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Harmonizing Social Emotional Learning for Students with Special Needs

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This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the program chair, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education.

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Harmonizing Social Emotional Learning for Students with Special Needs

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A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

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Abstract

Students with intellectual disabilities (ID) typically face difficulties with social emotional skill sets, yet many classrooms for students with ID do not incorporate social emotional learning in the curriculum. Modifying SEL programs to fit the needs of students may be an appropriate solution, however, little research exists exploring the effects of modifying various SEL programs to fit the needs of students with intellectual disabilities (ID). This research explores the benefits of modifying multiple social emotional learning (SEL) programs to best fit the needs of students with intellectual disabilities. Qualitative methods were used in order to investigate how SEL programs and music therapy affects the behavior of students with intellectual disabilities. Participants include seven elementary school students who have been found eligible to be in a special day classroom for students with moderate intellectual disabilities. Two SEL programs, The Zones of Regulations and Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), were modified to teach students five different emotions. The emotions were taught through music and songs. The results of this study reveal how teachers' reactions to students' responses to questions about their students' emotional states affected student self-identification of their emotions. When teachers are more aware of their reactions and responses to students, they can remain neutral and allow students the safe, unbiased space to choose an emotion that is directly correlated to their internal and external behaviors.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Statement of Purpose	1
Overview of the Research Design	3
Research Findings	4
Research Implications.....	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	7
Background Information.....	8
Historical background of social emotional programs.....	9
Developmental background.....	10
Social Emotional Learning	11
Effects of social emotional learning.....	12
SEL school and classroom programs.....	13
SEL Program Strategies and Interventions.....	14
PATHS curriculum.....	14
Music therapy.....	16
Zones of Regulation.....	16
Modification of SEL.....	17
Chapter 3: Methods	21

Description and Rationale for Research Approach	21
Research Design	23
Research Site	23
Participants	24
Sampling Procedure	26
Methods	27
Data Analysis	33
Validity and Reliability	34
Chapter 4: Findings	36
Students Increased Ability to Identify Emotions of Self and Others	36
Ability prior to intervention.	37
Student participation.	37
Ability to identify own emotions.....	39
Increased ability when allowed non-verbal responses.....	42
Overuse of happy.....	44
Ability to identify others' emotions.....	45
Misidentifications.	46
Teacher reactions.....	48
Tool use increasing self-regulation	49
Use of Music Increased Student Engagement.....	53
Conclusion	56

Ch. 5: Implications	58
Implications for the Literature	60
Implications for Practice and Policy.....	62
Limitations of the Study	65
Directions for Future Research	66
References.....	68
Appendix A: Teacher Interview Questions	72
Appendix B: Teacher Survey Questionnaire	75
Appendix C: Lesson Example.....	77
Appendix D: IRB Acceptance Letter	80

List of Tables

Table 1 Student Description.....	24
Table 2 A Description of Songs.....	27
Table 3 Coping Mechanisms for each emotion	31
Table 4 Student ability to identify emotions.....	38
Table 5 Ability to identify personal feelings before and after intervention	40
Table 6 Student emotional identification.....	44
Table 7 Emotional regulation tools	49
Table 8 Ability to regulate negative feelings before and after intervention.....	52

Chapter 1: Introduction

Students with special needs spend six to eight hours a day in school for eight to twelve years. They are learning the academic skills that are needed to complete their education, yet there is still a huge component missing from their education. Students with special needs, more specifically, students with intellectual disabilities, also need social emotional skills embedded into their curriculum. There are social emotional learning (SEL) standards in all 50 states in America, yet none include standards for students with special needs (NCSL, 2018). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies five SEL skills, which are: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (NCSL, 2018). These skills are important for students within general education, but foundational and critical for students in special education who do not intuitively have the emotional skill sets needed to function in society. To be taught the skills that general education students are being taught will increase students with special needs' social and emotional skills and allow them to have a greater chance of being successful with interpersonal relationships, relationships with themselves, and being a successful citizen in society.

Statement of Purpose

Students with intellectual disabilities (ID) typically have difficulties recognizing and regulating emotions, monitoring behavior, preventing high-risk behaviors, coping with interpersonal conflicts, carrying out solutions effectively, and avoiding negative behaviors (Elias, 2004; Feuerborn & Tyre, 2009; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007). Despite these difficulties, these students' social and emotional challenges can be addressed with the support of a SEL curriculum. Furthermore, inclusion not only means to include all students in the classroom, but to ensure all students are being equitably taught based on their specific needs;

supporting the social emotional needs of students with intellectual disabilities is one way to work toward inclusion.

In prior research, it is proven that the skill sets and the emphasis on social emotional learning (including specific skillsets) teaches skills that students with intellectual disabilities have difficulties with (Elias, 2004). Some studies prove the following benefits may occur from incorporating SEL curriculum: recognizing and regulating emotions, monitoring behavior, preventing high-risk behaviors, coping with interpersonal conflicts, carrying out solutions effectively, and avoiding negative behaviors (Elias, 2004; Feuerborn & Tyre, 2009; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007). Many different SEL curriculums are included in schools and it can be difficult to choose the right SEL program to fit the school or classroom community. SEL programs are also created in a general manner, in order to be broad enough to meet a wide variety of students' needs, but there no SEL programs exist for students with special needs. Music therapy also helps students learn how to self-express emotions and represents an alternative language (music) to reach students with intellectual disabilities (Music Therapy, 2015; Nordoff & Robbins, 2006). Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to examine how the implementation of multiple, modified SEL programs affects the behaviors of students with ID in a Northern California special day classroom and how music integration helps develop students' understanding of SEL concepts.

Although I found beneficial results in my research, there is little prior research examining the benefits of multiple SEL programs modified to fit the needs of this student group. There is also little research observing the benefits of incorporating music to teach students curriculum. This research aims to answer the following two questions: How does the implementation of

multiple, modified SEL programs affect behavior of students with intellectual disabilities? How does including music help students understand the concepts of social emotional learning?

Overview of the Research Design

Considering findings from previous research conducted on SEL programs for students with ID and the findings in this study, students benefit emotionally and behaviorally from the integration of SEL in the classroom. The targeted SEL skills were identifying emotions and regulating behavior using tools and strategies that were provided and taught. A six-week study was conducted in which the researcher modified two SEL programs, Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) and The Zones of Regulation, to fit the emotional needs of the student participants. The participants in this study included seven students with intellectual disabilities who were students in 3rd-5th grade in a Special Day Classroom in Northern California. In addition, one teacher and three paraeducators were involved in this study. The researcher introduced five different emotions: happy, sad, mad, silly, and frustrated. These emotions were taught through the use of colors, adapted from The Zones of Regulation, where each emotion was represented by a specific color and emoticon. Each emotion was taught weekly through songs, and each emotion had a specific song which was played every day for the week. As part of the study, the researcher asked students twice a day for six weeks how they were feeling and students were able to communicate their emotions using verbal or non-verbal responses. Data was collected through daily classroom observations, teacher interviews, and teacher and paraeducator surveys. By the end of the 6-week intervention, students were able to participate in identifying their emotions 100% of the time and began identifying the emotions of others. Students were also able to use tools and strategies provided to them to regulate their emotional behavior. My positionality in the classroom was a researcher and a student teacher in a Master of

Science degree program, which included obtaining a mild/moderate Special Education Credential.

This is a qualitative study conducted through a transformative philosophical worldview. A qualitative approach was chosen for this study in order to gain a better understanding of how adopting social emotional learning (SEL) programs affects behavior in individual classrooms. Taking a qualitative approach involves collecting data through surveys, interviews, and informal observations of the participants. The data collection methods for this study included: surveys completed by teachers and paraprofessionals, interviews with the teacher, and researcher's classroom observation notes. This study was also guided by a transformative philosophical worldview, which focuses on the needs of groups and individuals in our society that may be marginalized or disenfranchised (Creswell, 2014). The goal of the study is to promote the inclusion of social emotional learning curriculum for students who have not mastered the social skill sets.

This research was conducted in the natural setting of the students, for students are more comfortable in their classroom setting and because this is a vulnerable population, ensuring their comfort and safety takes priority. This study aims to empower students to cope with emotional hardships and learn how to self-regulate their behavior.

Research Findings

Through this research, I found that continuously making modifications to the SEL curriculum benefitted students. Creating an inclusive SEL program is important, but also modifying it, and continuing to modify it when needed will make the biggest improvement in student response and behavior. I found that when given only a verbal choice, students are less willing to engage and participate in the research study. Once the realization that some students

preferred, or could only communicate non-verbally, I modified the data collection to include non-verbal responses, such as student gesturing to what emotion they feel on the Zones of Regulation chart. Once students were given the explicit choice to gesture, or point, to the emotion they feel, the participation and motivation to self-identify emotions increased. What SEL programs you teach and how you teach them affects students' internal and external behaviors, confidence, and the way they perceive themselves and others around them.

Many findings that came out of this study; through the six-week SEL intervention, there was an increase in students' ability to identify their own emotions and the emotions of others. Students became more comfortable with discussing their emotions and were taught what the focused emotions were and what they looked and felt like. Participation and student ability increased when given a non-verbal choice of communication, such as pointing to an emotion rather than verbally communicating. When students would identify their emotions, misidentifications occurred, which could be due to comfort or teacher reactions and responses. Students used tools and strategies to increase their emotional regulation. The emotions were taught through music, which increased engagement during instruction.

Research Implications

Considering the lack of research and knowledge about modifying multiple SEL programs to fit the diverse needs of students with ID, there should be trainings on how to use different SEL programs as a baseline of how to teach students social and emotional skills and curriculum. Once teachers understand the goals and focuses of different SEL programs, they can use their knowledge to choose what to include in their modified SEL curriculum to fit their students' needs and consider which skills they need and how to teach those skills. The needs of students

that teachers need to consider can include (but not limited to): language barriers, mild to severe disabilities, interests, age, culture, and socioeconomic status.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Students with intellectual disabilities (ID) typically face difficulties with social emotional skill sets, yet many classrooms for students with ID do not incorporate social emotional learning in the curriculum. Research has shown that if SEL is incorporated into the classroom, the following benefits may occur: recognizing and regulating emotions, monitoring behavior, preventing high-risk behaviors, coping with interpersonal conflicts, carrying out solutions effectively, and avoiding negative behaviors (Elias, 2004; Feuerborn & Tyre, 2009; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007). Existing SEL programs, however, may not fit the needs of all students in classrooms. Therefore, modifying SEL programs to fit the needs of students may be an appropriate solution. Including different teaching methods to educate students about SEL curriculum could further support the students. Moreover, incorporating music therapy into SEL could help support the SEL program by introducing skills in a different learning format. This would help students understand how to express their emotions through the benefits of singing and dancing (Music Therapy, 2015). However, little research exists exploring the effects of modifying various SEL programs to fit the needs of students with intellectual disabilities (ID).

In the following review of literature, I will discuss three main themes. First, I will discuss the history and structure of Special Education classrooms. I include a discussion on the progress of special education in the United States, the history of social emotional programs in schools, and the developmental background of students with intellectual disabilities to help readers understand the background of the research. Second, I explore how social emotional learning in schools and classrooms supports student learning in general, and specifically improves the behavior of students with intellectual disabilities. Through the process of modifying existing

SEL programs, teachers can support the needs of their students. Third, I consider some SEL strategies and interventions commonly used to regulate behavior in the classroom. Two SEL programs are given special attention as they are used in the research setting: Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program and The Zones of Regulation. In this study, these programs were modified to incorporate music therapy.

Background Information

The existing literature on the history of special education shows how important education is to those who have disabilities. It is essential to understand the history of special education and how students are affected by this history because, in order to change these students' future learning experiences, we must understand the past. Next, the history of how social emotional learning became more prevalent in education is discussed. Social emotional learning continues to grow in education, yet there are no present CA State Standards discussing social emotional learning in the classroom. Lastly, the developmental background of students with intellectual disabilities is discussed to better understand this population of students' behavioral difficulties.

History of Special Education. Students with intellectual disabilities have not always had the same educational opportunities as those who have no diagnosed disability; this is due to the lack of inclusivity in educational institutions. In 1954, the case *Brown v. Board of Education* focused on working toward equal public educational opportunity for all, regardless of race, gender, or disability. The *Brown v. Board* decision informed a public education system that aimed to provide public education to all people (Esteves & Rao, 2008). People with disabilities were afforded nearly the same educational opportunities as everyone else, and this opened doors to jobs, and a normal way of life. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the State Schools Act provided grants to states that assisted the education of children with

disabilities. These acts were passed in 1975 and this guaranteed free public education to those with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education, 2010). In 1973, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act stated that any persons with a disability cannot be denied benefit from any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Section 504 essentially prohibited discrimination based on disability, and this act applied to all public schools. In 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) required public schools to provide “a free and appropriate education” to all children (US Department of Education, 2008).

Historical background of social emotional programs. According to various researchers, social emotional learning is defined as the “knowledge and skills that children acquire through social and emotional-related education, instruction, activities, or promotion efforts that help them recognize and manage emotion, engage in responsible decision making, and establish positive relationships” (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2009, p. 21). The term SEL has been examined by many researchers, one of whom was Maurice Elias. Elias researched the emotional intelligence of children with disabilities in schools by focusing on specific skill sets that, if understood, would improve the students’ social relationships among themselves and others around them. Elias concluded that SEL reflected both the social and emotional skills that are needed to have a successful academic learning experience (Elias, 2004). Maurice Elias, Roger Weissberg (another SEL researcher) and the W.T. Grant Foundation teamed up and created the W.T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence (Edutopia, 2011).

Elias, Weissberg, and youth-development experts released a framework for incorporating social and emotional learning in schools. This group said that “identifying and labeling feelings, expressing feelings, assessing the intensity of feelings, managing feelings, delaying gratification,

controlling impulses, and reducing stress” are the emotional skills necessary for emotional competence (Edutopia, 2011, p. 1). By creating the W.T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, researchers created core social and emotional competences that future schools could use to create social and emotional frameworks to help improve behavior in the classroom (Addressing Barriers to Learning, 1997). In 1994, the organization Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, now known as Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), was created in response to the increased familiarity of SEL in the schooling system (Edutopia, 2011). CASEL’s goal was to establish high-quality, evidence-based SEL as a crucial part of students’ education beginning from preschool until the end of high school (Addressing Barriers to Learning, 1997). In 1997, CASEL partnered with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development to create a preschool through 12th grade book of practical strategies for educators to create an inclusive and organized SEL program (CASEL, 2018). This comprehensive SEL strategy book, titled *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators* allowed educators to create their own SEL program, based on different strategies and practices.

Developmental background. Students with intellectual disabilities often have cognitive difficulties with social cues that impact their behaviors (Bender & Wall, 1994; NASET, 2006); the term *cognition* covers different aspects of thinking and problem solving (NASET, 2006). Cognitive difficulties could result in poor interpretation of social events and behavioral concerns (Bender & Wall, 1994). Bender and Wall (1994) state that if students with ID do not get the support they need, their social emotional development may be severely impaired when they become young adults. The research shows that when students with ID reach the 12th grade, they are more likely to be involved with juvenile authorities (Gregory, Shanahan, & Walberg, 1986;

Huntington & Bender, 1993; Phil & McLarnon, 1984; Spafford & Grosser, 1993; Weller, Watteyne, Herbert, & Crelly, 1994). This statistic is very important because it shows that students need social emotional support when they are younger to help them cope with their emotions when they become older.

Some social emotional difficulties that students with intellectual disabilities may face include misreading social cues, misinterpreting others' feelings, being unaware of how their behaviors affect other people, and being unaware of others' perspectives (NASSET, 2006). Regardless of the academic ability of students with intellectual disabilities, there is agreement that poor social skills are a common issue for those with ID (Elias, 2004). Children with ID may have inadequate feelings vocabulary and may have trouble recognizing feelings in themselves and others (Elias, 2004). Typically, students with ID have three principal feelings: sad, happy, and mad (Elias, 2004). To build social skills, students with ID need to learn the basic social emotional skills they may struggle with such as: recognizing expressions of emotions, correctly interpreting social situations, predicting behavioral consequences of specific actions (positive or negative), learning how to resolve conflicts, and learning emotional states of others (Bruno, 1981; Cavioni, Grazzani & Ornaghi, 2017; Mattys, Cuperus, & Van Engeland, 1999; Pina, Marino, Spadaro, & Sorrentini, 2013; Saloner & Gettinger, 1985; Wiig & Harris, 1974).

Social Emotional Learning

According to the National Center for Innovation and Education (1999), there are three essential principles of social emotional learning (SEL). First, caring relationships are the foundation of all lasting learning. This principal of SEL is important because when educators establish relationships with their students, students can then develop the skills they need to build relationships with others. Second, emotions affect how and what we learn. Emotions can direct

student attention and influence learning. Third, goal setting and problem solving provide focus, direction, and energy for learning. Helping students focus on important topics is an effective practice to attempt to limit internal and external distractions (Elias, 2004). SEL curriculum attempts to recognize a specific set of skills, which are difficult for students with ID to learn. The specific skill areas that may be difficult for students with ID are: SEL skill area #1- recognizing emotions in self and others; and skill area #2- regulating and managing strong emotions (positive and negative) (Elias, 2004). In the next section of the literature review, the effects of SEL on students with intellectual disabilities will be discussed, along with the modification of two or more SEL programs in classrooms. Lastly, I will discuss classroom and school-wide SEL programs.

Effects of social emotional learning. SEL curriculum has been known to help students with intellectual disabilities with social and emotional difficulties. SEL programs offer a framework to promote the positive social, emotional, and academic growth of students (Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004). SEL helps to improve outcomes for these students by teaching them how to recognize and regulate emotions, monitor behavior, prevent high-risk behaviors, cope with interpersonal conflicts, carry out solutions effectively, and avoid negative behaviors (Elias, 2004; Feuerborn & Tyre, 2009; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007). Greenberg et al. (2003) explain that SEL instruction in the classroom improves students' abilities to emotionally understand themselves and others and that effective classroom-based SEL instruction enhances students' SEL competence (Greenberg et al., 2003). Research studies show that students need to learn more complex emotions and the vocabulary used to identify the emotions in order to identify and articulate a wide range of feelings (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2009). Studies have also shown the positive impact of SEL programs on social and academic outcomes,

including a decrease in aggressiveness, anti-social and conduct behaviors, emotional distress, depressive symptoms, and at-risk behaviors (Cavioni, Grazzani & Ornaghi, 2017; Horowitz & Garber, 2007; Tobler et al., 2000; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007).

SEL school and classroom programs. Several SEL instructional approaches can be used to promote school achievement. Social-emotional skills also can be infused into the regular academic curriculum so that academic and SEL skills are coordinated and reinforce one another. Once students possess skills such as being able to set goals and solve problems, they can apply them to enhance their study behaviors and increase their academic engagement, or these same skills can be applied to subjects such as social studies and literacy (Zins, 2007). The promotion of social emotional learning goals is seen as essential and can be taught and implemented in schools through various strategies (Zins, 2007). SEL programs can be integrated into the classroom curriculum, on a school-wide platform, or if there is not a school wide approach, teachers can individually choose to include SEL programs into their lessons (Adams, 2013).

SEL instruction provided in the classroom by the teacher is called curriculum-based SEL instruction. This means that the students are being taught the skills of SEL in the setting and with the people they spend majority of the day with. SEL instruction is typically integrated into English Language Arts and other core curriculum (Adams, 2013). Adams (2013) discusses the school-wide SEL curriculum in New York's District 75 school and their three-tiered model of intervention that also has an effective behavioral system. In this study, once the school chose to adopt a school-wide SEL program, 76% of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) met their teacher-generated social-emotional goals written into the IEP that same school year. The following year, the school incorporated SEL standards and teachers began to incorporate the succeeding standards in their daily lesson plans: addressing lack of common definition, targeting

of social skills to develop, and the low frequency and intensity of social skills training. At the end of the study, 98% percent of ASD students were on track to meet the social-emotional goals written into the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

SEL Program Strategies and Interventions

There are many different social emotional interventions and strategies that may improve the emotional needs of students with intellectual disabilities. Teachers can incorporate SEL programs into their classroom, such as Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program and The Zones of Regulation. For my research, PATHS curriculum, music therapy, and The Zones of Regulation are being incorporated into the classroom/research site. These methods were chosen based on the population of the students and considering their classroom goals. As stated above, students with ID have difficulties with self-regulation and connecting with their emotions, and these programs attempt to help with these difficulties.

PATHS curriculum. The PATHS (Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies) program focuses on promoting children's emotional development, self-regulation, and social problem-solving skills (Kam & Greenberg, 2004). PATHS takes a classroom-wide approach, which means the curriculum is intertwined with the existing curriculum in the school. This approach is beneficial when there is not a school-wide SEL program already in place.

Although the curriculum teaches individual skills, it also promotes an emotional change in classroom atmosphere to increase empathy and openness in dealing with social and emotional needs (Kam & Greenberg, 2004). Students can then learn from each other and they can begin to work together to better understand the emotional skills taught. Through PATHS, students practice and apply how to identify and describe a wide range of feelings, calm themselves through breathing techniques, and take others' perspectives to solve problems (Weissberg &

O'Brien, 2004). In a study researched by Humphrey et al. (2016), after implementing PATHS for a two-year process in two elementary aged focus groups, there was a significant increase in teachers' perceptions of change in student's social-emotional competence and pro-social behavior, and there was a decrease in emotional symptoms and conduct problems. This study indicates that PATHS benefits emotional competence in students; though it might be a slower process, due to it only being implemented in the classroom.

In another study conducted by Kam and Greenburg (2004), they examined the long-term effectiveness of Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) with children who had been identified with special needs. PATHS program focuses on promoting children's emotional development, self-regulation, and social problem-solving skills through classroom activities and lessons (Kam & Greenberg, 2004). In this study (Kam & Greenburg, 2004) there were 133 participating students with varying disabilities such as, learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, or health impairments. The 133 students came from seven elementary schools and were in the second and third grade. This study used a shorter version of the PATHS curriculum, which consisted of 60-lessons that were adapted specifically as a model for the second and third grades and were composed of units on self-control, emotions, and problem-solving. Special education classroom teachers used a modified version of PATHS that placed a greater focus on teaching and reinforcing behavioral self-control and less emphasis on the more advanced steps of problem-solving. The researchers randomly assigned special education classrooms to be either an intervention classroom or a control classroom. There was a significant difference (intervention group decreased at a rate of 0.37 points and control group increased at a rate of 0.72 points per year) found between the intervention and control groups. Considering the growth in externalizing behaviors means that students are exhibiting less

maladaptive behaviors in the intervention group. Both externalizing and internalizing behaviors of the intervention group continually decreased, while those for the control group children increased (Kam & Greenberg, 2004).

Music therapy. Music therapy was incorporated in my study due to the students having intellectual disabilities and their interest in music. Music therapy positively affects students with intellectual disabilities by stimulating attention and motivation, providing emotional support, and promoting the development of cognitive, behavioral, physical, emotional, and social skills (Music Therapy, 2015). The benefits of incorporating music into classroom instruction ranges from collaboration between students and learning teamwork to learning how to self-express emotions using the students' bodies (Nordoff & Robbins, 2006). Exposing students to music while giving instruction can be an effective way to reach special needs students, especially as an alternative language (Music Therapy, 2015). Music can be a means for letting go of frustration or anxiety and can help special needs students feel more connected to a larger community (Music Therapy, 2015). Music allows students to learn about emotions through their different senses and teaching students through song will motivate them to learn more about their emotions.

Zones of Regulation. I used The Zones of Regulation to help teach students about internal awareness and building self-regulatory behaviors (Kuypers, 2011). The Zones of Regulation curriculum was selected in order to teach children greater internal awareness and build self-regulator behaviors and socio-emotional adaptive skills (Kuypers, 2011). This SEL program is especially important to students with ID, who may have difficulties with internal awareness and regulating their emotions. The Zones of Regulation was created by Leah Kuypers in 2011 and the basic concept is to help students learn how to self-regulate by creating a system to categorize how the body feels and what emotions you feel into four colored zones. The four

colors are: blue, green, yellow, and red. Each color represents emotions that a person typically feels. The Blue Zone is used to describe feelings that involve a lack of energy or engagement, such as when one feels sad, tired, sick, or bored. The Green Zone is used to describe a state of mind when a student is ready to learn, including when one feels calm, happy, focused, or content. The Yellow Zone is used to describe feelings that occur when a student is in a state of dysregulation, including stress, frustration, anxiety, excitement, silliness, or fear. The Red Zone includes feelings that occur when a student is upset and not ready to learn, described as anger, rage, explosive behavior, panic, extreme grief, terror, or elation. The Zones of Regulation program explains to teachers how language makes a difference when speaking to students who are having difficulties behaving appropriately. Kuypers (2011) explains expected behaviors as behaviors that give people around you good or comfortable thoughts about you and unexpected behaviors as behaviors that give people uncomfortable thoughts about you.

Modification of SEL

One issue concerning SEL in schools is that there are too many programs and they are all disconnected (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007). Zins (2007) states that students need different aspects of SEL. There are different SEL programs that teach social and emotional curriculum in different ways. As written above, some schools use a certain SEL program and the school abides by it, while other schools do not have a specific SEL program in place.

Researchers have conducted studies on various SEL programs and using the different aspects of SEL programs to best fit the needs of their own students. Cook and Frye (2015) conducted a study where they modified and used two different SEL programs (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Curricula Strong Kids) to see the effects on their students. Both programs focus on the promotion of positive

social and academic skills. Cook and Frye (2015) had four focus groups: one group was taught using the PBIS program; one group used the SEL program; one group had no intervention program; and the last group had a combination of both PBIS and SEL.

Cook and Frye (2015) reported that the combination of both the PBIS and SEL programs had the highest improvements in externalizing behaviors. Teachers also reported that the combination of programs was acceptable, feasible, and fair. Students in the PBIS and SEL focus group also demonstrated a more significant positive change before and after the intervention than the other focus groups. This study demonstrates that combining SEL programs can benefit students more than using one SEL program that might not fully fit the needs fully of the students.

When looking at the effectiveness of modifying two SEL programs to best fit the needs of students, Malti, Ribeaud, and Eisner (2011) conducted a study on the efficiency of two universal preventive intervention programs on 1,675 first graders in elementary schools. In the two-year intervention program, they implemented the PATHS program and Triple-P (Positive Parenting Program) program on focus groups. There were three focus groups: a PATHS group, a Triple-P group, and a combination focus group. The results showed that the combination focus group did not show a significant increase of externalizing behavior or social competence than PATHS or Triple-P alone. The researchers are attempting to find the best possible method of incorporating SEL curriculum into the classroom. In the study conducted by Malti, Ribeaud, and Eisner (2011), the information does not support the previous study conducted by Cook and Frye (2015) but every classroom is different, and all students need different things. Perhaps one of the SEL programs did not best fit the needs of the students, so finding other SEL programs and trying them would be the next step.

The findings from the literature indicate that there is a wide variety of SEL programs that can be incorporated into special education classrooms and the benefits of such programs are significant. However, there are disagreements regarding the various SEL programs and which programs to use to best fit the school community. Prior research has focused on schools or classrooms using one SEL program and teaching students with intellectual disabilities the focused SEL skill sets. Across the literature, researchers agree SEL curriculum is beneficial for students.

The weaknesses in the literature include little research of SEL in special day classrooms since SEL programs and standards are produced for general education classrooms. There are a lack of studies using students' cognitive and developmental information to determine what SEL programs to use in the classroom. SEL programs are generalized for the majority of students instead of being chosen for the diverse population in the school. In addition, there is little research about modifying SEL programs. Many schools and classrooms use one SEL program that they feel could fit their school community the best and do not modify multiple programs to be used in their school. Additionally, there is a lack of research incorporating music and SEL programs together for students with ID.

Overall, there is a limited amount of information about the modification of SEL programs in special education classrooms. The differentiation of SEL programs is not adequately discussed, even though typically, classroom teachers differentiate core curriculum and activities to fit the needs of students in these classrooms. This research study examines the effects of teaching a modified SEL curriculum through music on the level of social emotional awareness and self-regulation skills for students with ID. I aim to offer more information about how

educators could modify SEL programs to best fit the needs of students with intellectual disabilities.

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study was to explore the benefits of modifying multiple social emotional learning (SEL) programs to best fit the needs of students with intellectual disabilities. Qualitative methods were used in order to investigate how SEL programs combined with music therapy affect the behavior of students with intellectual disabilities. This study explores two central questions: How does the implementation of multiple, modified SEL programs affect behavior of students with intellectual disabilities? How does the inclusion of music help students understand the concepts of social emotional learning?

Description and Rationale for Research Approach

To research the modifications of SEL programs to fit the needs of students in special education, I conducted a qualitative study with a transformative philosophical worldview. A qualitative approach was chosen for this study in order to gain a better understanding of how adopting social emotional learning (SEL) programs affect behavior in individual classrooms. Creswell (2004) discusses how qualitative researchers interpret, validate, and reveal the potential outcomes of a study. Qualitative researchers ask open-ended questions, collect data themselves, validate the accuracy of the findings, interpret the data, and create an agenda for reform. Taking a qualitative approach involves collecting data using surveys, interviews, and informal observations of the participants. Participants in this research project included students with special needs who have been identified as having limited communication skills; therefore, no students were interviewed.

Considering the small sample size for this project, a qualitative approach was more appropriate than a quantitative approach. Due to the vulnerable population, this research was conducted in a natural setting; I observed and collected data in the setting of the participants

(Creswell, 2014). Students are more comfortable in their classroom setting and only a few students are in general education mainstream classrooms for a few hours a week. I chose this sample of participants because the teacher emphasizes life skills and social skills. This connects with my research because there is no SEL program being implemented and I wanted to determine the behavior of the students before and after the implementation of SEL programs.

This study followed the transformative philosophical worldview, which focuses on the needs of groups and individuals in our society that may be marginalized or disenfranchised (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), “transformative worldview research contains an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher’s life” (p. 9). This research is intended to promote the inclusion of social emotional learning curriculum for students who do not have an average social skill set. Students with intellectual disabilities often have social difficulties and struggle to develop these skills without the integration of SEL curriculum (Adams 2013; Ashburner, Ziviani & Rodger 2010; Cavioni, Grazzani, & Ornaghi 2017; Elias 2004; Feuerborn & Tyre 2009; Kam, Greenberg, & Kusche 2004; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg 2007). My participants are not currently receiving any explicit social emotional learning curriculum and, after my research is conducted, my plan is to show the teacher and the school community that SEL curriculum is valuable and important; it supports students’ mental and emotional growth. Before and after implementing SEL curriculum, I shared data collection results with teachers, including interview questions, survey results, and classroom observations of student behavior.

The transformative worldview addresses important social issues such as empowerment and inequality. This study aims to empower students to cope with emotional hardships and learn how to self-regulate their behavior. The objective of the transformative worldview is to inform

administration and teachers that students with special needs can benefit, socially and emotionally, from SEL curriculum and improve the lives of children with special needs by helping them learn to regulate and cope with their feelings and emotions. A transformative worldview also allows participants to have a voice in research and allow them to improve their own lives. Participants have an opportunity to change their own lives and to advocate for themselves through learning how to self-regulate and handle emotions in everyday life. With regulation tools like these, students can live a more independent lifestyle both in school and outside of school.

Research Design

This is a qualitative research study. Data was collected through the two interviews with the special education teacher, surveys from the special education teacher and paraeducator, and classroom observations. Student behavior progress was observed and recorded daily by the researcher throughout the duration of the study to document student progress.

Research Site

The school setting where this research was conducted is at an elementary school in northern California, which I will refer to as Meadows Elementary School. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for the school, the students, teacher, and paraprofessionals. This school serves 711 individuals ranging in grades from kindergarten to eighth grade, including three special education classrooms for these ages. There are 1.1% African American students, 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native students, 4.1% Asian students, 0.4% Filipino students, 85.9% Hispanic or Latino students, and 8.3% Caucasian students (CA Department of Education). There are approximately 23 students in the three Special Day Classrooms, ranging from Kindergarten through Eighth grade. During the study, I was a student teacher in the 2nd-5th

grade Special Day Classroom for seven students with moderate intellectual disabilities, ranging from Down Syndrome to Autism Spectrum Disorder; this group of seven students works, on average, at a kindergarten academic level. This school was purposefully selected because there is not a formal social emotional program in place, so it is an appropriate location to explore a SEL program to see how the program affects students' behavior. After conversations with the principal and director of Special Education, both administrators approved the proposed study. This study did not disrupt the school day or standard student services.

Participants

The students involved in this research were seven elementary school students who were found eligible to be in a special day classroom for students with moderate intellectual disabilities. See **Table 1** below for additional information about these students.

Table 1 Student Description

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Verbal/Non-verbal	Disability/diagnosis	Services
Olivia	7	Female	Haitian/Creole	Verbal (limited) English Language Learner	Intellectual disability	Occupational Therapy
Justin	7	Male	Hispanic/Latino	Verbal, English Language Learner	Intellectual disability/partial blindness	Occupational Therapy, Visual
Jeremy	10	Male	Caucasian	Non-Verbal	Other health impairment	Occupational Therapy, Speech and language, receives

						outside resources as well.
Gregory	10	Male	Hispanic/Latino	Verbal, English Language Learner	ASD	Occupational Therapy, Speech
Randall	7	Male	Asian and Caucasian	Verbal	Speech and Language, intellectual disability, Down Syndrome	Occupational Therapy, Speech
Steve	10	Male	Hispanic/Latino	Non-Verbal, English Language Learner	Intellectual disability	Occupational Therapy, Speech
Jacob	8	Male	Hispanic/Latino	Verbal, English Language Learner	Intellectual disability	Occupational Therapy, Speech

Although the classroom is considered mild-moderate, students' disabilities are labeled as moderate and all students have significant intellectual disabilities. The most academically advanced student, who is 10 years old, is learning to write numbers up to 20. Many students are learning self-help skills rather than an academic curriculum. All students have behavioral difficulties. The only time the entire class participates in whole group instruction is during music. Two students, Randall and Steve, are dropped off and picked up by their parents, and the rest are bussed in and out of school. Jeremy wears diapers and Olivia is unable to go to the restroom independently. Olivia and Jeremy utilize sensory tools, such as a weighted vest and headphones. Gregory takes frequent breaks and leaves the classroom when he is overstimulated with noise.

Jeremy is completely non-verbal and tends to bite/hit other students or teachers. Jeremy has a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) along with an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). All students have IEPs and goals to work on throughout the school year. Jacob and Randall are mainstreamed for 30 minutes, twice a week, for language arts and music and art electives. Two of the students are new to the class because they are in 2nd grade, and the other five students have been in the classroom between two and four years. Two of the students are graduating from the 5th grade and will be moving up to the Middle School special day classroom, which is on the same campus.

The adults in the classroom include a special education teacher and three paraeducators. The classroom teacher is a 30-year-old female who has been teaching in a special day classroom for five years; she teaches alongside the three paraeducators. One of the paraeducators is a 28-year-old male who was hired three years ago by an outside agency to be a one-on-one teacher for the student with Other Health Impairments. The second paraeducator is a 44-year-old female who has been the paraeducator for two years with the main teacher. The last paraeducator is a 47-year-old male who has been a paraeducator for eight years.

Sampling Procedure

Parent consent for the students was requested through a written letter sent home in the students' take-home folders. A copy of the letter was also translated into Spanish, since the majority of the students are English Language Learners. After parental consents were returned, I began the SEL curriculum about identifying and regulating emotions. The teacher consent for the open-ended interview and behavioral survey for each student was signed and then I was able to begin the pre-intervention (SEL integration) interview and survey data collection process. Consent was also given by the paraeducators in the classroom to participate in the student

behavior surveys, which document student progress after six weeks of intervention. All surveys were completed in the classroom. All educator participants were asked to contribute to this study because they are the full-time teachers/paraeducators in the special day classroom.

Methods

SEL lessons about identifying and regulating emotions were presented in the form of musical songs. The specific concepts that were covered were emotions, including, “happy, silly, sad, mad, and frustrated,” and how to regulate these emotions. I incorporated the SEL program, PATHS (Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies), which focuses on promoting children’s emotional development, self-regulation, and social problem-solving skills (Kam & Greenberg, 2004); I taught these concepts through songs. The chart below demonstrates the material that was covered during the six-week intervention:

Table 2 A Description of Songs

Week	Song	Goal
Week 1	“Show me what you’re Feeling” by Tom Chapin Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood- PBS Kids “This is My Happy Song”	The students will understand what emotions are and how it is normal for your body to feel different emotions, but we should try to show what we are feeling and get the help we need. We will be working on the emotion “happy” this week and we will also talk about The Green Zone and the strategies we can have when we are happy!
Week 2	“Sad, Bad, Terrible Day” By The Learning Station (this classroom uses a lot of The Learning Station songs)	The students will learn about the emotion “sad” and what it looks/feels like. We will also be discussing The Blue Zone and what strategies we can use and do in the classroom to help regulate this emotion.
Week 3	“In the Group” by Tom Chapin (this song will help students understand that	The students will learn about the emotion “mad” and what it looks/feels like. We will

	students should keep their bodies in the group and classroom, even when they are mad) I found this song to work best to help students when they are mad. “I get Angry” by GrowingSound	also be discussing The Red Zone and what strategies we can use in the classroom to regulate this emotion.
Week 4	“When I’m Silly” by StoryBots	The students will learn about the emotion “silly” and what it looks/feels like. We will also be discussing The Yellow Zone and what strategies we can use in the classroom to regulate this emotion.
Week 5	“Self-Control (Character Education Song) by Heath and the Checkershoe Band	The students will learn about the emotion “frustrated” and what it looks/feels like. We will also be discussing The Yellow Zone and what strategies we can use and do in the classroom to regulate this emotion.
Week 6	Playing each song one day for the week in order to review all emotions.	Reviewing all the emotions and songs to allow students reflection on what emotions they can use to express how they are feeling.

I taught one new lesson from the curriculum on Monday and repeated the lesson every day for the entire week (see sample lesson in Appendix C). The repetition allowed students to better grasp the songs and remember them. In these lessons, I chose songs specific to the learning goals and the songs changed every week, for a total of five songs in six weeks; we also reviewed the prior week’s songs at the end of each new week (as written in the song chart above). Songs were chosen from the following: Tom Chapin’s Social Thinking album entitled “The Incredible Flexible You,” songs by The Learning Station, Learning Time Fun, Flocabulary, Heath and the Checkershoe Band, StoryBots, GrowingSound, and PBS Kids. The Tom Chapin songs that I used included, “Show me what You’re Feeling” and “In the Group”. I chose these songs because

they are about emotions and how to regulate them, but they are also catchy and easy to follow. I chose PBS Kids Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood because this interactive song discusses being happy and what things can make us happy.

I chose "Sad, Bad, Terrible Day" by The Learning Station because not only does this song explain what being sad might look and sound like, it gives students tips on how they can make themselves feel better or get the help they need from an adult. I chose "I get Angry" by GrowingSound because this song discussed what things might make a student angry and what angry may look and sound like. This song segues into teaching the students how to regulate their anger and what tools they can use when they are feeling angry. I chose "When I'm Silly" by the StoryBots because being silly is a more difficult emotion for the students to identify and they have trouble controlling their bodies when they do feel silly, so this song explained to students how being silly might look and what they can do to help control their bodies. I chose "Self-Control" by Heath and the Checkershoe Band because being frustrated is also a difficult emotion for the students to understand because many times they feel frustrated, but not angry. This song explains how frustrated looks and feels; this will provide a platform to introduce tools to use when students are frustrated.

I also incorporated the SEL program "The Zones of Regulation", which focuses on teaching children greater internal awareness and building self-regulatory behaviors (Kuypers, 2011). I taught the students the different colors of the zones, which align with the goal and emotion of the week. I created a version of "The Zones of Regulations" chart and taped each chart on the students desks. The chart had four long rectangles that were each colored a red, yellow, green, or blue. Each color visualized different emotions; I reviewed these emotions and included cartoon facial expressions to signify what emotion each color represented. I would refer

to the chart when I would express my own feelings or when the students would express their feelings. I wanted to ensure students would gain familiarity with using the chart in order to get them to express their emotions more regularly.

Each week I reviewed one of the emotions, went over the Zones of Regulation color and emoji, went over how the feeling looks/feels, and reviewed the tools and strategies that the students were provided to regulate their behavior. For example, in the first week, I discussed the emotion “happy” and asked students how happy looks and sounds. We discussed examples of what makes us happy, from eating candy to seeing a friend. When discussing the emotion “happy”, I also taught the students the Green Zone, which represents calm, happy, focused, or content. When teaching a more difficult emotion, such as mad, I focused on teaching students what mad looks like, because it is easier to visualize a physical manifestation of an emotion. I showed students the red zone and the cartoon clip art that represented a mad face. Once the 6th week of intervention was completed, the students knew what all the colors meant and what simple coping mechanisms they can use to help balance their emotions. I continuously asked students throughout the day, two to three times per day, how they were feeling and asked them to point to the color on The Zones of Regulation sheet to describe their emotions. I needed to prompt students and help them choose the color that represented how they felt. Once students began to understand what emotions the colors represented, they were able to point to the color that represented how they were feeling. This activity is especially beneficial for those students who are non-verbal. Students simultaneously learned how to cope with these emotions through using tools or strategies that were already provided for them in the classroom when they felt certain emotions. See examples of these tools in the table below.

Table 3 Coping Mechanisms for each emotion

	Strategy #1	Strategy #2
The Blue Zone (sad)	Laying down in the “quiet corner”	Hugging the class teddy bear
The Green Zone (happy)	Not applicable	Not applicable
The Yellow Zone (silly, frustrated)	Sit in the “quiet corner” of the room	Squeezing a stress ball
The Red Zone (mad)	Taking a walk outside	Deep breathing exercise

Through the use of various weekly tools and strategies, students had the option of choosing a tool or strategy, but in a controlled approach. I attempted to include a few tangible tools and multiple strategies that students can use at any time in their day, regardless where they are or what resources they have. For example, when a student was very upset and angry, they could point to red and I could ask them, “What tool can you use when you are on red to help you feel better?” The student could choose deep breathing, a break outside, or stress balls. Lessons lasted 15-20 minutes a day for six weeks (from January to Mid-February), and incorporated both PATHS and The Zones of Regulation. These programs were modified to fit the needs of these students. I combined the visual colors chart to represent feelings from The Zones of Regulation with emotional regulation goals from the PATHS program to create an SEL program to fit the needs of this group of students.

In order to understand the teacher’s perception of the adapted SEL curriculum, I conducted a 20-minute interview with the special education teacher that consisted of open-ended interview questions about students and their behavior (see Appendix A for the interview questions). I asked questions such as, “What specific emotions or feelings do your students have trouble understanding? and “When have you observed your students identifying their own feelings?” The goal of these questions was to gain insight about students before the SEL program

interventions took place and then measure improvements (through final teacher interviews after the six weeks of intervention). These interview questions also helped answer the research question, “How does the inclusion of music help students better understand the emotions that these SEL programs are attempting to teach?” The interview occurred before and after the SEL curriculum integration at a time, date, and location chosen by the interviewee. The before and after interviews were recorded on the researcher’s iPhone that is password protected. Notes were taken during the interview but did not include any names or identifying information (e.g., addresses, phone numbers, personal references).

The teacher and three paraeducators participated in a short student behavior survey questionnaire (The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) that was conducted before and after the implementation of SEL curriculum in the research process (see Appendix B). An example of a question in the survey that the teacher and paraeducators were asked to answer is, “On a scale from ‘not true, somewhat true, or certainly true, how considerate of other people’s feelings is the student?’” Another example of a question on the survey is “Overall, do you think that this child has difficulties in any of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behavior, or being able to get along with other people?” Participants will rate the students on a scale from “no” to “yes-severe”, meaning severe difficulties. The surveys helped to answer the research question “How does the modification of multiple SEL programs affect student behavior?”

As the sole researcher conducting this study, I observed the classroom daily and I took notes on student behavior. During the six weeks, I observed how students handled their emotions and if they were able to identify the emotion of the week throughout the week. Paraeducators were asked to observe students during recess and lunch. This additional observation data was beneficial because paraeducators had a different perspective of the students. Paraeducators

reported back to me (through follow-up conversations) and I recorded their observation data. I kept a journal with all my notes and took notes every day, including observation notes from the teacher and the paraeducators.

Data Analysis

After the completion of the six-week SEL curriculum to teach students about emotions, I examined the data collected (interviews, surveys, and observation notes). I segmented the data into passages pertaining to a single topic in order to prepare the data for coding. Coding the data is a process of chunking the data into categories or themes to uncover common findings. Teacher and paraeducator observation notes were also coded to ensure the validity of the results. The interviews, surveys, and observation notes were hand-coded to reveal common themes and results. After this process, I generated my themes through the process of concept mapping, which means that I took the codes that I found and separated them into different themes. The expected codes (e.g., the benefits of SEL incorporation, benefits of tools and strategies, music integration) correlated with the themes of the SEL programs and the different goals of the weeks. There were also unexpected themes, such as student misidentification of emotions and teacher responses affecting student responses.

Tables were created to compare student behavior for each week. These tables included information about the students, the week, and the observation data collected by the teacher, paraeducators, and me. Data collected to chart student behavior was analyzed to determine if learning about emotions and integrating SEL curriculum contributed to any change in behavior. Comparing the different observations between the five adults in the classroom gave a more thorough description of how the students reacted to the SEL intervention and what they learned.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher is the student teacher in the classroom, and is enrolled in a Masters program with the teacher in the Special Education classroom. The relationship between myself and the head teacher may have influenced data collection because we were both invested in wanting students to succeed and gain emotional regularity. I also believe that SEL curriculum is beneficial and I have a bias towards the benefits of SEL. As the student teacher, I had to keep in mind that I may not understand the personalities of the students and their home lives. I discussed any questions I have with the teacher, who knows the students and the families to ensure that I did not make any false assumptions in my observations. Another bias was that I wanted the students to do well and I wanted them to be able to understand their own emotions and have strategies to ensure that they can regulate their emotions. I am aware of my bias and want to keep my objectives for the research clear to ensure a valid study.

In this qualitative study, the use of multiple teacher perspectives increased the validity of the research. The different perspectives and conclusions of the teacher surveys will help determine any similar conclusions and results between us. Triangulation involves using multiple sources and perspectives of the participants in the study. I examined the evidence from the multiple sources in the classroom and using both my observations and the observations from the teacher and paraeducators to justify findings (Creswell, 2014). Any pieces of data that do not fit into the main results of the study will also be noted in the findings, to give readers all of the information received even if the information counteracts my main points. Prior to collecting data, I spent one day a week in the classroom for a few months to familiarize myself with the classroom environment. My study is generalizable to all other areas of curriculum because it shows teachers and schools how modifying curriculum can positively impact diverse students.

Chapter 4: Findings

One of the most important skills taught in schools is emotional and behavioral regulation. Unfortunately, not all social emotional learning programs (SEL) are designed to fit the diverse needs in a special day classroom whose population is primarily students with intellectual disabilities (ID). Students with ID typically face difficulties with social emotional skill sets, such as “recognize and manage emotions, engage in responsible decision making, and establish positive relationships” (Zins, 2001, p 441 & Feuerborn & Tyre, 2009, p 21). In my research, I incorporated two different social emotional learning programs, The Zones of Regulations and Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) and modified them to fit the needs of the student participants. I introduced five emotional states (happy, sad, mad, silly, and frustrated) through music instruction in order to gain the interest and engagement of the students. Through data collection of teacher interviews, teacher and paraeducator surveys and six weeks of daily student observations, I was able to see the effects of student behavior when incorporating SEL curriculum.

In the findings presented below, I discuss three central themes. First, by the end of the six-week intervention, students increased their ability to identify emotions of self and others in a broader range of emotions. Second, the use of these tools increased students’ ability to self-regulate their emotional states. Finally, the findings below demonstrate that the use of music increased student engagement with the SEL curriculum.

Students Increased Ability to Identify Emotions of Self and Others

During the six-week intervention, students were able to improve from not knowing or understanding the five different emotions to understanding and being able to identify the emotions and show what they mean. In this section, I will discuss several factors that

incorporated the students' ability to identify their emotions. Differentiated curriculum increased student engagement, which resulted in an increased ability to recognize emotions in self and others. Allowing non-verbal responses affected students' willingness to participate and identify their emotions. There were many misidentifications of emotions and an overuse of the emotion happy. Also, teacher reactions potentially effected student responses.

Ability prior to intervention. The SEL programs that I chose to integrate and modify focus on the emotional regulation and identification of emotions. Prior to the SEL integration, the teacher stated in an interview that students would only identify their own feelings approximately 50% of the time when asked. The teacher never formally taught or assessed emotions or students' ability to identify their emotions or the emotions of others. The teacher also stated that, through her personal observations, students understood basic emotions, such as happy, sad, and mad. Emotions such as silly or frustrated were more abstract and students had difficulties understanding these emotions and using them in their daily lives.

Student participation. Throughout the six-week intervention, students increased their ability to identify their emotions. In week 1, students were asked to identify their emotions six times and in all other weeks, students were asked 10 times. As shown in Table 4, student participation averaged between 73% and 100%. This table also includes the number of absences for students, and those days were subtracted from the 54 times the students were asked to express their emotions. The percentages of participation were calculated each week to give a better idea of the changes of participation between each week. Some students, such as Olivia and Jeremy, had significant lower identification percentages, due to lack of desire to verbally communicate and a disinterest in the topic of emotions. Randall had 100% participation due to his motivation

to actively participate in the classroom and his natural ability to communicate more than the rest of the students. The other students participated 90-92% of the time.

Table 4 Student ability to identify emotions

	Week 1 /6	Week 2 /10	Week 3 /10	Week 4 /10	Week 5 /10	Week 6 /10	Total- /56	Percentage of participation
Randall	6	10	10	10	10	10	56/56	100%
Olivia	3	4	5	10	8	10	40/52	76%
Jeremy	3	7	3	9	9	10	41/56	73%
Justin	5	8	10	9	10	10	52/56	92%
Gregory	6	7	9	9	10	10	51/56	91%
Steve	5	7	10	8	9	10	49/54	90%
Jacob	5	6	9	6	8	10	44/48	91%
Weekly %	33/42 78%	49/70 70%	56/70 80%	61/70 87%	64/70 91%	70/70 100%		

During the first week, students had a difficult time participating in identifying their emotions due to their low comfort level and lack of prior knowledge discussing emotions, especially those emotions that were not “happy, sad, or mad”. During the first few days of the first week, the students’ understanding of the emotions differed. Randall understood what happy, angry, and sad meant and could show, through facial expressions, what each looked like. He had difficulty, however, understanding silly and frustrated. Olivia did not understand any of the emotions and was unable to show how any emotions looked, but could identify each emotion on her zones of regulation chart. Jeremy was unable to understand any emotions and was unable to identify the emotions on his zones of regulation chart. Justin could understand the basic concept that if you are happy, you smile and if you are not happy, you are mad. He was able to identify

the emotions on the chart through facial expressions and thumbs up/down if asked what a color and its paired emoticon represented. Gregory was able to understand what happy and mad look and feel like through the use of facial expressions and basic verbal communication. Steve understood what happy meant and how it looks and feels to be happy using facial expressions and minimal verbal communication. He was unable to understand any other emotions. Jacob was able to understand what happy looked and felt, through the use of communication, but was unable to understand the other emotions. As the first week continued, all students could identify all the emotions on the Zones of Regulations charts.

As the weeks went by, Gregory steadily increased his participation, while Olivia, Jeremy, Justin, Steve, and Jacob's participation fluctuated. During the weeks, the students' participation depended on their mood that day, for they were less willing to participate when they were upset. After formally teaching students about the emotions and what they mean and what they look or feel like, the participation increased. Students felt more comfortable and willing to participate, which increased their overall percentage of participation. The repetitiveness of asking them how they felt twice a day also made them more comfortable and some students would ask me when I was going to ask them how they were feeling. Students began to expect that they would have to share how they were feeling, and it became a large part of their routine. The intervention ended with 100% participation in the last week, which indicates students were now comfortable and willing to participate in discussing their own emotions.

Ability to identify own emotions. Students were able to identify their emotions and were able to use a variety of emotions, even ones that I did not explicitly teach, to express how they were feeling. During the six-week intervention, I taught the students five emotions: happy, sad, mad, silly, and frustrated (in that order). The most difficult emotions to understand for the

students were silly, mad, and frustrated. Those emotions were also identified the least amount during the six weeks. According to the teacher and paraeducator surveys, many students were somewhat able to identify their feelings or not able to identify their feelings. After the intervention, the only student the teachers determined could not identify his emotion was Jeremy. The rest of the students were considered to be able to identify their emotion. While Jeremy participated in the activity of identifying his emotion, he was unable to consistently identify his emotions correctly. Yet the fact that Jeremy was able to participate in identifying his emotions, was a huge improvement, compared to his refusal to participate in identifying emotions prior to the intervention. Unfortunately, there is no way to know exactly how often he was correctly identifying his emotions, due to the barrier in communication. Randall, Olivia, Justin, Gregory, Steve, and Jacob all improved in being able to identify their personal feelings, and this is also demonstrated in Table 4, where the participation increased by the end of the six weeks.

Table 5 Ability to identify personal feelings before and after intervention

Students ability to identify personal feelings	Survey before Intervention	Survey after intervention
Randall	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Not true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Somewhat true	Teacher: Certainly true Para 1: Certainly true Para 2: Certainly true Para 3: Certainly true
Olivia	Teacher: Not true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Not true	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Certainly true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Somewhat true
Jeremy	Teacher: Not true Para 1: Not true Para 2: Not true Para 3: Not true	Teacher: Not true Para 1: Not true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Somewhat true

Justin	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Not true	Teacher: Certainly true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Certainly true Para 3: Somewhat true
Gregory	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Certainly true Para 2: Not true Para 3: Not true	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Certainly true Para 3: Somewhat true
Steve	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Not true Para 3: Not true	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Somewhat true
Jacob	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Not true	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Certainly true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Somewhat true

In my student observations during the first three weeks, many students did not want to participate in sharing out their feelings; by the fourth week, all students participated in sharing out their emotions. In addition, students showed hesitation in expressing their emotions in the first weeks, even when they did participate. Once the students became accustomed with showing how they feel and understanding that their feelings are represented by colors, words, and faces (emoji pictures on the Zones charts), they were more willing to share out. Moreover, student participants gained the confidence and empowerment to speak up and were willing to express their feelings by being able to choose an emotion that is directly correlated to their internal and external behaviors.

Considering there was 100% participation by the sixth week, students showed more confidence by their willingness to answer questions about their emotions and behavior,

regardless of whether or not their answer was accurate. This shows that when students continue to practice expressing their emotions, they are more willing to participate 100% of the time they are asked how they are feeling. During the intervention, Steve and I played charades and he went to his Zones chart, brought it to me and pointed to silly. I understood this action to mean that he thought the game we were playing was silly. Also, during the intervention, I noticed that Randall was choosing the emotion “silly” more than happy and asked him why he has been feeling silly lately and he responded, “I just feel so silly!” He would jump around and laugh unexpectedly, which showed that he knew what silly meant. The music provided to teach the students what silly looks like resembled a lot of Randall’s actions.

Increased ability when allowed non-verbal responses. Emotional identification responses varied depending on if the students were able to choose between a verbal or non-verbal response. Jeremy and Steve are both labeled as non-verbal students. Steve is able to show facial expressions and is able to communicate non-verbally, whereas Jeremy is unable to put sounds together to create words but is able to point to indicate his wants and needs. Olivia is verbal but chooses not to communicate verbally on a regular basis for reasons unknown by the teacher.

During the intervention, I observed a lack of participation among non-verbal students, or students who prefer not to verbally communicate. Therefore, I modified my intervention to include a form of non-verbal communication when identifying student emotions. I told all students that if they did not or could not verbally express how they felt, they should point to the emotion they feel on the Zones of Regulation chart on their desk. Once I modified my curriculum and gave students the choice to communicate non-verbally, such as pointing to

emotions, the participation of non-verbal students increased to 100% by the end of the six-week intervention.

In the teacher interview, when asked what types of situations frustrate students to the point of exhibiting negative behaviors, the teacher stated, “A lack of being able to verbalize what they [students] want and need, so a lack of communication whether that be their nonverbal or limited verbal ability. Then a lack of control in not being able to say if they are tired or they do not want to work right now, so I try to give them choices to give them a sense of control and communication.” During the intervention, I observed students not wanting to answer the question regarding their feelings and getting upset until I gave them the choice to point to their desired emotion on the Zones of Regulation chart. This affected the students who are non-verbal and also the students who have difficulties expressing their emotions when they are feeling upset or have negative emotions.

There were multiple situations in which students would refuse to participate until I placed the Zones of Regulation chart in front of them and asked them to point to how they were feeling. For example, in the second week of intervention, Steve did not want to participate telling me how he is feeling but then I got the Zones of Regulation sheet to him and asked him to point to how he is feeling and then he was able to participate. In week three, Olivia had difficulties participating when asked how she felt but once the Zones of Regulation chart was out in front of her, she was able to point to happy. Even though Olivia is verbal, many times she chooses not to speak, so having the option to point to an answer was beneficial. In week three, Jeremy was still having difficulties participating and I wanted to think of a way to encourage him to participate, especially since it is important for teachers to be aware of their student’s emotional health throughout the day. I went to Jeremy and took the Zones chart off his desk and went to him and

asked him again how he was feeling and asked him to point on the chart to show how he was feeling. He had no trouble pointing to the green zone and smiling at me. I was able to know that he was happy, and he was now able to have a mode of communication to express his emotions with me and the rest of his classmates. This situation with Jeremy happened often, but by the end of the six weeks, I no longer had to bring the Zones chart to him, and he was able to point to his chart even if I was ten feet away from him casually asking him how he was feeling. Overall, students were more likely to share how they are feeling if they had the option of pointing to an emotion rather than verbally expressing how they feel.

Overuse of happy. During the first week of intervention, student participants were adjusting to the new SEL curriculum and the added discussions about their feelings and the feelings of others. Most of the students already understood what happy meant, looked, and felt like. The students were more comfortable using the emotion happy than any other emotions. This was apparent because the students were consistently identifying themselves as being happy more than any other emotion. Table 5 below shows that happy was used 267 times to describe student emotions, whereas the next most frequently emotion was sad with 19 responses.

Table 6 Student emotional identification

	Happy	Sad	Mad	Silly	Frustrated	Tired	Grumpy	Scared
Randall	40	9	0	4	0	2	0	1
Olivia	33	6	0	0	0	1	0	0
Jeremy	35	0	2	4	0	0	0	0
Justin	37	3	5	3	0	4	0	0
Gregory	50	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Steve	40	1	1	1	1	5	0	0
Jacob	32	0	0	0	0	0	12	0
Total #	267	19	9	12	1	12	12	1

This does not mean that students truly felt happy 267 out of the 333 times students were asked how they were feeling. Students often behaved in ways associated with other emotions but still identified as being happy. Students would constantly state that they were happy, regardless of their physical state. The classroom teacher believed that the easiest emotions for her students to understand were happy and sad. Thus, the overuse of happy could be attributed to the fact that students only understood happy and sad, so when they were not sad, they were automatically happy.

Ability to identify others' emotions. Once students were able to identify their own emotions, they were more aware of the emotions of others around them. Students could use the tools given to them, such as the Zones of Regulations chart, to identify the emotions of their classmates and connect their emotions to their behaviors. In the teacher interview, when asked the question: When have you observed your students identifying the feelings of others?, the response was, "That's a really hard one for them to like look outside themselves and identify other people's feelings. The only time I've really seen it is out on the play structure if someone is crying, one of my students might go up to me and point and show a sad face but it's tricky and that's a harder one for them." Identifying the emotions of others was also rare when I came to the classroom and began my intervention. It was not until week four that I saw evidence of students identifying the emotions of others. For example, one day Olivia was crying on the floor, stomach down, while throwing her arms and legs down on the floor. Steve was sitting in this desk and pointed at Olivia and pointed to the blue zone, indicating that Olivia is sad. He also made a crying face to show she is crying. This connected her behavior with her emotions, and it showed that Steve was able to make the connection between being sad and crying.

Another example was during the fifth week of intervention; Justin asked the Speech and Language Pathologist how she was feeling and if she was happy, sad, silly, or mad. When she replied that she was happy, Justin began to smile. This showed that Justin was able to make the connection that others have feelings and he cares how others are feeling around him. In the fifth week, Justin was showing signs of physical sadness, such as putting his head on his desk and being quiet, and Randall noticed Justin's behavior and went up to Justin and asked him how he was feeling, and Justin told him that he was feeling sad. Randall asked if he wanted the teddy bear and Justin said that he did not want it. This observation was important because, even though Randall did not specify that Justin was sad, he attempted to find out his emotions and wanted to help regulate them. In the sixth week, Olivia was feeling sad and began crying. Gregory was able to point to Olivia and point to the blue zone on his Zones chart and said, "Olivia is sad." The teacher agreed with Gregory and told him that he was very good at observing and seeing emotions. Overall, some students were showing that they understand the emotions of others, whereas before the SEL intervention they were unable, or unwilling, to identify the emotions of others, according to teacher interview and teacher/paraeducator surveys.

Misidentifications. When students were learning to identify their feelings, there was also misidentification of emotions when students stated that they felt one emotion but physically showed that they identify with a different emotional state. Students often chose other emotions that were not the emotion that they were visibly showing. This was an issue because it meant that students did not fully understand their emotions or were unable to make the connection between the emotions they felt and the name given to the emotion. For example, students might understand what sad is, but they mix up the words, sad and silly. Student misidentification of emotions could also be due to lack of time and repetition to fully understand emotions. In one

example, Steve seemed mad and I asked how he was feeling, and he pointed to happy, but seemed very upset when he walked in from recess. My colleagues and I asked why he seemed upset and he made hand and face motions that we were unable to decipher. The paraeducator came inside the classroom and said that Steve and Jacob had an altercation during recess and that was why Steve was upset. The teacher and I spoke to Steve and reexplained what happy means and looks/feels like and what mad means and looks/feels like. I felt it would be appropriate to explain to Steve the difference in a small one-on-one setting to ensure his understanding.

Another example of misidentification was when Olivia had a tantrum in the morning, for reasons unknown, and when asked how she was feeling she pointed to happy. The classroom teacher and I reminded her that happy means you are smiling and sad means you have tears and feel upset. So, after asking her again how she was feeling, she pointed to sad. Perhaps she needed a reminder of what the emotions were, and maybe she was mixing up emotions or simply forgot what they meant. Even though there were emoji pictures on the colors to help the students remember the emotions, she still made a mistake. It could also be because all students constantly overused happy so, students' immediate reaction was to point to happy. Another example of misidentification occurred when Steve pointed to the angry face in the red zone and pointed at himself. I went to him and asked why he was feeling mad and he did not respond. He then pointed to silly and made a silly face by sticking his tongue out. I was unsure if he felt silly and was trying to trick me by saying he was mad or if he just did not know how he was feeling. When asked how he was feeling, Jacob said grumpy but when asking a second time, he chose happy. Jacob had one of the most frequent misidentifications by stating that he feels grumpy, regardless of his happy demeanor. As recorded in Table 2, he chose grumpy twelve times, which was one of his most chosen emotions. Every time he would state that he was grumpy, I explained

to him how grumpy looked and felt like. He would continue to state that he was grumpy, regardless of my continuous reexplanations. His misidentification was most likely an effect of teacher reaction and response to his answer.

Teacher reactions. Teachers' reactions to students' responses to their prompting questions about students' emotional states affected students' self-identification of their emotions. During the six-week study, when students identified their emotional state, teachers would have exaggerated responses or ask follow-up questions, depending on the state that the student(s) were in. In the beginning of the intervention, if students participated, they were rewarded through the classroom dollar system. The classroom teacher and I wanted students to know that we welcomed their participation, even when they were unsure of how they were feeling.

In my observations, I found that teacher reactions could be a reason why students choose specific emotions. Typically, when students would state that they felt happy, the teacher reaction was positive and happy for the students. Presumably, the students enjoyed the positive attention from the teacher and paraeducators, which could lead to the overidentification of the emotion of happy. When students stated that they felt sad, the teacher reaction was sympathetic and offered a teddy bear to give the student comfort. When students were upset or angry, the teacher reaction was typically follow-up questions and concern for the student. Students who did not enjoy speaking may have tried to avoid saying that they were angry because of the many follow up questions that the teacher or paraeducators asked.

One of the more extreme observations was when Jacob would say that he felt grumpy every day for months because the teacher had laughed along with the paraeducators in the room and told Jacob he was so funny. Ever since that day, he chose the emotion "grumpy" whenever he was asked to identify his feelings. Many times, throughout the weeks, Jacob stated that he felt

grumpy but looked happy. In week three, after asking Jacob how he was feeling, he again chose grumpy so I took the option of grumpy away from him in order to see what he would choose, and he chose happy so I overly reacted and was very happy that he chose happy to try and get him to stop choosing grumpy. After trying that method of over reacting when choosing happy, Jacob would sometimes choose happy right away but his misidentification of self-identifying as grumpy remained an issue.

Tool use increasing self-regulation

Students with intellectual disabilities have difficulties regulating behaviors, unless they are taught to use tools and strategies. After students were able to identify their own feelings, they could be taught how to regulate their emotional behavior. Overall, SEL programs have tools and strategies students can use to help students determine how to identify their emotions. I found that by giving students controlled choices, they were more likely to regulate their emotions in a positive and independent way. The teacher stated in her interview that prior to the intervention, students did not use tangible tools to regulate their emotions, but rather took a break outside or in the back of the classroom or squeezed their bodies to calm themselves down.

Table 7 Emotional regulation tools

Emotion	Tools/Strategies
Happy (The Green Zone)	Not applicable
Sad (The Blue Zone)	Laying down in the “quiet corner” of the classroom where there is a partition high enough for the students not to see other students, but low enough for the teachers to view the student and hugging the class teddy bear.
Mad (The Red Zone)	Taking a walk outside and deep breathing exercise.

Silly (The Yellow Zone)	Sitting in the “quiet corner” of the room with the partition and squeezing a stress ball.
Frustrated (The Yellow Zone)	Sitting in the “quiet corner” of the room with the partition and squeezing a stress ball.

Throughout the intervention, there were numerous examples of students using tools and strategies to regulate their emotions, which lead to regulating their physical behaviors that occurred. I found that students did not need tools to regulate their behavior when they felt happy, since their behavior did not need regulating. No students during the six-week intervention had to regulate their behavior due to being or feeling “silly.” However, many students did not want to complete their work and cried when feeling sad. Being sad took a lot of time away from academic work, therefore regulating the students emotional distress helped their emotional health as well as their academic progress. After introducing the tools and strategies, as shown in Table 7, hugging the teddy bear became the most common and helpful tool students chose when they felt sad. On the first day that the bear was introduced, Olivia and Randall both used the bear and their moods became significantly happier after hugging the bear. In week two, for example, Olivia gave Randall the classroom teddy bear when he was feeling sad and it made him feel better to not only hug the bear but receive the bear from her. As the weeks went by, whenever Olivia felt sad, she was able to get the bear without prompting and self-regulate by getting the tool she needed to make herself feel better. Olivia was one of the more emotionally and physically detached students in the classroom, yet the bear became a successful tool for her. In fact, she was the student who utilized the bear the most.

Through the use of the tools and strategies, students were able to gain the knowledge and independence to regulate their emotions and have control over their behavior. In the second week of intervention, Steve became upset, for reasons unknown, and I took him outside for a break. He

was unable to express how he felt when we went outside, but after playing with a ball for about ten minutes, I asked him again how he was feeling, and he said he felt happy. At this point we went back inside the classroom to complete classwork. Later that week, Gregory came to school dysregulated and upset. During morning carpet time when asked how he was feeling, he screamed and the teacher asked him to go outside to take a break, which he willingly did. Unlike Steve, however, Gregory was unable to express how he was feeling in the moment or after he had calmed down. This showed that sometimes, when the students felt mad or frustrated, they were unable to express their emotions.

Later that week, Justin was visibly mad, and I played the angry song while stressing the strategies he could use when feeling this way. He chose to take a break outside and do deep breathing inhaling and exhaling ten times. This showed that when given a strategy, Justin was able to manage and regulate his emotions. Later that week, Gregory was very upset in the classroom and the rest of the students had to leave the room in order for me and the teacher to try to help him regulate his emotions. He did say that he was mad, and he laid on the floor, stomach down, until he calmed down. Gregory was able to identify his emotion and regulate his behavior, using his own strategy that worked for him. Typically, since students would usually get upset during unstructured free choice time, taking a break outside did not take away any academic instruction. One student also used a hard play dough ball to relieve his anger, because it was more of an aggressive anger. That student got the dough himself, which was interesting because that was a strategy I had planned to introduce (but had not yet introduced) to regulate the emotion of frustration.

The idea for regulating frustrated behavior was to ensure that the frustration did not turn into anger. In week two, Justin became upset because he could not find his water bottle but was

unable to express how he was feeling. He was given a hard ball of play dough to squeeze and after a few minutes of squeezing the play dough, he felt better. He began smiling and playing with friends again. In week three, Steve got upset and while he was upset, he could not identify his feelings. He squeezed the hard play dough and once he felt regulated and was smiling and sitting up straight, I asked how he was feeling, and he pointed to happy on the chart. He was unable to express why he was upset. In week five, Steve was feeling frustrated and when asked if he wanted to hug the teddy bear, he said yes. He hugged the bear for a few minutes then put the bear on his desk while he completed some of his work. Any strategy or tool that was previously taught during the six-week intervention could be used to help regulate any emotion. It was important for students to be able to choose what best regulates them.

Due to the importance of regulating angry or frustrated behavior, it was essential to see the differences between behaviors before and after the intervention. As seen in Table 8 below, Randall, Olivia, Justin, Gregory, Steve, and Jacob all increased their ability to self-regulate, according to the teacher and paraeducators. These students were also able to participate during discussions about emotions, participate in using the tools and strategies, and were engaged with the songs. Jeremy, however, did not increase his ability to regulate his emotions. This could be due to his inability to communicate and lower cognitive levels. He was unable to participate with the discussions about emotions and could not use the tools and strategies to regulate his emotions.

Table 8 Ability to regulate negative feelings before and after intervention

Ability to regulate feelings when irritated, anxious, or frustrated	Survey before intervention	Survey after intervention
Randall	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Not true	Teacher: Certainly true Para 1: Certainly true

	Para 2: Certainly true Para 3: Somewhat true	Para 2: Certainly true Para 3: Somewhat true
Olivia	Teacher: Not true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Not true Para 3: Not true	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Not true
Jeremy	Teacher: Not true Para 1: Not true Para 2: Not true Para 3: Not true	Teacher: Not true Para 1: Not true Para 2: Not true Para 3: Not true
Justin	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Not true Para 3: Not true	Teacher: Not true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Somewhat true
Gregory	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Not true Para 3: Not true	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Not true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Somewhat true
Steve	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Not true Para 3: Not true	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Somewhat true
Jacob	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Certainly true Para 2: Somewhat true Para 3: Not true	Teacher: Somewhat true Para 1: Somewhat true Para 2: Certainly true Para 3: Somewhat true

Use of Music Increased Student Engagement

The students involved in this project were taught the various emotions not only by using the Zones of Regulation charts, but also through music and lyrics of songs chosen specifically for each emotion. The use of music as a teaching method allowed students to connect with emotions in a fun and exciting way. In attempting to identify what teaching mode would be best as a method of teaching for emotions and emotional regulation, I asked the teacher the question “What method of teaching do students thrive and enjoy the most in?” The teacher response was,

“Small group, engaging them, bringing in technology, showing them a video, and having a lot of repetition.” I decided to choose music because it was one of the only whole group activities that the students have; the songs always had accompanying visuals (video) and were played on the large television in the classroom. Students enjoyed watching television and listening to music, so they were immediately engaged. The teachers also sang the songs in order to model for students what they should be doing while these songs were playing.

In the beginning of the intervention, students felt uncomfortable and were less willing to participate during conversations about emotions. While the songs were playing, however, the students were engaged and were more willing to have discussions before and after the songs. For example, when the students listened to “Show Me What You’re Feeling” by Tom Chapin, they showed little interest and engagement of the song, then I decided to play “This is my Happy Song” and the students’ reactions instantly changed. The students stood up and danced to the song, indicating that this was the song that needed to be played for the rest of the week. It was important that the songs chosen were to the liking of the students, because they needed to be engaged and interested in the song in order to listen to the song carefully and learn the meaning behind the song. Since the chosen song described some ways that make Daniel Tiger and his friends happy, after the song we were able to have a class discussion about what makes us happy. Music was a gateway into having the meaningful conversations they were uncomfortable having before the intervention.

Through the use of music and the videos, I was able to create hand gestures to remind students of the lyrics in the song when they needed reminding out of context. I specifically chose and played the song “Sad, Bad, Terrible Day” by The Learning Station because the focused emotion was “sad.” Before I played the song, I told students that we would play the song twice,

once to hear the song and dance, and a second time to listen to the words. I did not want students to be distracted by the beat of the music but focus more on the message the song was conveying. The second time the song played, I sang along to the words and modeled some hand gestures to help students understand phrases. For example, in the chorus, it states “I brush it off, from my head to my toes, brush, brush and wiggle my nose. I laugh it off-HA HA, HO HO HO, I feel better now, don’t you know.” While the chorus would play, I would gesture brushing off my own body and wiggling my nose. Throughout the day, if a student would feel upset, I would make these gestures and the student would understand what I would mean. The students would typically copy my gestures and I would also remind them what the song said when they became sad. Students would then “brush it off” by brushing their bodies, which gave them comfort.

It was important to use songs that made the students feel comfortable and more likely to enjoy talking about their emotions. Students would avoid or showed disengagement when they did not like a song. In the third week, the emotion was “mad” and I chose the song, “In the Group” by Tom Chapin and also had the song “I get Angry” chosen in case I needed a different song, based on the students’ previous lack of interest for the Tom Chapin song. When I first played “In the Group” by Tom Chapin, Gregory screamed and left the room to take a break. When he returned inside, he was calm and regulated himself. He informed me that he does not like the song, so I played “I get Angry” by GrowingSound the rest of the week. Once the song changed to, “I get Angry” by GrowingSound, students were engaged and enjoyed the visuals and upbeat tune. The song gave examples of what could potentially make a person mad and also gave them various strategies on how to help regulate their emotions when feeling mad, such as taking deep breaths, counting to three, or taking a break alone, which were all tools and strategies that I was teaching in class. The visual showed steam coming from the cartoon man’s head, which

gave a concrete visual to the abstract idea of getting mad. Justin sang the chorus of the song while walking to recess after getting upset and calming down. It was interesting to see him make the connection between the song and his own emotions, especially singing the song out of context, outside walking to recess. When the students were engaged and enjoyed the songs being played, they were more likely to pay attention and participate in learning about emotions.

Students did not sing all songs out of context. Some students were able to sing the song “I get Angry” by GrowingSound because of their constant need to regulate their emotions when they were mad. Due to the lack of need to regulate when feeling silly, students did not sing the song, “Self-Control (Character Education Song)” by Heath and the Checkershoe Band out of context. While the song played, the students sat and watched the video. Typically, the students would dance but during this video, they sat and watched because it is animated (in a similar fashion to a Sesame Street character), which they really enjoyed. Each day that I played the song, more students began to sing the words in the chorus and danced with the song. However, they did not sing the song out of context due to not having to regulate their emotions regarding feeling silly. Emotions that tended to need more regulating and repetition gave students the opportunity to sing the songs out of context.

Conclusion

This study explored two central questions: How does the implementation of multiple, modified SEL programs affect behavior of students with intellectual disabilities? How does the inclusion of music help students understand the concepts of social emotional learning? While some students responded well to the tools, strategies, and inclusion of music, the main finding is that when teaching to a diverse group of students, there is a constant need to modify and alter lessons, strategies, and methods of teaching. Modifying two social emotional learning programs

is beneficial for students, but to ensure success, there is a need to constantly improve and teach your students. Although there was an overall improvement when modifying SEL programs to benefit the behavior of some students with intellectual disabilities, additional modifications to fit the individual needs of students could have potentially made a more significant improvement for each student. Also, the inclusion of music did help students understand the concepts of SEL, but the inclusion of more hands-on practices, such as role playing could have further increased student understanding. Overall, students benefitted from the inclusion of SEL and were able to have the foundational knowledge to further improve their emotional and behavioral regulation.

Ch. 5: Implications

This research study aimed to explore the potential for increasing positive behavior when modifying multiple social emotional learning programs, specifically PATHS and The Zones of Regulation, to best fit the needs of students with intellectual disabilities (ID). The data supports prior research showing that the inclusion of SEL programs increased the students' ability to identify their own emotions and regulate the behaviors caused by their emotional dysregulation (Elias, 2004; Feuerborn & Tyre, 2009; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007).

Behavior concerns still existed, but the majority of students who participated in the intervention were able to identify and use the tools and strategies provided to them to help regulate their behavior. In addition, the findings support prior research demonstrating that the inclusion of music provided instruction of self-regulatory behaviors and engagement of emotional discussions (Kuypers, 2011; Nordoff & Robbins, 2006).

The results of this study are in alignment with those reported in prior research conducted on social emotional learning benefitting the behaviors of students, especially those with intellectual disabilities who may have inadequate feelings vocabulary and may have trouble recognizing feelings in themselves and others (Elias, 2004). Before the intervention, the majority of the students' knowledge of emotions included three emotions: happy, sad, and mad. This aligned with Elias' (2004) principle that students with ID's three principal feelings were sad, happy, and mad. Students' vocabulary expanded after interventions and they were able to identify themselves as also feeling silly, tired, and scared. Tired and scared were not emotions that were explicitly taught, but through adult and peer modeling, students were able to express these other emotions.

The literature stated that students with ID struggle with recognizing expressions of emotions and learning emotional states of others (Bruno, 1981; Cavioni, Grazzani & Ornaghi, 2017; Mattys, Cuperus, & Van Engeland, 1999; Pina, Marino, Spadaro, & Sorrentini, 2013; Saloner & Gettinger, 1985; Wiig & Harris, 1974). In my findings, I found that students with ID had trouble adjusting to the social emotional curriculum, especially when learning how to regulate their behaviors and learning the emotional states of others. Some students were able to use the tools and strategies provided and taught for the purpose of regulating their behavior. By the fifth week, two students were able to independently get the tool they needed, the teddy bear, to regulate feeling sad. Once students were able to identify their own emotions, some began to observe the emotions of others around them. Some students began to observe how others were feeling and they would point to the color that represented their feeling or verbalize how the other student felt. For example, Gregory was able to observe Olivia crying and pointed to her and pointed to the blue zone and stated that she was sad.

Many previous studies regarding the two SEL studies, PATHS and The Zones of Regulations, indicated that the inclusion of these programs benefit emotional competence and self-regulation behaviors in students with ID (Humphrey et al., 2016; Kuypers, 2011). The combined SEL programs highlighted the main points of each program that would best benefit the students in this study. The SEL programs were modified to meet the academic and emotional abilities of the students by teaching them about the various emotions and looking at emotions through the lens of colors. This method made emotions less abstract and easier for the students to understand. A study by Humphrey et al. (2016), indicated that PATHS might be a slower process, due to it only being implemented in the classroom rather than school wide. In my findings, I found that the process is slower due to SEL only being implemented in the classroom

rather than it being fully implemented during the school day. I imagine if there was more time in the study, or if SEL was used throughout a school, the students would have benefitted more. The Zones of Regulation's basic concept is to help students learn how to self-regulate by creating a system to categorize how the body feels and what emotions you feel into four colored zones (Kuypers, 2011). In my research, students were able to build self-regulation through tools and strategies.

The findings in this study have given me insight on music therapy and ways to engage students and connect them to academic curriculum. In past research, music therapy was found to positively affect students with ID by stimulating attention and motivation (Music Therapy, 2015). In this study, I found that music increased student engagement during the six weeks. Students were not typically engaged during lecture or when adults would talk at them. I used music to teach students about all five emotions and included many hand gestures with the music to further engage the students to listen and participate in the teachings of emotions.

Implications for the Literature

Although music therapy promoted engagement, some scholars claim that music therapy helps students with intellectual disabilities by not only stimulating attention and motivation, but also providing emotional support, and promoting the development of cognitive, behavioral, physical, emotional, and social skills (Music Therapy, 2015). I did not find evidence of these additional benefits for my students when including music in the intervention. The participants in this study did not seem to gain additional emotional support through music and there were no findings of the promotion of cognitive, behavioral, physical, emotional, and social skills. I used music solely as a teaching tool rather than a therapeutic resource to help students with their

emotions. The lack of findings to support the benefits of music therapy could be attributed to the lack of time and immersion in music.

There was a gap in knowledge in prior research about how to successfully modify two SEL programs to fit the needs of students in order to affect student behavior. In previous research, the modifications of two SEL programs versus using one SEL program did not benefit student behavior (Malti, Ribeaud, and Eisner, 2011). In this research study, I found that it was beneficial to modify two SEL programs to meet the needs of the diverse population of students with intellectual disabilities. There was a 22% increase of student participation when identifying their emotional state and students began to independently regulate their own behavior based on tools and strategies taught during the six-week intervention. The modification of these two SEL programs provided a more diverse program for my students. I found that I was able to create a program that could tailor to all my students and, through the six-week intervention, the ability to identify emotions increased from 78% during Week 1 to 100% participation in Week 6. Another gap in the literature was the use of non-verbal responses increasing participation of students, especially for the students who were non-verbal, or preferred not to verbally communicate.

In prior research, studies have shown the positive impact of SEL programs on social and academic outcomes, including a decrease in: aggressiveness, anti-social and conduct behaviors, emotional distress, depressive symptoms, and at-risk behaviors (Cavioni, Grazzani & Ornaghi, 2017; Horowitz & Garber, 2007; Tobler et al., 2000; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). In this research, there were not enough findings to document potential long-term outcomes, such as a decrease in aggressiveness, anti-social and conduct behaviors, emotional distress, depressive symptoms, and at-risk behaviors. Students continued to have behaviors, but they were able to identify their emotions and use some tools and strategies to help regulate the aggressive, or angry behavior.

There was also a lack of findings related to increasing empathy and openness in dealing with emotional needs (Kam & Greenberg, 2004). In the literature, Kam and Greenberg (2004) found that through their research of the PATHS program, students were able to learn from each other and they could begin to work together to better understand the emotional skills taught.

One insight emerging that came from this study was that students misidentified their emotions due to teacher responses or to misunderstand what the emotions meant. Another insight was that students increased their ability to identify the emotions of others post-intervention. SEL programs need to not only focus on self and individual growth, but include a focus on being aware and conscious of the feelings and behaviors of others.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The proven effectiveness of SEL programs for students in special education is documented through several benefits related to emotional and mental development. These increases in development can help students improve in other academic areas in the classroom. General education and special education students benefit from SEL programs and can learn emotional and social skills that are not taught in other areas of academics. Although schools and districts may have accessibility issues, such as lack of training and budget to obtain the needed SEL programs, individual schools can also incorporate SEL principles and methods into their classrooms. A positive school-wide behavioral program can be used so that all teachers and students practice and incorporate these principals into daily activities and lessons. Having a school-wide SEL approach improves attendance and behavior in student; this is because attendance and participation improve when students feel comfortable and safe at school. Social emotional learning teaches students the coping mechanisms to handle their emotions and regulate

their behavior. Overall, students' behavioral and emotional maturity improves through SEL curriculum.

SEL contains sensitive material that could potentially be uncomfortable for many students. Teachers should be aware of their responses to students' identification of emotions that may have negative consequences for correct identification. When teachers respond positively to a student's response, that student may feel inclined to respond the same way when they want positive attention. On the opposite spectrum, if a teacher responds negatively to the student's perspective or asks the student to engage with the teacher in a way that makes the student uncomfortable, that student may not want to respond or identify that particular emotion again. Therefore, maintaining sensitivity when discussing these topics that SEL brings into the classroom is important to establish long-term confidence for students. The long-term positive effects of SEL are developing social emotional practices and maturity. This is important because by the time students with ID reach the 12th grade, they are much more likely to be involved with juvenile authorities (Gregory, Shanahan, & Walberg, 1986; Huntington & Bender, 1993; Phil & McLarnon, 1984; Spafford & Grosser, 1993; Wellner, Watteyne, Herbert, & Crelly, 1994). Students need support in building the emotional skills and coping mechanisms to deal with the diversity in the world and with having the social and academic differences attributed to students with ID.

Administration in schools should be aware that all students need SEL implemented into curriculum. The idea of modifying SEL to fit the diversity of the school is important if there is no existing SEL program that works. A program designed or modified for a specific school can ensure success for most of the students, including students in general education settings and students with special needs.

The findings from this study also point to important implications for general education classrooms. Modifying multiple SEL programs could benefit not only students with special needs, but all students. Students in special education are currently mainstreamed in general education classrooms because of the push for schools to be inclusive. Teachers have to differentiate core curriculum to fit the academic needs that students with special needs have. Therefore, differentiation strategies should apply to SEL programs. In general education programs, if students do not appear to grasp central concepts the teachers should modify the existing program or combine with an additional program to meet the specific needs of individual students. This approach to modify SEL programs is innovative and teachers in schools can adapt any part of the program into their classroom, based on their students' needs and interests. With broad schoolwide SEL programs, teachers can take the pieces that are relevant for their classroom and adapt approaches and strategies as needed. With appropriate differentiation, SEL programs can be taught to students with and without ID.

District officials should incorporate a district, or school-wide SEL program to improve the motivation, attendance, and behavior of the students in their district. Having more stability in and increasing attendance saves money for the schools. Creating a district-wide or school-wide curriculum that is adopted to fit the needs of districts can lead to the institutionalization of such programs, creating long-term consistency in the area of SEL. Schools can then focus on working with the students in the SEL program rather than taking the time to find and modify multiple programs or trying to fit one SEL program into diverse school settings. Teachers have more buy-in when there is flexibility to express their opinions and philosophies in choosing what parts of the SEL programs they want to incorporate into their classroom, without straying away from the overarching district-wide or school-wide SEL programs. Adopting two different SEL programs

is more holistic than using one and can have more benefits because the program is customized for the specific population and needs of students.

Education today is moving towards more inclusive classrooms, which requires adapting curriculum to fit the needs of all students. Including strategies and tools for the classroom, such as deep breathing exercises, mindfulness, emotional identification and regulation, are relevant for all classrooms and all students. These tools and strategies can also transfer to students' everyday lives. Students who are currently struggling have much to gain when teachers differentiate SEL curriculum to meet their needs.

Limitations of the Study

There are many limitations to this study, such as lack of time and missing perspectives of various participants. Given additional time, this study could have evolved and expanded on the idea of emotional regulation and students could have had more opportunities to use the strategies and tools learned. More specifically, I would have spent two weeks focusing on each emotion. In the first week, I would teach students about the emotion of the two weeks through music and small activities including the colors of The Zones of Regulation. In the second week, I would focus on the tools and strategies used to regulate that emotion through role play and hands-on practice. Students would further understand each emotion and feel more comfortable identifying and regulating those emotions. The results could potentially be more dramatic and visibly beneficial for students. I predict a difference in participation would be evident if the study occurred over a longer period of time; I would be interested to see if student misidentification would decrease over time. With more time, I could also measure student responses over time and observe any fluctuations in long-term student participation.

This study is also missing the perspectives of students and their opinions and thoughts on the various emotions. I had to assume the students' understanding of each emotion and tailor the SEL program accordingly. The perspectives of the students' parents are also missing. Understanding the behavioral regulation techniques used in their home lives is important in order to streamline the tools and strategies between school and home life to potentially increase beneficial outcomes for students. Also, including parent opinions about how the multiple modified SEL programs are affecting students at home, including comments about student behaviors outside of school settings, would provide valuable information about the benefits of SEL in and out of school settings. Findings are also specific to the population and the number of students in the classroom where the research was conducted. There was a smaller number of total participants and more specifically, a lack of female participants, involved in this study. Only seven people participated and one of the participants was female and six were male. Having more participants would expand the scope of my research and I could gain more data on the benefits of SEL intervention. These limitations could have altered the environment of the classroom and the results of the study.

Directions for Future Research

With the understanding that a teacher's support and involvement in this process is imperative, it is also important to consider teachers' reactions to students' responses and the potential effect on students' self-identification of emotions. Therefore, more research is needed to better understand how teacher response affects the participation of students or the misinterpretation of their emotional self-identification.

Continuously researching the gap in literature regarding the misidentification of emotions that students tend to have is important. Misidentification could be a result of the

misunderstanding of emotions or the influence of teacher responses. Researching student identification of the emotions of others is also important, since many SEL programs focus more on the individual emotional growth of a student. More research is needed to understand appropriate pedagogies for responding when students misidentify their own emotions and for assisting students with identifying the emotions of others.

There are many considerations to explore with regard to the modification of multiple SEL programs and the creation of such programs that successfully meet the needs of students with diverse learning needs. Research that presents potential effective modifications of SEL programs will develop the information needed to meet the needs of diverse students and increase the quality of life for students in Special Education.

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Appendix A: Teacher Interview Questions

Dominican University of California

Teacher Interview Questions

1. When do students tend to have the most behavioral problems during the day?
2. What strategies have you used to promote positive behavior for students in your class?
3. What specific emotions or feelings do your students have trouble understanding?
4. When have you observed your students using coping mechanisms when feeling overwhelmed? How often does this occur?
5. When have you observed your students identifying their own feelings?
6. When have you observed your students identifying the feelings of others?
7. How does the behavior of a student effect the rest of the students?
8. How do you handle negative behavior verses how do the paraeducators handle negative behavior?

9. How do you handle positive behavior verses how do the paraeducators handle positive behavior?

10. What vocabulary do the teachers, including paraeducators use to refer to the various emotions that typical people feel?

11. When do paraeducators model identification of feelings?

12. What typical situations often frustrate students to the point of exhibiting negative behaviors?

Appendix B: Teacher Survey Questionnaire

Dominican University of California
The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

Due to copyright issues, The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire cannot be shown but it can be found here: [http://sdqinfo.org/py/sdqinfo/b3.py?language=Englishqz\(USA\)](http://sdqinfo.org/py/sdqinfo/b3.py?language=Englishqz(USA))

Examples of questions that the researcher added:

Extra Questions from Researcher:

Students ability to identify personal feelings

Ability to regulate feelings when irritated, anxious, or frustrated

Appendix C: Lesson Example

Dominican University of California

Lesson Example

VITAL INFORMATION

Total Number of Students	7
Area(s) Students Live In	San Rafael
Free/Reduced Lunch	6/7 students
	African American: 1
Ethnicity of Students	Hispanic: 4
	White: 1
	White and Asian: 1
English Language Learners	5
Students with Special Needs	7: Intellectual Disabilities, Speech and Language, ASD, partial blindness, other health impairment, down syndrome
Subject(s)	Social Emotional Learning, Health, Music, Special Education
Topic or Unit of Study	Using music to learn what "happy" feels and looks like.
Grade/Level	Kindergarten
Comments	

KEY CONCEPTS & STANDARDS

Big Idea & Essential Questions Understanding Emotions

Learning Outcome(s)

- The Learners Will (TLW) be able to identify what mad is.
- TLW be able to point to the color on The Zones of Regulation sheet to show what color "mad" represents.

Summary

This lesson is the first day of the "mad" week. Today, I will introduce the song and explain what the feeling mad is and what it looks like. I will also show the students what color on their Zone of Regulations "mad" is, so that they can tell me how they feel without using verbal language. Each lesson can only be approximately 15 minutes. By the end of the week, the learners TLW be able to tell you how mad "looks" and feels like. The learners will also be able to tell me one strategy they can do if they are mad.

Standards Comments

ASSESSMENTS

Assessment/Rubrics

- The Teacher Will (TTW) know if the learners can identify what mad is by listening to them sing the song and be able to tell when they themselves are mad.
- TTW be able to see if learners know what color correlates with mad by asking students to point to the color when they are feeling "mad".

Comments

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- Instructional Materials (Handouts, etc.)**
- Song of the week- "In the Group" by Tom Chapin
 - Back-up Song- "I get Angry" by GrowingSound
 - Apple TV
 - iPad
 - The Zones of Regulation sheet on desks

Comments

IMPLEMENTATION

- Sequence of Activities**
- TTW ask learners what they think the emotion mad is.
 - TTW ask learners to tell and show what mad looks like (students who are non-verbal will show me through facial expression).
 - TTW play the song of the week- "In the Group" by Tom Chapin and I have a back-up song in case, "I get Angry" by GrowingSound.
 - TLW listen to the song(s) and all together, the teacher, paraeducators, and students will show/tell what mad is and what it looks like in a collaborative circle. We will all sit in a circle and talk about the emotion mad.
 - TTW bring out The Zones of Regulation sheet and show the color (red) and facial expression in the red square and explain that if you are feeling mad, you can point to this color so that others are aware of how you are feeling and you know how you are feeling!
 - TTW tell students that tomorrow we will learn two different things we can do if we are feeling mad.
 - End the lesson by playing one of the songs- students can vote to choose.

Appendix D: IRB Acceptance Letter



January 28, 2019

Deema Shihadih
50 Acacia Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Deema,

On behalf of the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants, I am pleased to inform you that your proposal entitled *Harmonizing Social Emotional Learning for Students with Special Needs* (IRBPHP application #10720) has been approved.

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,



Randall Hall, PhD
Chair, IRBPHP