defined as listening attentively and politely, demonstrating self-control, staying on task and working well with others (retrieved from Urban School X Preschool Report Card, 2016). The final result showed that mindfulness techniques impacted the expression of preschool children's social emotional skills in the following ways: there were less instances of interrupting, calling out of turn, talking when a teacher speaks, and a lessening of aggressive behaviors, such as touching others, kicking or pushing. There were also decreased instances of distracting others, leaving seat without permission, arguing, yelling and making demands. In this study, mindfulness did not appear to impact behaviors such as raising hand, helping, and using manners. This work carries significance, especially for preschool-aged teachers who are looking for simple, effective ways to manage common behavioral issues within the classroom. Keywords: mindfulness, social skills, social skills instruction, social and emotional competence, behavior management, pre-kindergarten, preschool education.

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This is dedicated to my daughters,

who share this journey with me

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In my professional role as an educator to 4-5 year old children attending a full day pre-kindergarten program, I often wonder how their ability to demonstrate social skills impacts their learning and overall school success. Denham, Bassett, Sitorkin, Brown & Morris (2015) suggest that for children to succeed in school they need to exhibit executive control, which can be further defined as showing social competence and being able to adjust to a classroom setting. To clarify, "…in terms of social competence, they can refrain from hitting when they are provoked, or, in terms of classroom adjustment, delay the gratification of biting into their snack until everyone is served (p. 214). Developing the types of social skills noted above appear to be an important factor to consider in a child's school success.

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL), a resource used by many states- including Wisconsin, provides strategies and interventions for best practice in the area of social and emotional learning for children birth to age 5. CSEFEL offers articles and resources for parents, child care providers and families. An executive survey by Irvin-Vitela, listed on the CSEFEL website, points out that preschool children in Wisconsin are being expelled from school at a high rate. For example, 42 % of 387 child care providers surveyed report that they have asked families to leave their care due to issues with a child's or family's behavior (2010).

Although I have not personally witnessed an expulsion in my career as a teacher, I have known a number of students suspended due to aggressive behaviors such as punching, hitting, and/or kicking peers. Denham, et al., (2015) further point out that, "…a socially competent child may be able to pay more attention to academic tasks, plan better, and devote more resources to learning than a less socially competent one…" (p. 213). It appears that children who have issues managing their emotions and behavior may also struggle to learn within the classroom.

Moreover, it is important for preschool children to develop social emotional competence because it may influence academic and social success later in life (McNabe & Altamura, 2011).

In my pre-kindergarten classroom, I often see children who have difficulty showing effective social emotional skills. To help define social emotional skills, CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning describe them as an ability for children and adults to "… apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions…achieve goals... show empathy for others…and establish and maintain positive relationships…" (retrieved from CASEL, 2016). In my teaching experience, I often notice children who are unable to express their emotions in a positive way. This can manifest as showing poor personal boundaries, making loud or inappropriate noises during classroom instruction, distracting others, calling out of turn and even aggressive behaviors, such as hitting, kicking or biting.

Many children struggle to focus attention, repeatedly interrupt peers and adults, leave their seat without permission, and do not follow through with age-appropriate directions. Further compounding these issues are that many children struggle to share, take turns, and establish friendships. Aggressive behaviors, such as hitting, kicking or pushing can be a common occurrence in pre-kindergarten classrooms. In my experience, issues such as these may occur for a number of reasons, such as language barriers, lack of developmentally appropriate instruction, and age of the child.

Problem Statement

My employer, (referred to as Urban School X, is a large, urban school serving a primarily low income Hispanic community) values the expression of positive social emotional skills. This is reflected within our school culture and is an expectation in my classroom. For example, I grade my student's in the area of "life skills" on our school report card and progress reports. These life skills are similar to the social emotional skills discussed in this research proposal.

LIFE SKILLS: K4 PROGRAM

(Urban School X - Preschool Report Card, 2016).

- Respects property of school and others
- Follows classroom rules
- Listens attentively and politely
- Participates appropriately during class instruction
- Demonstrates self-control and keeps hands, feet and mouth to self
- Stays on task
- Works well with others

The problem I explore within this proposal is the reality that many children receive a 2 in many of the life skills, which means "needs improvement" in this area. Families with students enrolled in our K4 program receive a report card three times per year. The report card uses a 1-4 grading scale, with 1 denoting a child has not mastered a skill to a 4, which means a child exceeds expectation for a skill. Each student also receives a 1-4 rating in reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies. Life skills are an important aspect of our report card and are frequently a main topic of conversation during conferences. In addition to academics, many families express concern about their child's behavior at school.

In many ways, an inability to express positive social emotional skills contributes to issues I experience in my classroom. Although I strive to create a classroom environment that promotes

positive, healthy relationships and engaging learning experiences, I still observe many instances of the behaviors described above. I have found that using best practice techniques, such as modeling expectations, providing community building activities and setting clear limits for behaviors can help alleviate some of these behavioral issues. As CSEFEL suggests, interventions like engaging in positive interactions, predictability in classroom schedule and routines, and engaging activities are important to supporting social emotional development and are critical in providing children with a background for learning positive social skills (CSEFEL, 2016).

CSEFEL also highlights the importance of Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards or WMELS. WMELS are a set of guidelines used statewide to guide educational programs for children, from birth to first grade. These guidelines cover areas such as teacher-child interaction, curriculum and instruction, and developmentally appropriate practice for learning. (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, WMELS printable download, 2016) In addition to health and physical development, language development and communication, approaches to learning, and cognition and general knowledge, WMELS specifically addresses social and emotional development in preschool aged children and suggest that these skills begin from birth and "…is an ongoing process of skills acquisition and mastery, involving emotions, perception, cognition, and language…" (2016). Expectation at my school are that lesson plans are developmentally appropriate and linked to these WMELS standards.

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families or DCF, also created Youngstar, which is a state wide system to improve the quality of care for children in childcare centers (report prepared by The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, July, 2011). Youngstar evaluates and rates programs on how well they demonstrate developmentally appropriate practice. Childcare programs that accept Wisconsin shares subsidy programs are required to participate.

Programs that are not required to participate can also apply into the program. In 2011, 92 percent or 3,429 childcare programs applied to Youngstar (July, 2011). My school's K4 program participates in Youngstar. I am expected to establish classroom routines and procedures that comply with Youngstar standards.

Our program is unique in that the hours between 8 a.m. and 11:30 are considered DPI (department of public instruction) and functions in a more formal atmosphere, with scheduled times for literacy and math. We are still expected to offer lessons that are developmentally appropriate but children are required to pay attention, be able to sit in a large group for short periods of time and complete structured learning tasks. After 11:30, we are considered a Youngstar program, where children make more choices in their own learning. They are able to choose learning centers during this time, move more freely around the classroom and are allowed time to interact with their peers. In my experience, issues with social emotional skills carry throughout the day, in both models of instruction, DPI or Youngstar.

Our school currently has a 5 star Youngstar rating, which is the highest rating given. Stars are earned based on specific criteria, with 5 stars being the highest rating a center can achieve. In 2015, a Youngstar assessor came to our school and evaluated my classroom using Youngstar criteria and rating scales. The assessor spent 2.5 hours in my classroom, observing my interactions with students, the physical classroom environment and my ability to meet children's needs. At the end of the observation, I was formally interviewed by the assessor. She asked questions about my lesson plans, how I differentiated instruction and what types of learning activities I implemented in my classroom. After the formal observation and interview process, she met with administration, who have their own set of criteria to follow. Ultimately, after a few weeks, our program received a 5 star rating. This is an accomplishment that was celebrated

throughout our entire school. The K3 and K4 team had our pictures taken and we received a cake in congratulations of our hard work and dedication to our field. In my school, a 5 star rating is expected and highly valued.

The Issue Needing Improvement

This year, about half of the 144 students enrolled in our 6 pre-kindergarten classrooms have no prior experience in a school setting. For many, it is their first time listening to a teacher, sitting in a classroom chair and interacting with a large group of children. This presents challenges as my coworkers and I spend much of our instructional time reinforcing, managing and setting expectations for behavior, especially in the beginning of a school year. My attention to actual instructional time is affected when I need to repeatedly redirect children who argue, leave their seat, call out when it is not their turn, distract others or show aggression. To further highlight this problem, a range of studies point out that poor social emotional skills like these may affect children's learning, ability to retain information and overall school success (Morris, Milleky, Raver & Jones, 2013; Denham, Basset & Zinsser, 2012; Arnold, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee & Marshall, 2012).

The issue needing improvement is how to apply strategies that improve social emotional behavior in preschool students, so that learning is effective and children make appropriate academic gains. Through my research, I found many strategies can be implemented to manage behaviors in the classroom. There are a wide variety of programs available to schools and teachers. I began to ask, which of these programs would work for my classroom? Which instructional strategies have good results and would be realistic for me to implement? How much time would I need to teach these skills and what impact would these interventions have? I then planned an intervention that works within my established practice of modeling expectations,

reinforcing rules, community building activities, parent/school communication and behavioral incentives.

Broader Context

At the time of this writing, Urban School X does not have a specific curriculum to help teachers improve social emotional skills within our pre-kindergarten program. On a professional level, many teachers understand the importance of teaching social skills but often do not have specific resources in place. This may be a common occurrence, as Flook, Goldberg, Pinger and Davidson (2015) point out…"Despite evidence highlighting the importance of such self-regulatory skills to academic and life success, these skills are not often explicitly taught in school (p. 45). There is a need within my school to address social emotional skills in our students, especially within the preschool, as we often have children who are new to the school setting.

Fortunately, my school has recently purchased a program (Growing Minds) to help students and teachers learn mindfulness techniques and apply them in the classroom. At this time, this program is not available to our K4 classrooms due to either funding or resources. However, we had the opportunity to attend a number of staff mindfulness trainings. These have been helpful for teachers who are personally interested in using mindfulness techniques and also helpful for teachers who wish to implement mindfulness strategies in the classroom. Our school counselor also comes to our classrooms once per month. She teaches a 30 minute lesson about topics like bullying, respecting personal space or how to express feelings appropriately.

Although K4 does not have a social skill curriculum per se, we are fortunate to have some resources available. My school is open to learning more about behavior and social skills in our preschool wing. In fact, the preschool coordinator at my school is interested in my research

findings and has asked me to present a staff training on what I learned that may benefit our students.

As I continued to explore the area of developing social skills in preschool children, I focused on one specific area of interest: using a mindfulness approach as a teaching strategy to promote social emotional skills. Having already incorporated some mindfulness techniques as part of my regular classroom routine, I naturally felt drawn to the area of mindfulness and its relationship to behavior. Last school year, I often used child-friendly yoga videos on my Smartboard and noticed how engaged and calm my students became as they practiced yoga positions. I frequently encouraged my students to take several deep breaths when they appeared agitated or upset. We also have fun trying the "warrior pose". This yoga pose has children stand with two legs apart, one knee bent and both arms outward. This requires balance, concentration and a calm body. This school year, the use of mindfulness techniques fits in with my school's vision and is allowed within my daily practice. I began to think about mindfulness techniques I could use that would effectively help my littlest learners succeed at school.

Through my research, I found that mindfulness and social emotional learning have a connection. Lantieri & Zakrewaski (2015) state that,…"By helping students become aware of and then embody the connection between their emotions, thoughts and bodily sensations, students are better able to regulate their emotions, which then impacts their behavior…" (p.1).

Zelazo and Lyons (2012) also suggest that mindfulness techniques, such as deep breathing, body scans, movement exercises, and yoga stretches help children self-regulate their behavior. The idea that mindfulness techniques can have a positive impact on children's expression of social emotional skills is the focus of this research proposal. Specifically, my goal is to explore

ways in which mindfulness practices may impact student's expression of social emotional skills within a preschool classroom.

Research terms I used to search for information are: social skills, social skills instruction, social skills development, social competence, emotional competence, preschool education, parent involvement, parent survey, Youngstar, mindfulness, self-regulation, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, social emotional learning. The search engine I used most often and found most helpful is ERIC. I discussed and cited information from these websites: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, CASEL, CSEFEL, and Greater Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life.

Research Question

How does the use of mindfulness techniques impact preschool children's expression of social emotional skills?

Preliminary Plan and Research Goal

The goal of this research proposal is to explore ways in which mindfulness techniques may impact social emotional skills within a preschool classroom. This research supports my teaching practice and brings information to my school's K4 program via implementing my research and sharing my findings. My plan further incorporated mindfulness techniques into my daily teaching and uncovered how mindfulness may be an effective intervention to common behavioral issues in the classroom. Specifically, I implemented a mindfulness technique using age-appropriate song and movement activities. I have adapted these ideas from the WOMMP mindfulness technique, created by Marcia Parsons, Professor of Dance at UW-Milwaukee. I originally learned about WOMMP through a staff training at my school. The hand out I was given at this training did not have a citation for who created WOMMP. Fortunately, a google

search led me to find Marcia Parsons. After an email exchange, Marcia Parsons asked me to cite her as the creator (confirmed through Microsoft Outlook email exchange 4/19/16 with Professor of Dance, Marcia Parsons, UW-Milwaukee).

The WOMMP technique is not published but I was granted permission to adapt the technique to fit the needs of students in my preschool classroom. Using WOMMP for inspiration, I created my own mindfulness technique that is developmentally appropriate for the children in my study. The techniques I created are a reflection of the knowledge I have gained through my research and my own general understanding of mindfulness. For the purposes of this action research, I focus on four areas of mindfulness I use in my personal life: body scanning, deep breathing, balancing and grounding. Each of these components is linked to a song or movement that helps student's practice each of the four areas I have selected to focus on.

These engaging and age-appropriate movement activities are intended to help children become aware of their bodies, identify feelings, and finally calm and center themselves. For my intervention, I created a set of visual cue cards with a picture of each movement exercise (See Appendix A). Within the first week of the school year, I introduced the cue cards, which we called our "Calm-Down Cards". These cards became a regular part of my daily teaching practice. We used them during transition times-such as coming back inside from recess, at the end of the day before they went home and when I felt they needed a brain-break. I did not use the Calm-Down Cards during our literacy block, as that was my intervention and my planned data collection time. After exposing the children to the Calm-Down Cards for one week, I began my actual intervention using the cards. I collected data on the specific social emotional behaviors I observed during our literacy block-before and during the intervention. I also collected data from the caregivers of the students about their perception of their child's social emotional skills.

Lastly, I collected data from the student's themselves by asking them what they felt they needed each day: water, rest, sharing time or movement. These three components of data helped me identify ways in which I could most effectively address the needs/concerns of the student's families and help the children in my classroom. The goal of this research was to see an observable improvement in student's social emotional skills. These skills are specifically defined as an ability to listen attentively, demonstrate self- control, stay on task, and work well with others.

Context

Urban School X offers education for families K3 through eighth grade. We are an urban school located on the south side of Milwaukee. We are part of a Hispanic community, in a low economic area. My school is also part of a larger social services organization that provides many services for the community, such as mental health counseling, drug abuse interventions, housing and services for seniors. Our school is chartered through UW-Milwaukee. We became a charter school in 2000 and won an award for best charter schools in 2010.

My school's mission statement is that, Urban School X "… is a non-sectarian, non –profit, community-based, charter school dedicated to creating an environment that fosters high expectations and excellence for all students (retrieved and copied from school website, 2016). My school is results-driven and academically rigorous. All pre-kindergarten classrooms assess their students using Wisconsin PALS twice per year and also use K4 benchmark assessments five times per year. We assess letter and sound knowledge, rhyming, concepts of print, positional words, handwriting, number concepts, number recognition, shapes, colors, and life skills in the classroom. We have parent-teacher conferences twice per year and send out progress reports each quarter. All assessments are compiled into data charts, which we then submit to our

principal, preschool coordinator, preschool manager, reading specialists and curriculum coordinator.

Each K4 classroom within my school has 24 students, with one licensed teacher and one full time bi-lingual assistant. Since most students are Hispanic and speak English as a second-language, each teacher in K4 has a bilingual assistant to help translate and assist in daily communications with families. Teachers are not required to speak Spanish as we are technically an English speaking school, with all lessons being taught in English. Students attend our full-day program, from 8 to 2:45 p.m. We operate from the end of August through the first week of June. We also offer a 6 week summer school program in K4. As noted previously, my school operates DPI in the morning and Youngstar in the afternoon.

Based on my school's current interest in mindfulness and the need for social emotional skill information and support in our K4 classrooms, I have chosen this focus for my research proposal. The following literature review explores ways in which preschool children develop social emotional skills, the possible affect that parents and teachers have on these skills and the subsequent impact on a child's learning and success in the classroom. After a discussion of social emotional skills, a review of mindfulness and its connection to academic learning is considered.

Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

The development of social emotional skills in young children and the impact these skills have on academic success are important topics to consider in the field of education. Students are expected to listen, sit quietly, get along with others and engage in learning. Problems arise when student's struggle to demonstrate appropriate behavior within the classroom, which can interrupt the process of teaching and learning. Research maintains that negative or inappropriate behavior can seriously affect academic success as children who are disruptive in a classroom have a harder time learning and retaining new information (Morris, Milleky, Raver & Jones, 2013). The connection between a child's ability to demonstrate appropriate social emotional skills and the subsequent impact on their learning is an area of interest in education.

Weissberg and Cascarino (2013) suggest that developing social emotional skills and the subsequent relationship to a child's overall academic success is gaining national attention. They highlight the importance of studying how social emotional learning impacts children's ability to form positive relationships throughout their lives (2013). Flook, Goldberg, Pinger and Davidson (2014) further report that… "There has been a surge in interest among educators, parents, and policy makers in addressing children's social and emotional development in addition to academic skills…" (p. 45). These social emotional skills may be defined as the skills a child acquires and applies in order to interact positively with peers and teachers, avoid aggressive behaviors, regulate emotion, behavior and impulses, and demonstrate an awareness of emotion (McNabe & Altumura, 2011; Denham & Basset, 2012; Denham, Basset, Sirotkin, Brown & Morris, 2015; Havinghurst, Harley & Prior, 2004; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013).

The development of these skills are important to becoming a good student, achieving personal goals, understanding emotion, and establishing healthy relationships (Weissberg, et al., 2013). Therefore, it appears necessary to examine how a child develops social emotional skills, factors that may influence their development and the relationship between these skills and educational success. CASEL (The collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) studied SEL or social-emotional learning and define five skills important to developing social-emotional competence:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

(Weissberg, et al., 2013).

McNabe and Altamura (2011) further propose that social emotional skills are essential to develop in young children. Children who lack social emotional skills while in preschool are more likely to struggle with the transition to kindergarten and show issues with academic and social achievement (2011). These are all important factors to consider as researchers, policy-makers, teachers and families continually define and clarify which concepts students should master in order to become successful and well-adjusted adults (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Traditional academic subjects, such as math, science, and literacy are one component of a child's learning and for younger children, preschool programs are shown to enhance these academic skills (Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford & Barbarin, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

Many factors may influence how children develop social emotional skills. The development of these skills and the subsequent effect on a child's educational experience are an important matter to consider. Research supports the idea that a socially capable child is better able to focus on academic tasks, control their impulses, and are more accepted by classmates and teachers (Denham et al., 2015). The ability to demonstrate social emotional skills can be affected by the many life experiences and circumstances to which a child is exposed.

Bronfenbrenner's theory of systems describes the interaction and relationships experienced within a microsystem. A microsystem describes the places or settings, such as home, school, or work that an individual interacts within. The microsystem contains a mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Using Bronfenbrenner's theory of systems, Stacks (2005) discusses how the relationship and interplay between home and school, the caregiving environment, poverty and life stressors all play a role in a child's behavior. This interaction between home and school occurs within the mesosystem. Bronfenbrenner suggests that researchers needs to look at the different settings in which a person relates (1977). Doing so reveals how, "…events in one milieu may influence the child's behavior in another. Thus, the experience of a child in…the classroom…may change his pattern of activities with parents or siblings in the home, or vice versa…" (p. 523).

Stacks (2005) also points out that parents and teachers often communicate about behaviors that are seen in the classroom and at home. Some issues may only occur at home or school, but not both. Open conversation about behavioral issues that are present in the child help teachers and families determine if a behavioral referral needs to be made.

Other factors that are considered a risk in the development of social emotional skills and may impact a child's behavior are divorce, death, moving, and change in family income (Stacks, 2005). Denham, et al., support the notion that systems and early life experiences can influence the development of social emotional skills. For example, experiencing stressful life situations, such as poverty, chaos, noise, lack of support from family, and an overall lack of resources can hinder the development of social emotional skills (2015). Bronfenbrenner's systems theory suggests that environmental factors, the relationships a child establishes between home and school, and between child and caregiver may affect the development of social-emotional skills (Stacks, 2005). These relationships are an important factor to examine when considering how children develop social emotional skills.

Development of Social Emotional Skills

Children's ability to express and regulate emotions effectively begins as early as the preschool years (Havighurst, et al., 2004). These researchers suggest that social emotional competence plays an important role in a child's "…ability to regulate emotions…are hallmarks of positive social and behavioral functioning [and] can be seen in children at an early age" (p. 424). Children who are not able to express their emotions safely and have behavioral issues are less likely to receive instruction, are not adequately engaged in their own learning and feel poorly about their role as a learner (Morris et al., 2013).

Other researchers maintain that developing social emotional skills is an important milestone, and social emotional issues can begin in the earliest years, from birth to age five (Aubrey & Ward, 2013). One study, using a sample of 467 preschool children, examined the relationship between social functioning and academic achievement. They found that children with better social functioning, such as cooperation, self- control, the ability to follow directions

and low aggression was correlated with stronger academic achievement (Arnold, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee & Marshall, 2012). Children's ability to regulate their emotions and respond to the emotions of others in a school setting helps them successfully attend to instruction, sit quietly and follow instructions (Denham et al., 2012).

The ability to exhibit emotional competence allows children to experience school success in areas such as engagement in learning, forming positive relationships with staff and peers, and overall school satisfaction and enjoyment (Denham, Bassett & Zinsser, 2012). Another area to consider is how the development of social skills can be linked to the successful formation of early relationships with adults (Stacks, 2005).

Role of Relationships

A child's relationship with parents and the ability to form positive relationships with other adults beginning early in life remains an important topic to examine. Stacks (2005) suggests that "…prior to kindergarten, children's relationships with important adults may have a stronger influence on outcomes related to school performance than relationships in later childhood" (p. 271). Denham, Bassett and Zinsser further discuss how a parent's ability to model, teach and react to children's emotions affects their successful development of social-emotional competence (2012). They found that parents are critical in helping their child develop these skills through their own display of positive emotion and ability to talk about it with their child.

Havighurst, et al., also found that parents who attended a parenting program designed to help parents become more sensitive to their child's emotional needs had children who showed a reduction in behavior problems (2004). Overall, positive experiences can be affected by parental

depression, parental inexperience, alcohol and/or drug use, and type of parenting style and affect a child's behavior well into adulthood. (Aubry & Ward, 2013). The effects of poor relationships and stressful life experiences can have consequences into adulthood. For example, maternal factors such as smoking and drug abuse have been linked to conduct disorders later in life (Aubrey & Ward, 2013). As these researchers discuss, negative interactions with parents, depression, stress and lack of affection can be an area of concern (2013).

Havighurst et al., (2004) advise that improving the emotional interaction between parent and child is critical to improving a child's emotional competence. They conducted a study using a sample of 50 parents of children attending 4 year old kindergarten in lower to middle class areas. One focus of the study was to determine if a program teaching parenting skills would improve a child's emotional competence, social skills, and decrease behavioral issues. Of the sample of children, 64% had non-clinical behavioral issues while 36% did have clinical behavioral issues as measured by the Eyeburg Child Behavior Inventory (Havighurst, et al., 2004). Clinical behavioral issues were measured by three subscales: Conduct symptoms, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity and Oppositional Defiant Symptoms. The parents in the study attended two hour parenting sessions once per week, for a period of six weeks. The parenting sessions were designed to help parents build skills in recognizing and responding to their child's emotions. They found that 70% of the children within the clinical level of behavioral issues showed positive changes in their behavior and 44% of them no longer scored at the clinical level (Havighurst et al., 2004).

The role of parents and their influence on child's ability to develop social emotional skills is but one part of the picture. As Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests, there are many systems to evaluate in the development of an individual's behavior and the interactions within these

relationships. The interactions between the microsystem (home, school, and family), the exosystem (neighborhood, media, government) and the macrosystem (cultural norms) can influence behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Another area to consider relates to the role teacher's play in fostering social emotional skills in their students.

Role of Teachers

As discussed, some research focuses on parents as the primary influence on developing social skills in young children. The need to also explore the role teacher's play in developing social emotional skills in preschool children has come to light. For example, Denham et al., highlight the importance of further examining how children develop social-emotional skills and recognize that both parents and teachers play an important role in the process (2012). Their theoretical review maintains the position that more research needs to be done regarding the teacher's role in fostering social-emotional competence in young children.

One study examined a sample of preschoolers and found that their positive engagement with teachers was significantly related to their ability to regulate their emotions (Williford, Whittaker, Vitiello & Downer, 2013). In this study, 341 preschoolers from 100 preschool classrooms located in a large urban area in the United States were evaluated. Each program ran for a half-day, 31% of the centers were funded by Headstart while the rest were privately or state funded. Children were observed twice, once in the fall and once in the spring for four hours each. Children were assessed on their positive or negative engagement with teachers, peers and tasks. They were also observed on their emotional regulation, compliance and control of emotions (2013). This study found that children who experienced positive interactions with teachers, such as "…high emotional connection, expressed positive emotions, and adaptive communication with teachers-were related to gain in compliance/ executive control…" (p. 178).

Teachers are often faced with managing behaviors in the classroom. Many children struggle to stay on task, find it difficult to get along with peers and complete tasks. Children are spending more time in preschool settings and teachers themselves know the importance of teaching social skills (Denham, et al., 2012). Consequently, many educators try to help children who struggle with negative behavior (Morris, et al., 2013). Often, teachers make an effort to manage negative behaviors and spend critical instructional time trying to manage and control these issues (2013).

Teachers who are able to successfully use effective discipline, management skills, and provide positive interaction may be more able to support their students in the classroom. Howes, et al. suggest that these types of classroom environments are associated with a rise in children's literacy skills (2008). Furthermore, the quality of a child's classroom experience, such as interactions with teachers are critical to development (2008). NAEYC (National Association for the Education of the Young Child) also recognizes the importance of the teacher/child relationship. They set guidelines for preschool education that require programs to provide enough materials for each child, offer effective teaching practices and promote positive teacher/child relationships (2008).

Social Emotional Skills and Academic Achievement

Social-emotional skills are an important factor to consider when addressing the educational success of children. The relationships children experience with both parents and teachers can influence how a child relates to others and their success in the classroom. When looking within the educational system and specifically at academic achievement, research posits that children who do not successfully develop social and emotional competence struggle to gain academic skills in a timely manner (McNabe & Altamura, 2011). Additionally, 10% to 15% of

preschool children show maladaptive social skills and struggle to transition successfully into kindergarten (2011).

Children who struggle to transition successfully into kindergarten continue to have behavioral problems that carry into elementary school (Stacks, 2005). Issues related to social emotional skills begin to present themselves before formal education or kindergarten begins. Research stresses that children who struggle to develop social and emotional competence in younger years are found to have long term problems academically (McNabe & Altamura, 2011).

A study conducted by Arnold et al., (2012) sampled 467 high-risk, low SES preschool children and the relationship between social skills and academic achievement. Specifically, the authors focused on the preschooler's attention, aggression, and display of social skills, such as ability to follow directions, cooperation and self- control. They looked at how these variables related to literacy, language and math acquisition. Overall, they found that better social functioning was significantly related to stronger academic success in these areas.

Although difficult behaviors such as temper tantrums, spitting, hitting and not paying attention can be considered normal in preschool aged children, they can become severe and an indicator of more serious behavioral issues (Stacks, 2005). Behavioral issues like these affect a child's development of relationships and contributes to their overall lack of academic achievement. Also, "children with poor social competence will have fewer opportunities for interaction with peers because they lack social skills, have emotion regulation difficulties, and are often ignored, neglected, or rejected by their peers" (McCabe & Altamura, 2011, p. 515). Many now look toward preschool education as a means of socializing young children and preparing them for kindergarten (Howes, et al., 2008).

Importance of Preschool Education

Research suggests that preschool programs are important in helping children develop school readiness (Howes, et al., 2008). Many pre-kindergarten programs may help children succeed by promoting academic and social opportunities. According to Howes, preschool education has become mainstream as many public and private schools now offer them. They are expected to continue to grow as they are becoming supported by state funds.

Preschool programs are a choice for families who seek to give their child pre-academic experience. Many families seek to have their child attend preschool programs as a way to learn social skills; such as making friends, sharing and taking turns. Parents may be correct to assume that preschool programs help teach children these skills. Gunindi (2013) found that there is a measurable difference in social skills between children who attend preschool and those who did not. The study asked 100 mothers to rate their child's social skills after attending a preschool program and found that "…30% of mothers whose children attended preschool education institutions stated that their children were always willing to help people around them when needed…" (p. 86).

Headstart programs also seek to better understand how social and emotional development impacts preschool-aged children (Morris, Mattera, Castellis, Bangser, Bierman & Raver, 2014). The Impact Findings from the Head Start CARES Demonstration highlight that children who lack positive social development can result in behaviors which lead to… "less instruction, to be less engaged in and less positive about their role as learners, and to have fewer opportunities for learning from peers" (Morris, et al., 2014, p. ES-1). Not only can these behaviors affect the learning of individual children, it can have an impact on the atmosphere of the entire classroom. Morris, et al., (2013) also report that disruptive behavior in preschool classrooms can be

detrimental to the overall learning environment and hard for teachers to manage. Often, this can lower instructional time and hamper learning because teacher's attention is focused on managing behaviors. Overall, issues related to developing social emotional skills in preschool aged children have prompted researchers to examine interventions.

Behavioral Intervention Overview

Researchers advise that a lack of social development in children can contribute to poor academic outcomes, due in part to disruptions to their own learning (Morris, et al., 2013). Behaviors such as teasing, tattling, and aggression can be difficult for teachers to manage and can take away from the overall learning environment (Morris, et al., 2013). An inability to take turns, share and interact positively with other children continue to be a cause for concern (Aubrey & Ward, 2013). In response to these types of behavioral issues, research examines interventions which may support children in building successful social emotional skills in the classroom. As previously noted, developing and applying social emotional skills allows children to experience success in areas such as engagement in learning, forming positive relationships with staff and peers, and overall school satisfaction and enjoyment (Denham, et. al, 2012).

The implications for children who are not able to show social skills manifests into lower overall school satisfaction, takes away from the learning of others, and may affect educational outcomes (Morris, et al., 2013, 2014; Denham et al., 2012). The different types of classroom interventions, instructional practices and possible impact on children's social emotional skills is further highlighted below.

Teacher's Instructional Practice

One large study examined which types of classroom interventions improve preschoolers' social emotional skills. Impact Findings from the Head Start CARES demonstration (Classroom-based Approaches and Resources for Emotion and Social skill promotion) looked at three specific classroom based social skills programs and found that preschool children's social-emotional development can be improved using these types of interventions (Morris, Mattera, Castells, Bangser, Bierman & Raver, 2014). Specifically, CARES evaluated 104 Head Start centers and 307 preschool classrooms nationwide to determine which types of classroom based enhancements (social skills programs) and subsequent teacher instructional practices help promote positive social skills in children.

The three classroom based intervention programs studied are: The Incredible Years Teacher Training Program, Preschool PATHS and Tools of the Mind-Play. The study found that while these programs were not specifically shown to improve preschoolers' pre-academic skills, they did improve social-emotional competence. Importantly, teachers who received support, such as teacher training and coaching were most successful delivering the programs (Morris, et al., 2014). Teachers received four to six training sessions, weekly coaching in the classroom and assistance with the technical aspects of the programs (2014). The relationship between school and student is an important factor to consider, as Bronfenbrenner explains how this mesosystem and the interplay among all the systems, can affect the development of human behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Over the course of one preschool year, this study evaluated the interventions or classroom enhancements for these outcomes:

- Teacher practices
- Climate of the classroom

- Children's behavioral regulation and understanding of emotion
- Children's learning behaviors and social behaviors

(Morris, et al., 2014).

Morris, et al., found that teachers who used the classroom based programs showed improvement in their instructional practices, such as classroom management, the use of positive behavior practices, and delivery of social-emotional instruction (2014). Within these programs, teachers also made changes to length of circle time activities, reduced whole group instruction, scaffolded children's play, and taught social-emotional skills with lessons provided through these programs (2014). This study is the first large scale one conducted within Head Start programs on a national level. The authors suggest the most important findings are that classroom based enhancements can impact the development of positive social-emotional skills when combined with teacher professional support and training.

Another type of classroom based intervention is PBS or positive behavior support. This system is adopted by an entire school and enforced inside the classroom, with all children held accountable for their behavior (McCabe & Altamura, (2011). Some teachers and schools also attempt to manage negative behavior in children through time outs, ignoring, setting limits, and taking away of privileges (Havighurst, et al., 2004). These classroom based interventions illustrate how various approaches may be implemented within classrooms and their effectiveness in promoting social emotional skills in children.

Furthermore, some researchers suggest that teachers who are able to provide positive classroom practices may have higher academic outcomes (Howes, et al., 2008). Classrooms can be evaluated by an extensively used tool: the early childhood environment rating scale-revised,

known as ECERS-R. One component of this tool is the Teaching and Interactions factor, which scales… "Staff-child interactions, discipline, supervision, encouraging children to communicate, and using language to develop reasoning skills…" (Howes, et al., 2008, p. 33). These researchers appear to support the idea that children in quality programs, with positive classroom environments and teachers who are able to successfully manage behaviors, can show growth in social skills and academic achievement.

Mindfulness

One specific intervention to address social emotional development may be the use of mindfulness techniques. Zelazo and Lyons (2012) propose that age-appropriate mindfulness activities may help children focus their attention, attend to tasks, sit still and enhance calmness and emotional well-being (2012). Mindfulness may be defined as "…a way of attending derived from Asian contemplative traditions…it involves reflecting on one's experience on a moment-by-moment basis (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012, p. 156). Research suggests that mindfulness interventions are becoming more available for children, are being empirically researched and are being applied in homes and school environments (Greco, Baer & Smith, 2011). Thomas and Atkinson (2016) also report that mindfulness practices such as breathing, listening exercises, and movement activities may have positive effects on children's ability to pay attention.

Research further speculates that mindfulness techniques can benefit children in many ways. For example, Semple, Lee, Rosa and Miller (2009) found that the use of mindfulness based cognitive therapy in children showed a positive decrease in attention and behavioral problems, using the CBCL and MASC scale (Child Behavior Checklist and Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children). This study looked at 29 children aged 9-13 years old, who demonstrated attention and anxiety issues. The mindfulness treatment partly used breathing

techniques, body awareness and yoga. Overall, the study found that mindfulness based cognitive therapy can benefit children who already are experiencing anxiety and behavioral based problems.

In recent years, mindfulness has become recognized as beneficial to children as well as adults although no specific measure of mindfulness skills in children exists (Greco et al., 2011) Their research was one of the first attempts to assess mindfulness in school aged children and adolescents aged 12-17 using a CAMM scale, or the Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure. They compiled four studies which explained and provided validation for the use of the CAMM scale. They found that a CAMM score was an appropriate measure of mindfulness traits such as observing, acting with awareness, and accepting without judgement.

Researchers have also studied how a Mindfulness based Kindness curriculum that focuses on breathing, attention, setting daily intentions and practicing kindness promotes prosocial behaviors in preschool children (Flook, et al., 2015). These researchers found that students exposed to a 12 week Mindfulness based curriculum showed significant improvement in social competence (2015). These researchers suggest this mindfulness curriculum "…shows promise as an accessible and cost-effective strategy to promote well-being and prosocial behavior by training noncognitive skills that are also important for academic success" (p. 49).

Their study included a random sample of seven preschool-aged classrooms, from six different elementary schools within an average sized Midwestern city (Flook, et al., 2015). A total of 68 children participated, with a mean age of 4.67 years. Children were assigned to either a mindfulness based intervention (Kindness Curriculum) or a control group for a 12 week intervention period. The Kindness group participated in training geared toward promoting attention, emotion regulation and kindness practices, such as sharing and empathy.

Results indicated that those who participated in the mindfulness based curriculum showed gains in social competence as scored by teachers. The study also found that children who participated in the Kindness curriculum intervention scored higher at the end of the year report cards in areas "…of learning, social-emotional development, and health…approximately three months after the end of the intervention: (p. 49). This study suggests a mindfulness intervention may positively impact preschool-aged children, even months after the intervention has occurred.

Summary

The importance of children's development of social emotional skills is clear. Issues such as the quality of classroom environment, interactions and instructional practices are found to improve performance in standardized tests for children in elementary school (Howes, et al., 2008). There are many different instructional practices and models to choose from to promote social emotional skills in children. Many of the programs utilize different ways of teaching students to listen, follow directions, and manage emotions. This action research seeks to specifically explore the connection between mindfulness techniques and children's social emotional skills.

My overarching goal is to explore the connection between the use of mindfulness techniques implemented in the classroom and their possible impact on the expression of preschool children's social emotions skills. An additional goal of my action research is to gather parental opinion about their child's social emotional skills and the perceived connection between home and school. Lastly, I aim to listen to children themselves speak about their experiences in the classroom to further gain insight into their thoughts, feelings and needs.

Methodology

The literature review highlights how social emotional skills begin developing in the preschool years and can be an important component of academic success. My goal is to decrease problematic behaviors in the classroom and increase social emotional skills by using a mindfulness intervention. In order to define and quantify social emotional skills, I use my current schools life skills guidelines.

LIFE SKILLS FOR URBAN SCHOOL X: K4 PROGRAM

(Retrieved from Urban School X Preschool Report Card, 2016).

- Respects property of school and others
- Follows classroom rules
- Listens attentively and politely
- Participates appropriately during class instruction
- Demonstrates self-control and keeps hands, feet and mouth to self
- Stays on task
- Works well with others

For the purpose of this action research, I focus on four of the above life skills. These are listening attentively and politely, demonstrating self-control, staying on task and working well with others. I propose the use of a mindfulness intervention that enables students to identify feelings, while also using balancing, deep breathing and grounding movements to promote the expression of social emotional skills in the classroom. I chose to use this method because mindfulness techniques such as these have been shown to help student's pay-attention, exhibit pro-social behavior and improve social-emotional development (Thomas, et al., 2016; Flook, et al., 2015). This section of the research proposal will clearly define the population, research method, data sources and procedures. An operationalization of variables will be presented and clearly defined.

Population

The population of my research project are 4- 5 year old preschool children in my regular education classroom. Children are identified as 100% Hispanic and are English language learners or use English as a second-language. Most students qualify for free or reduced lunch. All participants have similar demographics, socioeconomic status and cultural background. 23 students were given parental consent to participate in the research.

Research Method

This action research project utilizes a quasi-experimental design within the interpretivist paradigm. Neumann (2011) explains the interpretivist paradigm as a way in which to, "…develop an understanding of social life and discover how people construct meaning in natural settings" (p. 102). I aim to examine and observe how the students in my classroom naturally demonstrate social emotional skills as part of their regular school day.

My research is quasi-experimental. While I can suggest that a mindfulness technique may impact social emotional skills in my classroom, I cannot generalize my findings to other classrooms. My sample of participants is not random as I will use the students assigned to my classroom. I do not have a control group and my sample size is small at 23 students. (Information regarding quasi-experimental design taken from classroom notes, class two, Rita-Narwocki-Chabin, 2016).

My research examines how children's behavior within my classroom may be impacted by mindfulness techniques. To gather this information, I used participant observation. As their teacher, I am a natural observer. I am familiar to the children and families. I established rapport, built trust and became a natural part of their day at school. Additionally, I chose participant

observation as my data collection method because the behaviors I observe are part of my daily teaching practice. As I taught small groups, I easily monitored the behavior of all students in the classroom, as I normally do. I carried a clip board with me that had the Student Observation Form and Child Check-In Form. (Appendix B, Appendix C). I observed behavior during the intervention period and quickly made tallies. Each day, I used a new Student Observation Form and Child Check-In Form. I made tallies directly on these forms according to behaviors I witnessed and what each child reported they needed: water, movement, share, or rest. This provided a quick and easy way to record my data.

The second goal of this research proposal was to explore parent opinion of their child's social emotional skills before and after the mindfulness intervention. I used a Caregiver Pre and Post Survey (Appendix D, Appendix E). I requested that parents not identify their child's name on the survey form to protect their privacy and to protect against influencing my own judgement as I observed child behaviors during the intervention. My goal was to get a better understanding of the specific areas parents identified as concerns regarding social emotional skills in their children. This added an additional layer of depth to my research because while the Student Observation Form (Appendix B) records overall group behavior in the classroom, the Caregiver Pre and Post Survey (Appendix D, Appendix E) looks at behavior as observed outside of the classroom.

The final observation portion of my research examined information given by the student's themselves. I used the Student Observation Form to directly ask students what they needed during the intervention period. This aspect of data collection provided me with insight into student needs while in the classroom. Overall, using three different data collection measures lends truth value and credibility to my action research because I show triangulation. In addition

to my data sources, I use the literature review, which helped me narrow and clarify the research question. I also suggest Bronfenbrenner as a theorist, which informs and guides this action research proposal.

I understand that this research cannot be replicated to a larger audience but may provide information to a variety of interested audiences on how a mindfulness intervention impacted my students. The ideas in this research may be helpful to other preschool teachers in my building, the families of my students, administration and other individuals interested in mindfulness in classroom settings.

Data Sources

To demonstrate how mindfulness techniques may impact the expression of social emotional skills, I implement multiple sources of data. My goal is to explore mindfulness in two distinct areas: emotional awareness and body awareness. As a way of looking at how children feel and helping them to develop body awareness- I created the Child Check-In Form (Appendix C). This form is a graphic organizer divided into four parts: water, move, share and rest. As part of my intervention, I asked children directly what they needed while in my literacy group. I quickly showed children the chart and asked them to "check-in" about what they needed. Children would then point or verbally express their need: water, movement, verbally share something with me or rest. The goal of gathering this data was to discern insight into their needs. Did children feel they needed more water, movement, talking time, or rest during our literacy block? Would knowing this help me better serve their needs?

During the 10 day pre- intervention and 10 day intervention period, I used the Student Observation Form (Appendix B). I created this form to best quantify observable social emotional behaviors as a whole group. I used the four specific like skills as a guide to define the

behaviors I will be observing. For example, Life Skill 1 requires students to listen attentively and politely. To quantify instances of this behavior I observe each instance of a child raising their hand to speak, each instance of calling out of turn, and each instance of talking when a teacher speaks. If one child repeated this behavior, I marked it as counting for each occurrence. My reasoning for this is that I aimed to gather data as a whole group. Each instance of behavior was important to look at in terms of overall group behavior. Each of these variables are clearly defined in the operationalization of variables section.

Finally, to gain an understanding of parental opinions of their child's social emotional skills, I distributed a Caregiver Pre and Post survey (Appendix D, Appendix E). I adapted this survey from Measuring Social Competence in Preschool-Aged Children Through the Examination of Play Behaviors by Lee (Graduate Thesis, 2006). The survey I created, much like Lees, asks parents to rate child's behavior they observe at home. The behaviors listed on the survey are the same behaviors I observed and recorded as part of my mindfulness intervention. The goal was to find if parents felt the intervention I used at school impacted their child's behavior at home. In summary, the three data sources I use are child data, parent data and classroom data. Through my analysis, I hope to gain insight into what children report they need in the classroom, what parents perceive about their child's social emotional skills, and finally to observe a decrease in the number of problematic behaviors during my classroom's literacy block.

Procedures

This action research studies the impact mindfulness techniques have on the expression of social emotional skills in preschool children. Only students who had parental consent were observed and recorded. All students received the mindfulness intervention as it became a regular part of the classroom experience and integrated into my daily teaching practice. The mindfulness

intervention I adapted from WOMMP (with Marcia Parsons email confirmation of approval, 2016) and subsequently created using my own understanding of mindfulness, are what I choose to call "Calm-Down Cards" (Appendix A). The mindfulness techniques depicted on these cards include body scanning, movement, breathing and grounding exercises.

Each card in the set has a title: Body Scan Songs, Deep Breathing, Balancing Act, and Ground Yourself. Each card has a movement or breathing exercise for children to do. For example, Body Scan Songs are "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" (song idea presented to me by Sandra Graham during TLA 651 assessment interview, Spring, 2016) and "If You're Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands". Both songs encourage children to be mindful of the body and also their feelings. In my experience as a teacher, I know that young students are naturally engaged in song and that this approach is developmentally appropriate.

I chose to present the mindfulness techniques as a set of laminated, regular paper sized cards to help ELL and ESL students have a visual representation of the songs and movements. The cards also appeal to visual learners. When using the cards, students received oral instruction while I held up the cards as a visual aid. Laminating the cards also allowed the students to use them on their own throughout the day. I hung them up in our classroom, where they were easily accessible. I noted that students did ask to use the cards during free-choice time.

I used Microsoft Word online clip art picture tool to find pictures for the Calm-Down cards and the Child Check-In form. Terms I searched are: music, balloons, heart, downward dog, feet, marshmallow, and sleep. I then copied and pasted each picture onto a blank page, printed them in color and had the cards laminated by my school. I found the cards were easy to use, visually appealing and highly engaging for the children.

Students were introduced to both the Child Check-In form and the Calm-Down cards at the beginning of the school year. We practiced them for one week before I began the intervention in all parts of the day, except for Literacy block. To familiarize them with the Check-In form, I explained what the choices were (water, move, share, rest) in a large group setting. Then the children each took turns coming to the front of the room, pointing to the picture and doing the action. The children loved this activity. At first, they were hesitant to choose and needed guidance and prompting from me. Once they understood what the choices were, they eagerly participated.

To teach the children about the Calm-Down Cards, I first modeled each song and movement. We talked about how our bodies can feel (sleepy, bouncy, tired, wriggly, calm, and sick) and the different emotions we have (happy, sad, mad, excited, and scared). Practicing the cards before the intervention helped ensure students were familiar with the techniques and that learning this new skill would not interfere with the treatment results. Students who are new to a skill need time to practice before it can be fairly observed and measured. The mindfulness intervention took a total of 5-7 minutes to complete. I performed all these movements with my students. This fit in well with the normal time constraints and expectations of the classroom.

The Calm-Down Card components are: Body Scanning, Deep Breathing, Balancing and Grounding:

Body Scanning:

Step One: Students were shown the Body Scanning Card. As a whole group, students first sang, "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" I then asked students to voluntarily report how their bodies felt. After some children had answered, I repeated back to them what they reported. For

example, if a child said, “I feel sick”. I said back to the child, “You feel sick. I am sorry you feel sick today”.

Step Two: I modeled to children ways to express how we feel. For example, I said, “I feel happy today because the sun is shining in our classroom.” I then invited children to share with the class how they felt. After a few children answered, I then encouraged each child to turn to a neighbor and say, “I feel…” This created a whole group conversation where children were able to express their feelings to each other. To close the Body Scanning section of the intervention, we then sang “If You’re Happy and You Know It” as a whole group.

Deep Breathing:

Step One: Students were shown the Balloon Breathing Card. Children were then instructed to “scoop your breath up” by reaching to the ground, “scooping” air into their hands and moving the air through their body and releasing it to the sky. Students did this movement 5 times.

Step Two: Students placed their hands on their stomachs and were asked to “Take a deep breath and fill your tummy with air like a balloon. Students breathed deeply in and out 5 times.

Balancing:

Step One: Students were shown the Balancing Card. While standing, students were invited to “give your body a hug” by wrapping both arms around themselves. Students then crossed their feet one over the other and tried to balance themselves while holding the position. Students held this position for a total of 10-15 seconds.

Step Two: Students were asked to try the "Downward Dog" which is a yoga movement. They leaned forward at the waist and balanced their weight on their hands and feet, bottoms up in the air. Students were instructed on the safe way to do this. (Keep both feet and both hands on the floor. Arms straight, head does not touch the ground).

Grounding:

Step One: Students were shown the series of grounding cards. Students were encouraged to "plant" their feet firmly into the ground and wiggle their toes in their shoes. We then placed an imaginary marshmallow into our mouths and closed our eyes briefly, while I counted to 20.

Step Two: We finished the series of Calm-Down cards with another quick whole group feelings/ body awareness check-in.

(Calm-Down Cards and procedures were adapted from staff training hand out on WOMMP strategy, August, 2015. These techniques were synthesized from my own understanding of mindfulness through personal experience and literature review).

Students had five consecutive days of practicing both of these mindfulness techniques beginning the first week of school. Once we had practiced them for five consecutive days, I moved on to pre-intervention observation and data collection. For the pre-intervention period, we practiced the Child Check-In form and Calm-Down Cards as previously explained. I then observed student behavior and collected data during our literacy block from 9:00-9:30 a.m. for ten days.

My school's literacy block is an abbreviated version of Daily 5. During this hour long block, students are divided into 4 groups of 6 children each, based on their individual learning needs in letter and sound recognition. When I began the intervention, students were familiar with

the other children in their group, the expectations for learning and how to rotate to the next center. Students spend 10-12 minutes in each literacy center, which are as follows: Working with teacher, Word Work, Independent Work, and Reading to Self. Our Daily 5 begins at 8:30 each morning and runs until 9:30 a.m. I use a Smartboard timer set to 10-12 minutes. When the timer goes off, students know to clean up their activity, push in their chairs and stand near their table, in a line 6 students. When everyone is ready, each line of students walks to their next center. Each center is labeled with a line of tape on the floor, so children can see where to move next and where to stand in line.

I purposefully planned my mindfulness intervention for the last 30 minutes of our literacy block because this is when I most often notice problematic behaviors. For example, I begin to see children invade personal space, argue, make noises with their mouths, struggle to complete their work, call out, leave their seats, and show difficulty waiting their turn. Although I try my best to offer engaging, child appropriate activities within a reasonable time frame (10-12 minutes each) I notice many behavioral issues during the last half of our literacy block. Examples of literacy activities I offer are: playdoh, stringing beads, snap blocks, and literacy games. We also use pencils, crayons or markers and simple worksheets or whiteboards. During Read to Self, students are able to find a comfortable spot of their choice in the classroom. I have a bean bag chair and pillows for this purpose.

The mindfulness intervention period lasted a total of five weeks. During week 1, I introduced the Child Check-In form and Calm-Down Cards. During weeks 2 and 3, I used both mindfulness techniques throughout the rest of the school day but not during Daily 5. I began to collect data on the observed behaviors as noted on my observation form, during Daily 5, from 9:00 until 9:30. During weeks 4 and 5, I used the Child Check-In form with each student as they

entered my group (Working with Teacher). I then used the Calm-Down Cards half-way through Daily 5, which approximately falls near 9:00 a.m. In this way, I was able to observe and record student behavior at the same time each day and directly after we used the Calm-Down Cards. At the beginning of each new group of 6 children, I began by showing them the Child Check-In Form (Appendix C). Students then had these options:

1. Walk quietly and quickly to get a drink of water located right outside of our classroom.
2. Do a series of 20 jumping jacks or run in place for a count of 20, while standing near their work table. Children counted to themselves.
3. Verbally share something with me. For example, many children told me something that happened at home or something they did outside of school.
4. Rest by laying their head down on their table and closing their eyes briefly-usually no longer than a minute.

In the movement option, children counted themselves. This also seemed to help with their ability to count to 20 independently.

I clipped my observation forms to a clipboard that I carried with me. I was able to quickly and easily make tallies on the forms during the observation periods. I did not specify which individual children demonstrated a behavior because I am interested in whole group results. My intention was to provide a mindfulness intervention in the middle of our literacy block to decrease problematic behaviors and increase social emotional skills as defined in the next section.

Operationalization of Variables

For the purpose of this study, I use Urban School X's life skills as retrieved from their preschool report card. The specific life skills I focus on are: listens attentively and politely, demonstrates self- control by keeping hands, feet and mouth to self, stays on task and works well with others. I have specifically defined these variables as such:

Life Skill 1: Listens attentively and politely. Students will:

- Raise hand to speak

Life Skill 2: Demonstrate self- control and keep hands, feet, and mouth to self. Students will:

- Be able to keep their hands and feet within their own personal space
- Child will refrain from touching others, sticking out tongue, making loud noises, or saying inappropriate words. Students will refrain from distracting others by talking, laughing or playing with supplies.

Life Skill 3: Stay on task. Students will:

- Stay in their seat during learning times.
- Students will use material for learning activity appropriately.

Life Skill 4: Work well with others. Students will:

- Help a peer or teacher.
- Will be able to use an object and willingly share it with another peer.
- Use manners with peers and adults by saying please and thank you.

I choose to implement the Calm-Down Cards because it is child-friendly, engaging and encourages children to think about their feelings, develop body awareness and possibly decrease problematic behaviors in the classroom. Based off the literature review and my schools' report card I have chosen to operationalize the variables as such:

Table 1: Operationalization of Variables

Research Concept	Variables	Measure	Information Sources
Improvement in social emotional skills through the use of mindfulness intervention	Social emotional skills	Attention, Emotions, Impulses Life Skills Observation Chart 1. Listens attentively and politely 2. Demonstrates self-control and keeps hands, feet and mouth to self 3. Stays on task 4. Works well with others by waiting their turn, share, use manners, and verbalize their needs	Zelazo & Lyons (2012), explore the connection between mindfulness interventions such as deep breathing and movement activities and their impact on children's ability to sit still, listen, and attend to learning tasks and show calmness and emotional stability. Flook, Simon, Goldberg, Pinger, Davidson (2015), suggest that a mindfulness curriculum which incorporates daily exposure to mindfulness practice within music and movement resulted in teacher rated increase in social competence among preschool children.
	Social Emotional Skills	Caregiver Pre Survey- Parents rate their children using a Likert scale, using Always, Often, Sometimes, Never. 1. Waits their turn to speak 2. Talks over or interrupts others	The literature review speaks to the importance of parental involvement in the development of children's social emotional skills.

		3. Waits their turn while playing 4. Hits, kicks, pushes or shows aggression to others 5.Focuses or pays attention on an activity 6. Plays with items or toys appropriately 7. Offers to help others 8. Says please and thank you 9. Cries, argues or tantrums when with other children 10. Shares toys or items with others Caregiver Post-survey: Same questions noted above, plus one additional question: Since practicing mindfulness at school, have you noticed a positive change in your child's behavior? Yes No Sometimes	Gunindi's (2013) study reflects on mothers opinions about the impact preschool programs have on their child's social skills. This literature review highlights the importance of relationships within systems such as school, teachers and families and their impact on the development of social emotional skills in children. Bronfenbrenner (1977) highlights the importance of systems and the interaction between these systems, such as home and school, peers and school, family and school. The mesosystem, and the relationship between these settings is studied in order to receive a clearer picture of behavior.

Trustworthiness

I have chosen to place this research proposal within the interpretivist paradigm because I cannot generalize my findings or collect data from a random sample. My research does not seek to imply that mindfulness techniques will cause a decrease in problematic social emotional

behaviors but rather seeks to find a connection between mindfulness techniques and a positive expression of social emotional skills. As previously discussed, I am not able to generalize my findings outside of my classroom. Furthermore, I do not have a random sample as data will only be collected from the students within my classroom, who have been approved to participate.

My proposal has truth value because I have operationalized my variables using the information I gathered in my literature review, my own experiences as a preschool teacher and my school's definition of Life Skills. I have clearly explained and defined social emotional skills in a way that I believe other teachers can relate to and understand. I have asked my Alverno peers, Rita Narwocki-Chabin and various school administrators to read my survey questions and observation form to provide feedback. I have made many changes, such as how I worded my survey questions based on these suggestions.

I realize that I have a close bond with my K4 students and this may affect my results in some way. For example, I may feel empathetic toward a particular student on any given day and hesitate to make a tally mark. I may know information about each child and their behavior because their parent shared a behavioral concern with me. I may be unintentionally biased. I have committed myself as a researcher to fairly observe students as I cannot have any one else make observations for me. However, future researchers may want to have an independent observer to address this researcher/participant relationship.

As I have explained, my research cannot be generalized outside of my classroom. As a researcher, I do expect that my research would be able to provide an example of one teacher who implemented a mindfulness method and the results may open the door to further conversation at other classrooms or schools. My naturalistic inquiry offers a description of social emotional skills in preschool children and how mindfulness may impact their educational experience.

Perhaps my research may be used by other teachers interested in trying a mindfulness intervention that is easy to implement and cost-effective. My research has helped start a conversation with my own colleagues and administrators about what we can do to improve student behavior within our K4 program.

I have provided consistency within my research by specifically describing how I plan to carry out my research within the methods section. I have included citations, search terms, the Calm-Down Cards, parent surveys, and thoroughly describe how I plan to carry out the intervention. I believe I have supplied a solid foundation of research, data collection methods and a logical approach to my research question, so that other researchers would be able to understand my interpretation of the problem.

Ethics

My research has the potential for harm. One possible area for harm I address in the IRB form is the possibility that parents/guardians would feel their child is being identified as having poor social emotional skills. The strategies I will implement to reduce this risk is to clearly explain to parents/caregivers that this research is to enhance the development of social skills in their children to better prepare them for transition to kindergarten. The social emotional skills I am evaluating are specifically embedded in our school's report card and are part of the behaviors I typically observe. I offered parents a copy of the Life Skills section of the report card during Meet and Greet as I explained my research.

Another potential area for harm is that I am observing young children, who cannot legally give their own consent. I have addressed this issue by having parental consent. In order to obtain this consent, I have created the Informed Consent Form that parents/guardians can read in their

own language (English or Spanish). To create these bilingual forms, I asked my preschool coordinator and also the school secretary to translate them. I also had the parent survey checked by a Spanish speaking co-worker. To the best of my ability, I had a plan in place to ensure the Informed Consent Form was easily understood, clear, and explained my research accurately.

I protected the anonymity of each child and family who chose to participate in my research study by requesting that families do not put their child's name on the survey form. I will not use any child's name or personal information on my observation form or in my results section. I fully disclosed who I am, the school I attend, and the details of my research proposal. Finally, although no child asked why I was making tallies, I had planned to respond by saying, "I am watching all the learning we are doing today and taking notes to help me be a better teacher".

Data Analysis

The approach I have taken to analyze data is three-fold. Firstly, I present findings on the impact the mindfulness intervention had on children's expression of social emotional skills in the classroom. Secondly, I discuss data regarding caregiver opinion of their child's social emotional skills before and after the mindfulness intervention. Lastly, I provide a description of the reflections and expressed needs of the students themselves.

To gather data, I observed the students in my classroom during our literacy block for ten days pre-intervention and for 10 days during the intervention (Calm-Down Cards and Child Check-In, Appendix A, Appendix C). Using the Student Observation Form (Appendix B), I made tallies each time I witnessed a specific behavior listed on this form. Each instance of behavior was tallied. For example, if a child left his or her seat 3 times, I tallied the behavior as occurring 3 times. I also made a tally to mark each time a student reported they wanted water,

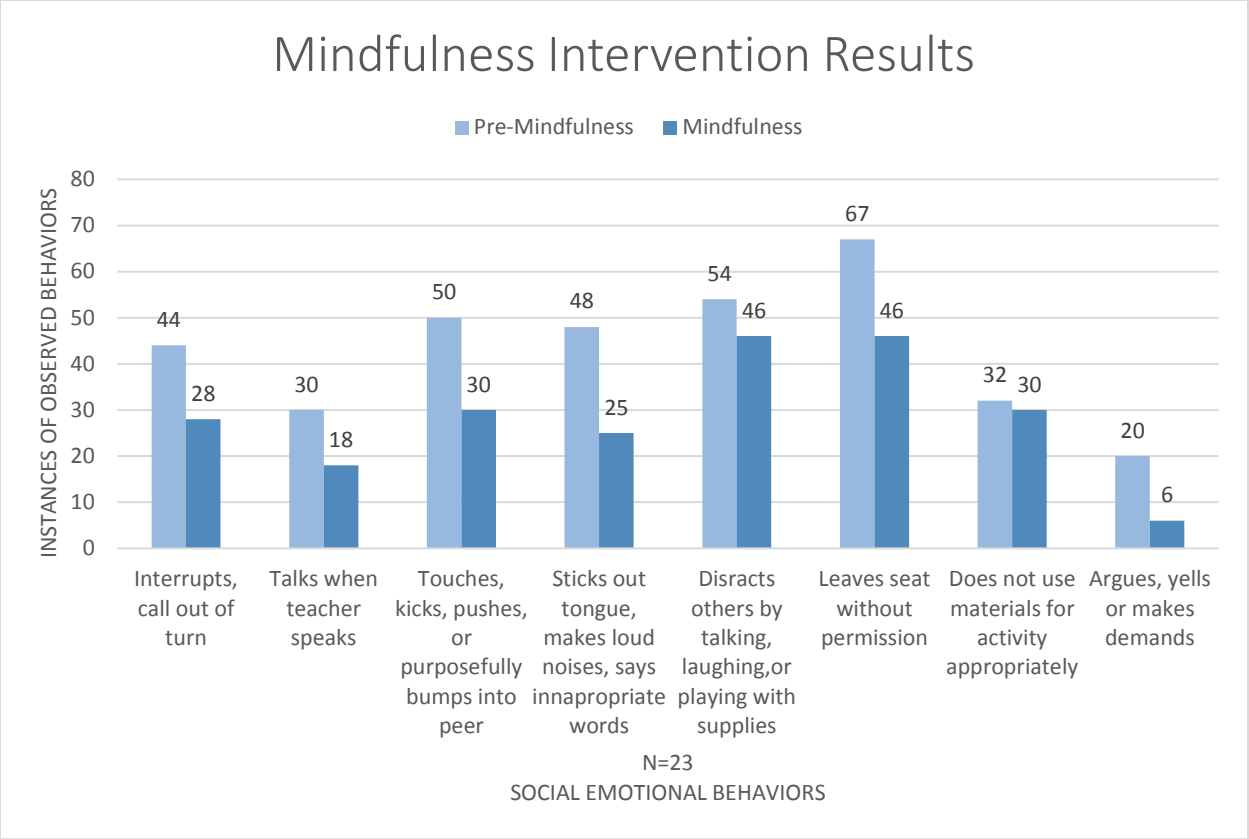
movement, share or rest time. The first week of data collecting were difficult. The original Student Observation Form I used was too complicated and long. I was not able to keep up with marking the behavior. I needed to throw out the first week of pre-intervention data because I knew it could not be accurate. I then created a new Observation Form that was easier to read, more specific and allowed me to find and mark behaviors quickly.

Upon careful review of this observational data, I found that the mindfulness intervention impacted social emotional skills in the following ways: there were less instances of interrupting and calling out of turn, talking out, touching, kicking, or purposefully bumping into others, distracting others, leaving seat without permission, using materials inappropriately and arguing. My interpretation of results are that the mindfulness intervention I implemented did decrease problematic behaviors in the classroom. The observational notes I took during the intervention contained comments such as, "Students are quieter today" and "Students seem calm". In general, my classroom observations during the intervention period were that students were working quietly, there was less talking and less instances of calling out and leaving their seats. To further examine the findings, there may be other factors that influenced child behavior, such as day of the week, special events at school, or the child's general well-being (hunger, illness, tiredness).

In summary, the data reflects there were less instances of problematic behaviors while using the Calm-Down cards and Child-Check In form. As the class and I moved through the song and movement activities, I often stopped and assessed how they felt. For example, after we sang "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes", I then asked them how they felt. The children responded with a variety of answers, such as "I feel sick." "I feel strong" "I feel excited". At the end of the Calm-Down card activities-I again asked the students how they felt. The children were very engaged in this process and appeared eager to share their answers with me and with their

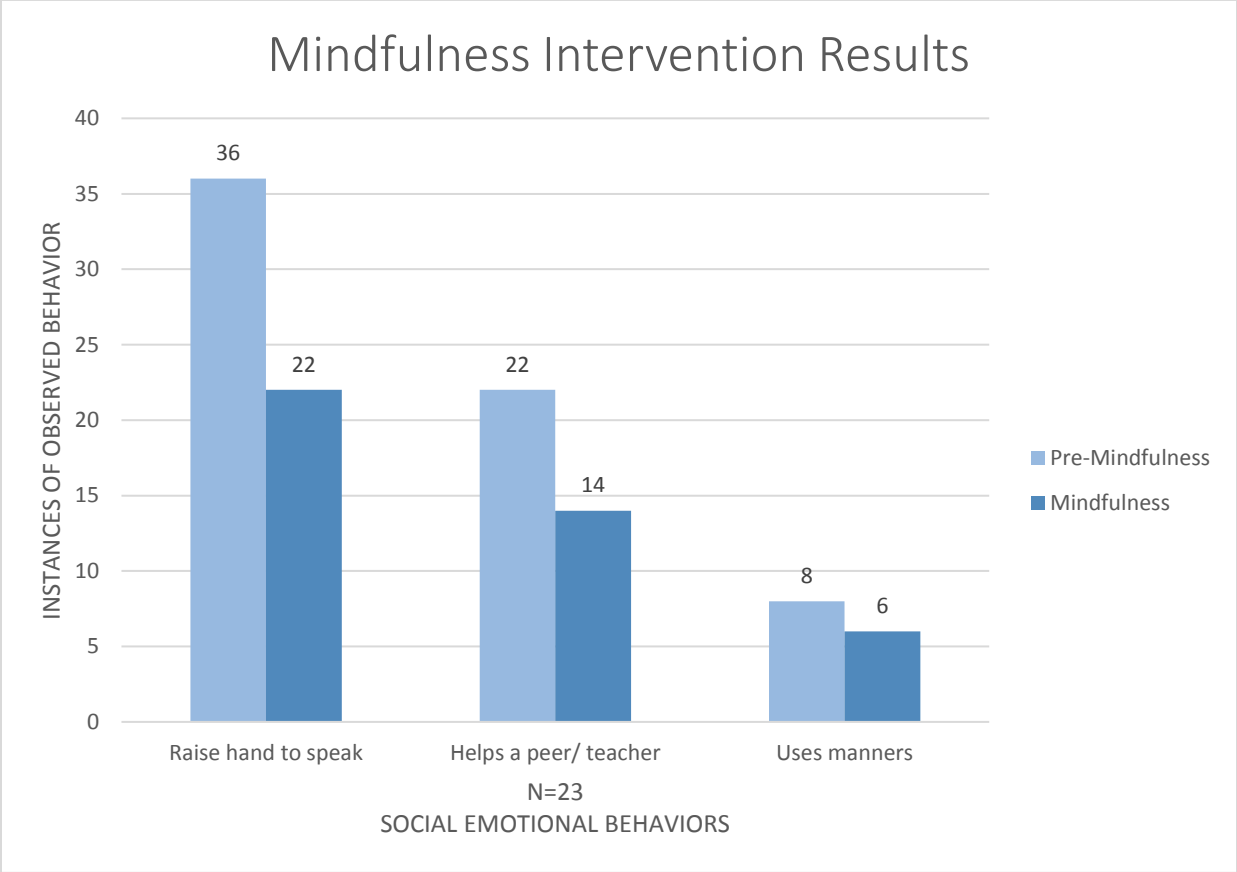
peers. Additional anecdotal notes I made during the intervention were that the children were generally quieter as they worked within their groups. There was less talking in general and they seemed more focused on the task at hand. There was less arguing and distracting others-which I believe may lead to a more effective learning environment. When I used the Child-Check in form during each small group, the children quickly took a break and returned to the learning activity with minimal interruption. Giving the children a small break appeared to help them with their learning because they seemed more focused. Overall, the data reveals the mindfulness intervention decreased all problematic behaviors except for raising hand to speak, helping a peer/teacher, and using manners. This interesting finding is explained below, in Chart 2. Firstly, I examine the decreased behaviors as listed in Chart 1.

Chart 1: Mindfulness Intervention Results



These findings show that there were less instances of the measured behavior during the mindfulness intervention. Chart 2 tells a different story in that there were more instances of raising hand to speak, helping behaviors, and manners in the pre-mindfulness data collection period. Please refer to Chart 2.

Chart 2: Extended Mindfulness Intervention Results



My interpretation of these results are that perhaps the mindfulness intervention did not impact raising hand, helping, and manners. However, this data could have been affected by a number of factors. One is that there may have naturally been less opportunity for children to raise their hand during the mindfulness intervention. Also, it could be that there were less ways for a child to help a peer or myself. The number differences are minimal with using manners, such as saying please and thank-you. I think it would be interesting to further explore how mindfulness directly impacts behaviors that reflect kindness.

The third set of data focuses on caregiver perception of their child's social emotional skills as found through the pre and post-surveys. The pre-surveys were sent home near the first

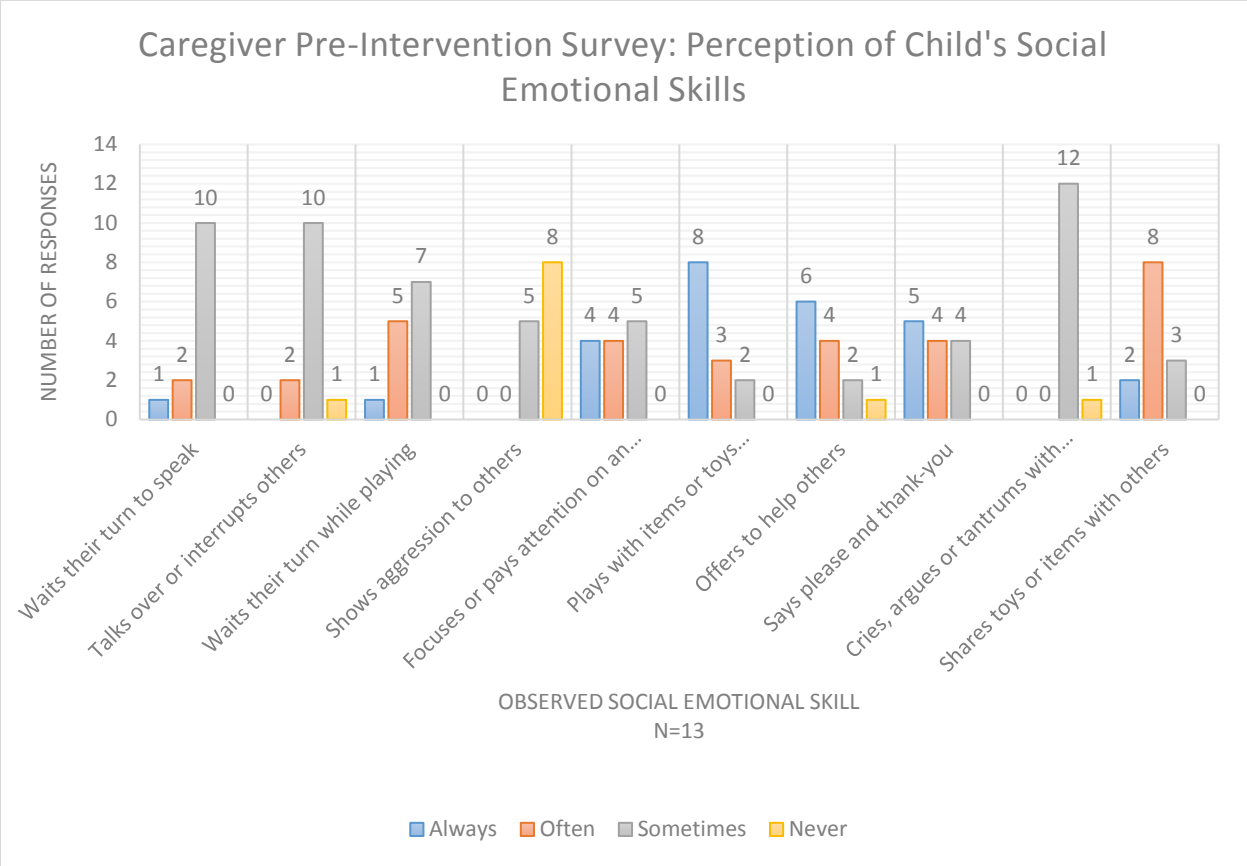
week of the mindfulness intervention. I had them translated into Spanish. All participant families received a copy in English and Spanish. The surveys were sent home in each child's weekly "Wednesday Folder". I found this to be the quickest and most reliable way to distribute the surveys. Families then returned the surveys in the same folder. I took them out and did not record the child's names. I intentionally did this so my intervention observations would not be influenced by parental reports of their child's behavior outside of school. I wanted to get a general idea of parental concerns and needs regarding behavior. In the future, my school has asked that all K4 teachers use the survey I made in the beginning and end of the school year to monitor parental concerns and child behavior. These surveys would contain the names of the children, so that teachers could best serve their individual needs. For this research, I chose to keep the surveys anonymous as I was looking at data as a whole group.

Parental response to both the pre and post-survey was low, with 14 and 10 of the 23 families returning the survey. As many of the families do not have access to internet, I had chosen to use paper surveys, translated in both English and Spanish. My thoughts are that families were not willing to disclose personal information about their child's behavior, even anonymously. Our school has high expectations for behavior. Perhaps families felt a certain amount of hesitancy to disclose any behavioral issue with their child. Another factor that may have influenced the low return rate is that our families typically have many flyers and other items they need to turn in each week. They may have opted to not take the survey because of time constraints.

Out of the 13 families that did respond to the pre- survey, 12 replied that they sometimes observed their child waiting their turn to speak, talking over or interrupting others and crying, arguing or having a tantrum with other children. I can infer that most survey respondents noticed

these types of behavior in their child. 5 participants responded that their child sometimes showed aggression to others. Caregivers also noted positive behaviors. 8 responded that their child often shares and 8 families also reported that their child often uses toys appropriately. I used this information to gather a general idea of parental opinion about their child's behaviors. Going into my research study, I was able to look at this data and make the connection that most parents responding to the survey (n=13) reported their child never showed aggression but sometimes cried, argued or had a tantrum around other children.

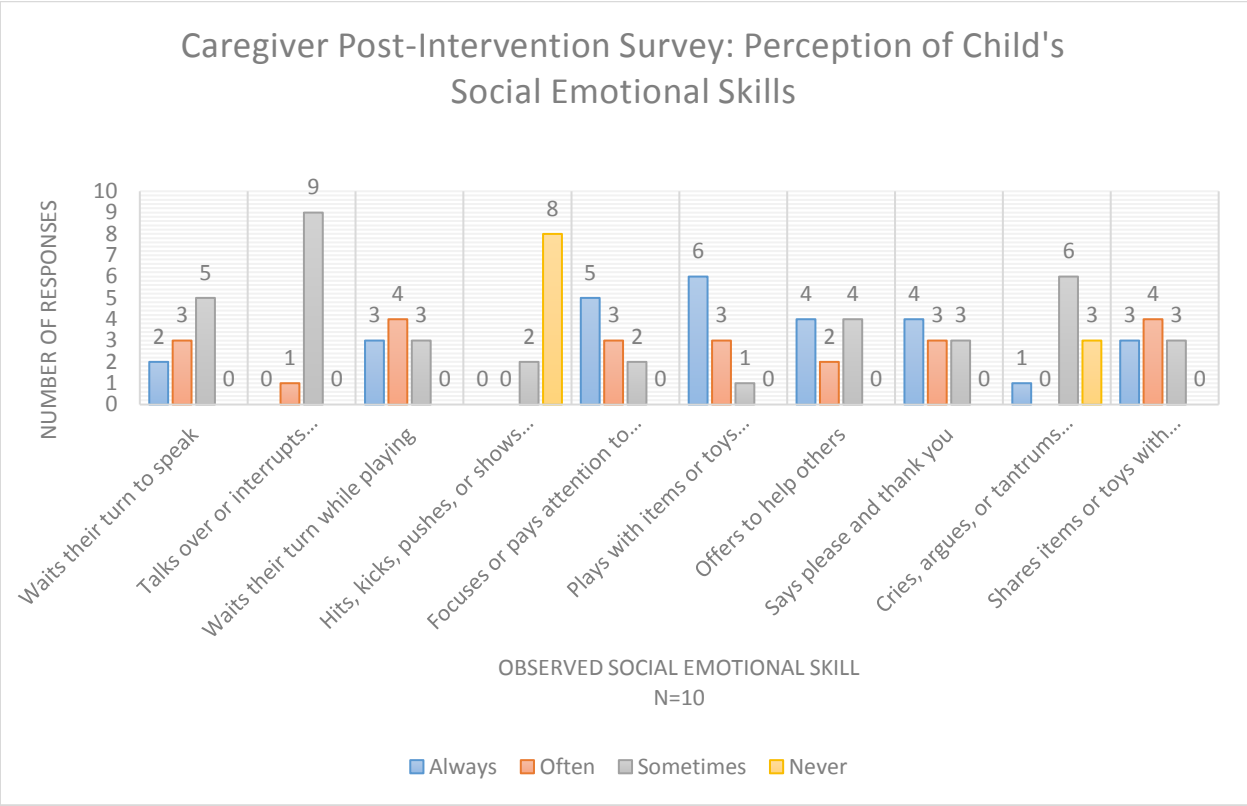
Chart 3: Caregiver Pre-Intervention Survey: Perception of Child's Social Emotional Skills



After the mindfulness intervention was complete, I sent out the post surveys in the same way as the previous survey. Again, there was a low response rate of 10 out of 23 families choosing to respond. The post survey has one additional question: Since beginning school and learning mindfulness techniques (deep breathing, balancing and movement) do you notice any positive changes in your child's behavior? 5 respondents answered yes, they did notice a positive change in their child's behavior. 3 respondents answered they "sometimes" noticed a positive improvement and 3 did not answer the question. This data can only be used as a general guide to parental opinions because I did not collect student names, I do not know if the families turned in

both a pre and post survey. Future research may collect specific information about individual parent opinion. For my purpose, I can point to a trend that mindfulness may have lessened overall parental concern about behavior in one area: child cries, argues or tantrums was reported less times. However, since survey respondents were small, and their identity was unknown- I cannot draw a formal conclusion, but make an informal observation. Please see Chart 4 below:

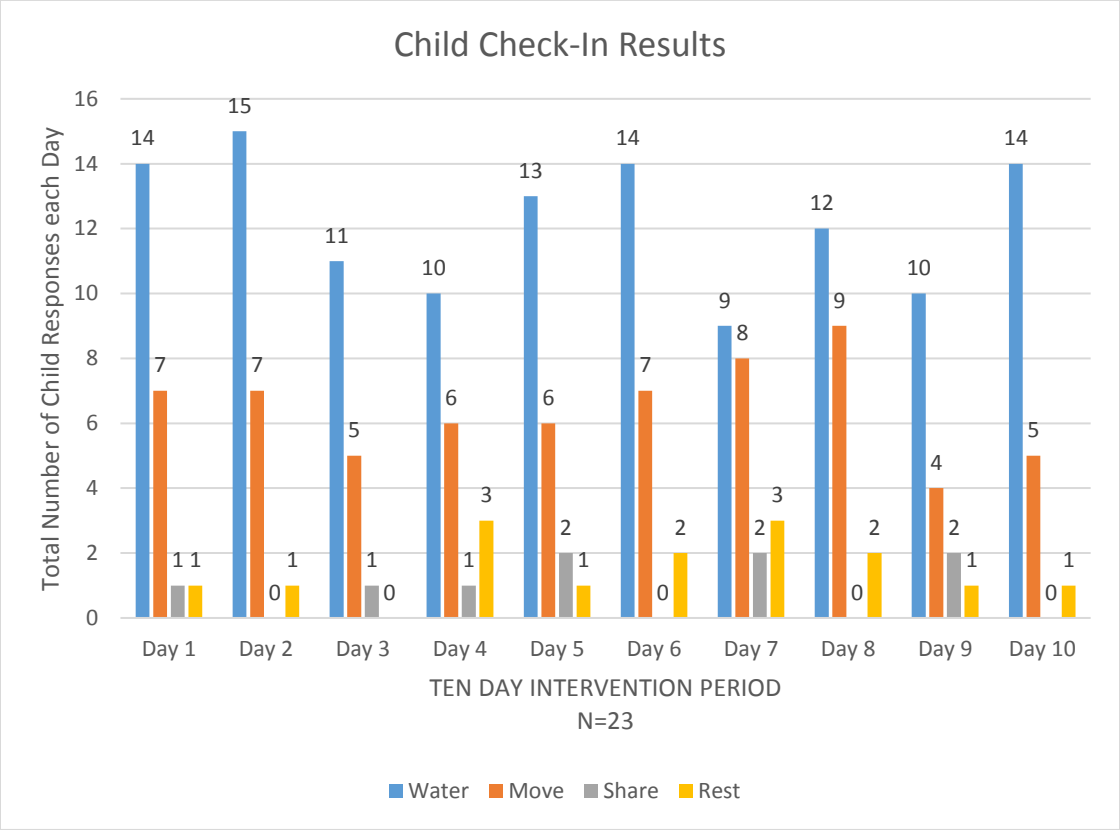
Chart 4: Caregiver Post-Intervention Survey: Perception of Child's Social Emotional Skills



Lastly, I tabulated data collected from the daily Child Check-In Form. My goal was to gather information from the children themselves. During the process of implementing the mindfulness intervention, I talked with the children about the importance of listening to our bodies. I modeled to them how to identify feelings in the body. For example, I would say, I feel

thirsty, what could I do? Children would then say, “Get a drink of water!” I encouraged them to take turns sharing how they felt to myself and their peers. Anecdotally, I observed the children happily participating and actively sharing their feelings to me and with each other. Over time, they hesitated less about making a decision about what they needed. With practice, their answers became more confident and they easily pointed to the pictures on the Child Check-In form. Interestingly, they most often reported they needed a drink of water and to move. This knowledge helped me meet the needs of the children in my classroom. Scheduling a consistent water or movement break during small group time appeared to matter to my students. The results are listed below.

Chart 5: Child Check-In Results



Implications and Future Research

This research has greatly impacted my classroom teaching. As I learned about mindfulness and started implementing techniques in my classroom, I began to see a transformation in my students and in the overall classroom atmosphere. I observed that students appeared calmer, quieter and more focused. Beyond that, the children appeared happier. They openly shared their feelings, identified how their bodies felt and were able to express their needs. For myself, I highly value asking children how they feel. I keep in mind that they are little human beings, with preferences and needs-that go beyond basic academic learning. In my opinion, listening to my students enabled them to listen to each other. We were able to create a safe space within the classroom that allowed everyone to feel their feelings and be accepting of

that. In that regard, classroom culture was improved, because we showed a genuine care and concern for each other. I believe this may have also impacted student behavior. For example, I observed that students were kind to each other. They asked each other questions like, "Are you ok?" They appeared sincerely concerned if a peer was upset and came to me for help. I continued to use the Calm-Down cards and Child-Check in after my formal research was over, as I believe it became a valuable and integral part of my classroom.

There are many ideas I have regarding future implications for this research. I wonder what would happen if the Calm-Down cards were used without the Child-Check in form? Do they need to be used together to have positive results? Is the feelings check in as critical as the songs and movement? Is it most effective to use both interventions? I also think it would be an interesting study to see if mindfulness techniques contribute to happier students, if happiness were clearly defined. Would it also contribute to less suspensions or enable children to recover from behavioral setbacks faster?

One final area of future research could be how mindfulness impacts specific student learning outcomes and parental opinion of their child's learning and behavior. Gathering parental information, although limited in this study-could be an area of research. For me, working together with families helped me better understand their concerns about their child's behavior. I also wonder how mindfulness may have contributed to learning in my classroom. Did it help students learn their letters better? Were they able to make connections and retain more information? Discovering how mindfulness may impact literacy in a preschool classroom would be exciting to study. As a teacher, I look for ways to teach literacy effectively. I think a mindfulness approach to literacy would be fascinating.

On a personal level, my school is interested in the results of this study. My preschool coordinator recognizes that I have no need to take my students to the office and is fully supportive of the mindfulness techniques I am using. I have been asked to provide my school with a copy of the parent pre and post survey, so that all K4 classrooms can begin using them next year. Other teachers have asked me about my study and expressed interest in learning more. I plan on bringing the Calm-Down cards and Child-Check In form to our next grade level meeting-as teachers have asked me to show them how they work. I am excited to be able to share these ideas with my colleagues and my school. I plan on continuing to share what I have learned with my school, teachers, families, future students and other professionals interested in mindfulness and preschool education.

In conclusion, this research proposal has guided my teaching, been an instrument of change in my classroom and has helped me grow professionally. On a personal level, mindfulness has changed my life and I am excited that it impacted the littlest learners in my classroom.

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