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Effects of Social-Emotional Instruction on the Behavior of Students with Learning Disabilities

Kelsey Olson
Dominican University of California

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Effects of Social-Emotional Instruction on the Behavior of Students with Learning Disabilities
by
Kelsey Olson

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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EFFECTS OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL INSTRUCTION

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the department 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. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Kelsey Olson
Candidate May 10, 2018

Elizabeth Truesdell, PhD
Department Chair May 10, 2018

Jennifer Lucko, PhD
Thesis Advisor May 10, 2018

Suresh Appavoo Ed.D.
Secondary Thesis Advisor May 10, 2018

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EFFECTS OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL INSTRUCTION

Abstract

Students with learning disabilities who spend the majority of the school day in a general education classroom often struggle to appropriately deal with feelings of frustration and anxiety. There is currently a gap in understanding how special education teachers can support the social and emotional inclusion of students with learning disabilities when they are in the general education classroom. The purpose of this study is to explore the results of implementing a social-emotional curriculum both in a pullout setting and in the general education setting and examine the effect of the program on the behavior of students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom. This research expands on the ongoing dialog in the literature concerning the effects of explicit and targeted social-emotional instruction. Students with disabilities were included in the data collection in order to better understand how students perceive the effects of the curriculum. This is a qualitative study that consisted of interviews with ten students who qualify for special education services under the eligibility of Specific Learning Disability. Three teachers with participating students were also interviewed. Data showed that a social-emotional instructional program positively impacts both students with learning disabilities and the classroom as a whole by helping students increase their coping skills, which thereby helps reduce the instances of these students being upset at school and minimizes their reaction to academic and social struggles.

Keywords: social-emotional learning, MindUP, mindful breathing, special education, anxiety, frustration, elementary students

Chapter 1: Introduction

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2017), 62% of students receiving special education services spent 80% or more of their school day in a general education classroom in 2014. This is a significant increase since 1990 when only 33% of students receiving special education services spent the majority of their school day in general education classrooms (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). One benefit of this increased inclusion time has been the increase in the amount of time students with learning disabilities spend in the company of their general education peers and the increased exposure to the standards-based curriculum (Morgan, 2016). However, students with learning disabilities are often unable to fully participate in grade level classroom activities. While there are identified academic reasons for this due to their specific disabilities, many students also struggle to socially integrate into the general education classroom environment. This lack of social integration may lead to feelings of frustration and anxiety as well as increases in behavioral issues, which further impacts their ability to progress academically.

Thus, in the same way that students with learning disabilities need academic support and intervention, they also require support and intervention for social-emotional learning (SEL). Students with learning disabilities are more likely to face peer rejection and less likely to feel connected to school (Murray & Greenberg, 2006). According to Emerson and Hatton (2007), 33% of children with learning disabilities say that it is “harder than average to make friends” as opposed to nine percent of children without learning disabilities reporting that they feel this way (p. 8). Additionally, students with disabilities are disproportionately more likely to be involved in the bullying dynamic, both as victims and bullies, than their non-disabled peers (Rose, Simpson, & Preast, 2016). The difficulties that students with literacy-related learning disabilities

experience when reading have been shown to relate to difficulties in understanding and correctly interpreting social cues, which impacts how they participate in social interactions (Elias, 2014).

It follows then that the effects of learning disabilities often put students at a social disadvantage.

Research has also shown that small group pull-out instruction does result in academic progress when compared to inclusion only teaching (Fuchs et al., 2015). It follows that small group instruction could also help students improve their social-emotional skills through structured SEL instruction and practice opportunities, and thus impact their ability to connect and better manage their behavior in the general education learning environment.

Background and Need

Previous research has emphasized the importance of specific supports and training for teachers in order to best instruct students in inclusion model classrooms. According to LeDoux, Graves, and Burt (2012), communication and collaboration between the special education team and general education teachers help better address the increased academic, social, and behavior concerns that tend to appear when placing special education students in a general education class. Karin, Ellen, Evelien, Mieke, and Katja's (2012) study shows the importance of a supportive school-wide culture in order for positive inclusive teaching. A culture of caring and a principal who supports a drive towards more meaningful inclusion is instrumental in supporting teachers and students.

In addition to a positive school culture, the existing research also shows that students with disabilities need targeted, social-emotional, supports. Elias (2014) argues that just because a student is around general education peers, it does not mean that these interactions are positive or that the student is able to learn the correct lesson from the peer modeling. Students need to be taught problem-solving skills, memory strategies, and coping techniques (Elias, 2014).

According to Kudliskis (2013), neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) is one method that can be used to help special education students shift to a positive state of mind. This shift can help students better focus on the academic task at hand, and also increase their awareness of their own behavior, which is a key step towards being more included in a classroom setting.

Existing research also demonstrates that, when done appropriately, small group pull-out instruction is beneficial for the academic progress of students with learning disabilities. Studies show that students are able to have their individual academic needs addressed more fully when instruction takes place in a small group setting. Fuchs et al. (2015) found that low-achieving students made more progress in their understanding of fractions when they were provided with specialized intervention as opposed to the students who received inclusion only instruction. When teachers ensure that beneficial methods carry over into all instruction settings, the gains of pull-out instruction are even greater. Marston (1996) found that a combined service model consisting of pull-out instruction and collaboration between special education and general education teachers resulted in the largest growth in student reading scores from pre-test to post-test as when compared to inclusion only instruction and pull-out instruction without collaboration.

Additionally, studies have found that the students receiving support generally see small group instruction favorably. Rose and Shevlin's (2017) study found that students felt positive about the pull-out small group instruction they received. Furthermore, studies have pointed to the need for students to receive small group instruction in order to understand and make progress in social-emotional learning. According to Hromek and Roffey (2009), lecture-style instruction is not enough for students to understand SEL, they need modeling and small group practice

opportunities. These studies demonstrate the benefits of quality small-group instruction, both for students' academic growth and their social-emotional growth.

There are many recognized benefits that are linked to stronger social-emotional skills, and these benefits are often lacking for students with learning disabilities. Additional interventions are needed for students with learning disabilities to make progress towards a higher understanding of social-emotional skills. Hromek and Roffey (2009) argue that an understanding of SEL is linked to less stress, better coping strategies, a more connected school community, and an increased ability to learn. When students have the capacity to appropriately cope with stress and difficult situations as they arise, they are better able to focus on and engage with the academic and social tasks of school. This ability to persevere and demonstrate growth-mindset can lead to the individual student experiencing more success at school (Snipes & Tran, 2017). On the other hand, Kirby (2017) discovered that students with learning disabilities were found to put less effort into academic tasks, have less self-efficacy, and a more negative mood. These qualities correspond to a lack of perseverance and growth-mindset; which students need in order to continue working in the face of difficulties. Furthermore, Snipes and Tran (2017) found that students who scored at the Emergent level on state testing in math responded with lower growth-mindset scores than students who scored in the Exceed Standard range on the state math test. This displays a connection between academically struggling students, like those with learning disabilities, and a decreased understanding of social-emotional skills needed to progress through school. In addition to the struggles with academics, according to Nepi, Fioravanti, Nannini, and Peru (2015) students with special education needs are also more likely to be "less accepted and more rejected" than other students (p. 332). A lack of peer connection can account for the increased likelihood of negative mood, and can also lead to students having a difficult time

collaborating and communicating with their peers. These studies all support the need for targeted supports directed at students' social-emotional needs in order to support their academic and social growth.

Statement of the Problem

While a review of existing literature showed that small group instruction can be beneficial for academic and SEL progress when provided in an appropriate way, there is a lack of information about how a set social-emotional curriculum provided in the general education classroom and in a pull-out special education environment impacts students with learning disabilities' behavior in the general education classroom setting (Fuchs et al., 2015). An additional weakness of these studies is the dearth of information regarding student opinions towards different educational placements. Most studies relied on assessment scores and teacher opinions to show how different educational placements affect the students involved (Marston, 1996). Additionally, due to the legal and moral issues surrounding educating students, particularly those with disabilities, most studies were unable to use randomized sampling when comparing student placements (Gelzheiser, Meyers, & Pruzek, 1992). Rather, students were selected and placed in the educational program that their teachers, parents, and the rest of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team felt was optimal for that individual student, which impacts the collected data.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to assess the process of implementing a social-emotional curriculum with students who have been identified as having learning disabilities and examine the effect of the program on students' behavior in the general education classroom as reported by their teachers. This research expands on the ongoing dialog in the literature concerning the

effects of explicit and targeted social-emotional instruction. Students with disabilities are included in the data collection in order to better understand how students feel the curriculum program affects them.

Significance of Study

This study is significant for teachers interested in implementing social-emotional curriculum in a small group environment. The findings from this study have the potential to help special education teachers collaborate with general education teachers, and advocate for the needs of their shared students. In addition, teachers participating in this study gained strategies and understanding, so that special education students could be more fully included in general education classroom environments and curriculum. With an increase in social-emotional understanding, I hope to see an increase in students' feelings of connectedness to their classroom and peers, their engagement during general education lessons, and thus their academic progress. This social-emotional progress has the potential to create a more equitable learning environment for students with learning disabilities.

In order to engage in this research, I collaborated with general education teachers at the school where I teach, as well as with my students who have learning disabilities. This is my third year working at this school, so relationships have been established with students in all grade levels through teaching in my resource room, teaching Saturday School, being out on the playground during recess and lunch, and by visiting different classrooms throughout the year during special events. I am involving the students in my research in order to give them a voice. I believe that their opinions and experiences are particularly valuable to the discussion of how they are impacted by their education placement and social-emotional curriculum instruction. There is an issue of power with these relationships, as I am in a position of authority as a teacher at the

school. I have consciously tried to be the adult that my students feel comfortable talking to about their fears or concerns, by sharing with them about my own life and learning about their individual experiences.

Furthermore, I have established relationships with teachers at my school through collaborating to help various students, by working together in staff and IEP meetings, and through social functions outside of school. I am one of the newer teachers at my school, so I do tend to identify other teachers as individuals who can help advise me when difficult situations arise. However, I am the only resource specialist at the school, and I am aware of the power some teachers perceive I hold as one of the individuals responsible for assessing and determining student eligibility for special education. It is important for me to show the teachers at my school that I am not trying to decrease the number of students who qualify for special education services, but rather increase everyone's understanding of the needs these students face and the impact social-emotional learning has on student's interactions in general education settings.

Summary of Methods

This was a qualitative research study, with a goal of determining the effects of teaching elementary age students with identified learning disabilities SEL strategies. In particular, how do mindfulness and mindset strategies taught through the MindUP curriculum enable their capacity to manage feelings of frustration and anxiety? Data for this research study was collected by interviewing elementary age students and second, third, and fourth-grade teachers from the same school site. All participating students were found eligible for special education services under the category Specific Learning Disability. Participating students spend the majority of their school day in the general education setting, but are pulled out of their class for academic special education support one to two times a day. Students received MindUP social-emotional

instruction on a weekly basis within already scheduled resource pull-out time. Mind-Up is a curriculum and framework that integrates neuroscience, positive psychology, mindful behavior, and social-emotional learning concepts.

Summary of Findings and Implications of Study

This research showed that most participating students increased their coping skills given social-emotional instruction, which helped to reduce the instances of these students showing signs of being upset at school. It also minimized their reaction to academic struggles. This happened because teachers were able to fit simple social-emotional strategies, such as mindful breathing, within their daily lessons. Teachers, as well as students, were able to see the positive results of the regular practice of these simple social-emotional coping strategies and thus continued to make time for effective social-emotional practice regularly. In addition, the practices used in the general education classrooms were reinforced in the special education setting using the same vocabulary which provided students with continuity across academic environments.

These findings are important because they show that SEL strategies can be worked into the school day in small chunks of time and still be beneficial to students. Frequent repetition of strategies and a common language across educational setting appeared to support the students' ability to learn the taught SEL strategies. Additionally, teaching SEL strategies when students are young could help set them up to have more successful academic careers and futures. Social-emotional skills are important throughout life and should be taught early and often.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Students with learning disabilities face recognized difficulties with the academic curriculum, yet they are often expected to spend the majority of their school day independently navigating the social and academic environment of grade level classes. This is problematic as existing research demonstrates that students with disabilities are more likely to report negative social experiences at school, such as feeling excluded or being bullied, when compared to students with higher levels of academic achievement (Murray & Greenberg, 2006). Research has also shown a connection between stronger social-emotional skills and increased academic testing scores (Snipes & Tran, 2017). However, little research exists exploring how the explicit instruction of social-emotional impacts the level of frustration-based behaviors in general education classrooms for students with learning disabilities. How does social-emotional learning in a small-group pull-out environment affect the ability of students with learning disabilities to access their general education social and academic learning environment?

In what follows, I will discuss three main themes occurring in the academic literature. First, research indicates that supports are needed for teachers and students in inclusion classrooms. While researchers have found that student academic success can be achieved through inclusion teaching when the proper supports are employed, there is limited information concerning how the social-emotional needs of students with learning disabilities can be met in a similar way. Second, small group, pull-out, interventions can lead to student academic success. It is important that intervention instruction is research-based and targeted to the specific students' needs. Well-trained teachers and collaboration and communication between school staff are vital components of successful pull-out interventions. Third, social-emotional learning (SEL) is a necessary component of a child's education, particularly if the child has a learning disability.

Social-emotional skills have been shown to be important throughout an individual's life and can lead to increase feelings of social connection and happiness, as well as increased academic abilities. However, these skills are not always innate for individuals who have learning disabilities, which requires that they receive direct instruction in order to gain expertise in SEL.

Supports for Teachers and Students

The existing literature shows that specific supports are needed in order for teachers to successfully include students with learning disabilities within the general education classroom. Multiple researchers agree that general education teachers need collaboration and communication opportunities with special educators, training and professional development, administrative support and a school culture that embraces inclusion in order to successfully include students with disabilities in grade level general education classrooms (Dias, 2015; Morgan, 2016; Petersen, 2016). Similarly, students with learning disabilities often struggle to learn social-emotional skills independently without external supports. The types of supports that researchers have found to be successful in building social-emotional skills include interventions intended to address problem-solving skills, build memory strategies, improve coping techniques, and increase students' positive state of mind.

Communication and teacher collaboration. Findings from research studies on inclusion programs indicate that supporting both communication and collaboration between the general education and special education teachers is essential for student success. According to LeDoux, Graves, and Burt (2012), increased communication between the special education team and general education teachers is needed in order to address the academic, social, and behavior concerns that tend to appear when placing special education students in a general education class. Collaboration between teachers was also found to result in more successful instruction

planning and tracking of IEP goals (LeDoux et al., 2012). Morgan (2016) argues that when done well, collaboration and co-teaching can improve student learning, and help decrease the isolation that tends to occur when students are segregated in special education classrooms. While this method requires more scheduling and role changes for special educators, it has been shown to have great benefits for teachers and students alike.

Collaboration and professional development. Taking it a step further, Brusca-Vega, Alexander, and Kamin's (2014) study found that collaboration between special education and general education teachers, specifically the implementation of collaborative professional development resulted in better instruction in the classroom. This benefited all students, both those with disabilities and those without. With the support of professional development, the teachers who participated in the study reported that they were better able to adapt their instruction to the needs of their students (Brusca-Vega, Alexander, & Kamin, 2014). This study found increased skills, when measured from pre-professional development observations to post-professional development observation, in the areas of teacher patience, teacher provided think-time, hands-on instruction opportunities, collaborative learning opportunities, and more engaging questioning strategies (Brusca-Vega et al., 2014). These strategies help to ensure that the students receive more individualized instruction, as well as a more comprehensive learning environment. Moreover, Fuchs et al.'s (2015) study discusses the importance of intense research-based interventions to improve the academic skills of lower achieving students. In order to provide research-based instruction with fidelity, teachers need to be trained so that they can fully understand the new program and feel confident in their ability to provide these interventions.

A teacher's level of confidence and training has been shown to impact his or her opinion of the inclusion model, which is the teaching of students with disabilities within a general education setting. Dias (2015) found that teachers as a group feel positive about the idea of inclusion teaching, but professional development and experience teaching students with disabilities are key factors in determining how individual teachers feel about inclusion. Teachers who were trained in special education practices were found to have a more positive view of inclusion than teachers who did not have this specific training background (Dias, 2015). Formalized training leads to increased knowledge of special education instructional practices, which likely increases both a teacher's confidence for teaching students with learning disabilities, as well as his or her understanding of the students' needs. The researchers discovered that general education teachers are less confident in their ability to teach students with disabilities and that increasing teacher knowledge and confidence through professional development training could lead to an increase in their teaching abilities (LeDoux et al., 2012). This research shows the importance of continuing education opportunities for teachers so that they can best adapt to the individual make-up of each class.

Administrative support and school culture. While collaboration, communication, and worthwhile training are key factors in improving the level of teaching that occurs in a classroom, these elements seldom occur without the support of the administrators. As school leaders, a principal's engagement in a concept, or lack thereof, can play a large role in determining if true policy change occurs throughout the school (Brusca-Vega et al., 2012). Thompson and Timmons (2017) identified administrative support as a key need for a school attempting to shift towards more inclusion. Petersen (2016) found that administrative support was a needed component to ensure that everything else, including collaboration, communication, and professional

development, occurs in a meaningful way. Finally, administrators and principals play an important role in guiding the culture of a school, and school-wide culture is needed in order to support inclusive teaching (Karin, Ellen, Evelien, Mieke, & Katja, 2012).

An inclusive school culture and a well-supported teacher are both central in the success of a student, but according to teacher reports, students with learning disabilities need more supports and adaptations in the classroom than their peers in order to be successful (Dias, 2015). Consistency and clear learning goals that are shared with them help students with learning disabilities better understand the school routine and the expectations placed on them (Elias, 2004). Additionally, support chunking work into smaller, manageable, units and immediate feedback on their work can help students who are struggling with the academic expectations of a classroom (Elias, 2004). Beyond academic supports, students with learning disabilities often also need additional supports to navigate the social expectations of school. Elias (2004) found that simply including students with learning disabilities in general education classrooms was not enough to build their social skills. Direct intervention is needed in order to help them improve their problem-solving skills, learn memory strategies, and understand how to use coping techniques, which are all needed when interacting with others (Elias, 2004). In addition to direct instruction, Marston's (1996) research shows that students benefit from receiving support from both the special education and general education teachers throughout the day the school. In order for this to happen effectively, however, teachers need to be able to collaborate, classroom teachers need to open to making accommodations to their lessons, and administrators need to be supportive (Marston, 1996).

Research-Based, Targeted, Small Group Interventions

It should not be assumed that a student is making academic progress simply by being placed in a general education classroom. According to Fuchs et al. (2015), access to grade level curriculum can only be measured through student achievement on assessments. It is not accurate to say that a student is accessing the curriculum solely based on the location of that curriculum, even if supports and accommodations are provided (Fuchs et al., 2015). Fuchs et al.'s (2015) research shows the importance of targeted small group instruction in improving a specific skill for students who have attributes similar to those with learning disabilities. In this study, academically low-achieving students made more progress in their understanding of fractions when they were provided with specialized intervention as opposed to the students who received inclusion only instruction (Fuchs et al., 2015). Fuchs et al. (2015) found that these lower achieving students, who commonly include students with learning disabilities, generally have gaps in their understanding of basic skills. These gaps need to be addressed in order for the students to make progress towards grade level standards. In order for this to occur, these students require the additional support of instruction in foundational skills along with their grade-level instruction (Fuchs et al., 2015). This is difficult to provide in most general education classrooms due to the variance of skill levels and understandings. It follows that foundational skill instruction must be provided in a smaller group where individual needs can be more fully discovered and met.

A second study that supports the benefits of small-group, pull-out instruction was done by Marston (1996), who researched the differences in student reading achievement in inclusion only, combined services, and pull-out only models of special education. The collected student reading scores indicated that a combined service model resulted in the largest growth in student

reading scores from pre-test to post-test (Marston, 1996). Marston (1996) defines the combined service model as involving pull-out instruction and collaboration between the involved special education and general education teachers (p. 123). This shows that students benefit from receiving support throughout the day, both from a special educator in targeted small-group instruction and from their general education teacher in their classroom.

In contrast to the research done by Fuchs et al. (2015) and Marston (1996), DeMathews and Mawhinney's (2013) study found a decrease in the test scores of students with disabilities at the end of their research. DeMathews and Mawhinney (2013) looked into the issue of minority students with disabilities being disproportionately placed in learning settings that are separate from their general education peers, and the corresponding issue of district noncompliance of IDEA. This study specifically reviewed schools in an urban, high-poverty, school district that recently changed its special education policy to advocate for the inclusion of special education students within general education placement settings (DeMathews & Mawhinney, 2013). The challenges the district faced in this case study show that one specific model of inclusion is not necessarily the best practice for all school districts, and that school structures and the needs of the individual students have to be considered before following through with any plans for policy changes.

Notably, the school district being studied did not provide ample training or financial support to the schools that were expected to teach an expanded number of students with disabilities due to a change in policy (DeMathews & Mawhinney, 2013). Likewise, many principals reported that they did not support the district's approach to shifting towards more inclusion, and admitted to not following the district's mandate when possible (DeMathews & Mawhinney, 2013). Not only does this echo the importance of administrative support raised by

other studies, but it also raises questions about the true equity and the quality of instruction that was provided to special education students as this district shifted towards inclusion practices (DeMathews & Mawhinney, 2013). Access to quality instruction is important for student success in all academic settings.

Evidence of the lack of quality instruction appears to be found by reviewing the test scores of students before and after the shift to inclusion took place. DeMathews and Mawhinney (2013) found that test scores of students with disabilities dropped after the inclusion policy was changed. Prior to the policy shift towards more inclusion, 22% of students classified as having disabilities scored proficient on the standardized state reading test (DeMathews & Mawhinney, 2013). This percentage dropped to 14% three years later after the inclusion policy had been in effect (DeMathews & Mawhinney, 2013). They explain that the district focused on compliance and removing alternative placement schools at the expense of supporting the individual schools, teachers, and students who were affected by these changes (DeMathews & Mawhinney, 2013). This finding indicates that schools need to be able to provide fair and appropriate instruction for students with disabilities, not simply place them in general education environments as a sweeping policy. The appearance of equity does not override the actual fairness of a quality education.

An additional study, which supports the need for research-based and individualized instruction, was done by Gelzheiser, Meyers, and Pruzek's (1992). This study did not find statistically meaningful differences in the reading achievement of students who were taught in a pull-out method as opposed to a pull-in method when providing reading instruction (Gelzheiser, Meyers, & Pruzek, 1992). While this appears to contradict the research of Fuchs et al. (2015) and Marston (1996), the methods of this study must be fully examined. This study looked at pull-out

and pull-in reading instruction examples at six elementary schools (Gelzheiser et al., 1992). Students who were considered remedial were studied along with students who were receiving special education services (Gelzheiser et al., 1992). The Stanford Achievement Test was also used to determine pretest and posttest levels of reading comprehension (Gelzheiser et al., 1992). To the detriment of the study, the researchers gave each teacher quite a bit of choice and freedom during this study, which resulted in too many variables, and not enough clear controls. Thus, each pull-in or pull-out system was not the same, and the researchers did not examine these differences (Gelzheiser et al., 1992). As a result, more information was necessary to draw conclusions about which specific strategies led increased student achievement (Gelzheiser et al., 1992). However, the researchers were able to conclude from the collected data that the quality of instruction was a more important factor than whether the instruction took place inside or outside of the general education classroom (Gelzheiser, Meyers, & Pruzek, 1992).

While academic progress is of the utmost importance when considering the quality of instruction, social-emotional effects should also be taken into account when determining the success of interventions. The research shows that small group, research-based, targeted, interventions can lead to more academic and emotional skill growth than when students only receive instruction in the general education classroom. This instruction, however, must be paired with access to general education settings and curriculum. Small group learning opportunities have been shown to correspond to students' feelings of support. Rose and Shevlin (2017) studied the experience and opinions of students with disabilities who were provided with pull-out small group instruction to determine how the students' felt they were accepted within general education placements. Overall, they found that students were happy with their school placement setting (Rose & Shevlin, 2017). The interviewed primary students reported feeling that their

classroom teachers understood that they needed extra help, and were willing and able to provide that help in class (Rose & Shevlin, 2017). These students were aware that they needed more help and reported feeling comfortable asking for help in their classrooms (Rose & Shevlin, 2017). This evidence supports the theory that providing students who have disabilities with targeted instruction in small group environments does help them both academically and emotionally. It is possible, though not mentioned by Rose and Shevlin (2017), that a direct connection exists between the instruction and support the students received in their pull-out classroom, and their overall positive feelings towards school. Rose and Shevlin (2017) did find that the students appreciated that they could talk about problems, receive help more easily, and that they were frequently praised when they were in the pull-out classroom. This study shows the importance of students' access to teachers who are able to emotionally support students so that their social-emotional abilities can expand.

An issue surrounding both academic skill and academic mindset interventions is that pull-out instruction is not universally supported. Kirby (2017) writes that rather than separating students and providing individualized instruction outside of their classroom, all students should receive individualized instruction from their classroom teachers (Kirby, 2017). Improved teacher preparation programs and the use of technology are offered as ways to help make this type of teaching and learning occur (Kirby, 2017). However, these changes require alterations to the larger education process as well as the allocation of money, which are not simple steps. Additional suggested supports include frequently collecting data to drive instruction, and also tracking the generally more minor progress that occurs for students with learning disabilities (Kirby, 2017). The researchers propose that teachers use "constant progress monitoring" (Kirby, 2017, p. 187). While data is very valuable, this level of collection would take up a large quantity

of the classroom teacher's time, or additional aid support, which requires further financial support.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Researchers have found that when students have a better understanding of social-emotional skills, their academic skills tend to be better as well. Comparatively, students with learning disabilities often report feelings of exclusion, difficulty making friends, and are more likely to be involved in the bullying dynamic. Individuals with learning disabilities want to feel included but are frequently excluded due to the setup of societal and education systems, as well as the opinions of typically developing peers. While some argue against pulling students out of class for small-group instruction due to concerns of them missing important social-emotional development opportunities, small-group SEL activities have been found to help students feel more positive about school, their classmates, and themselves. These benefits are particularly important for students who are also struggling with a learning disability and the increased effort that the school environment requires of them. Specifically, growth mindset thinking has been shown to lead to an increased ability to persevere with academic tasks (Snipes & Tran, 2017).

Mindsets. Mindset theory involves the idea that individuals have different beliefs over whether levels of intelligence are constant throughout life, or if intelligence can be changed through an individual's effort (Macnamara & Rupani, 2017). The term fixed mindset is used to describe those who believe that intelligence is a set quality, whereas the term growth mindset is used to describe those who believe that their intelligence can grow through hard work (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). A growth mindset is generally agreed to be the ideal mindset for increasing academic achievement (Macnamara & Rupani, 2017). There are three central aspects of education that are believed to be affected by a student's mindset. The first is of these aspects

is the student's academic goals. Students with a growth mindset are more likely to create goals to expand their learning whereas those with a fixed mindset create goals to validate their perceived ability (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Second, students with a growth mindset are more likely than students with a fixed mindset to see effort as productive (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Students with a growth mindset see the benefit of working harder in order to overcome difficulties because they believe they can improve (Macnamara & Rupani, 2017). Individuals with a fixed mindset tend to believe that it is useless to put in extra effort because they assume they will be unable to expand their abilities (Macnamara & Rupani, 2017). Third, students with different mindsets react to academic setbacks in diverse ways (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Students with a growth mindset are able to see their failures and mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Conversely, students with fixed mindsets tend to feel helpless when faced with academic setbacks (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Setbacks are a central part of learning and life, so being able to deal with them in a productive way can greatly impact an individual's success in school and into his or her future.

Snipes and Tran (2017) found that students who scored at the Emergent level on state testing in math responded with lower growth mindset scores, higher ratings of work avoidance, and lower ratings of academic behavior when compared to the responses of students who scored in the Exceed Standard range on the state math test. Overall 74% of students in this study responded that they did not believe ability to be a fixed construct (Snipes & Tran, 2017). Sixty-one percent of students responded that it was either "not true" or "a little true" when asked if they engaged in work avoidance behaviors (Snipes & Tran, 2017, p. 7). Seventy-eight percent of students reported that they demonstrated academic behaviors "most of the time" (Snipes & Tran, 2017, p. 7). While these scores did not vary significantly when comparing students by grade

level, significant differences in survey responses were apparent when students were compared based on prior academic achievement (Snipes & Tran, 2017). This data shows a potential correlation between a student's lower academic achievement and a belief that his or her ability is fixed. Snipes and Tran's (2017) study contributes the theoretical idea that experiencing academic failure or difficulty leads to a fixed-mindset belief in students. Including interventions in academic mindset along with academic skill interventions could help students change their beliefs and increase their academic progress (Snipes & Tran, 2017).

Since students who report having a growth-mindset are also able to demonstrate academic achievement more frequently than students who report a fixed-mindset, it is important to consider what specifically can be done to help adjust students' mindsets. Kudliskis (2013) researched the possibility of shifting special education students to a positive state of mind through neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) in order to help students with disabilities increase engagement at school. Calming and visualization exercises were used at the beginning of small-group lessons in order to help students focus on the upcoming academic task more quickly (Kudliskis, 2013). The majority of students were very positive about these exercises in their post-interviews (Kudliskis, 2013). Data collected through observations also showed that the majority of students did transition to the lesson's academic task more quickly after being guided through a visualization exercise as compared to the initial observation data (Kudliskis, 2013). This concept ties into emotional readiness and the importance of students being able to engage in their own learning, which shows that teachers can help facilitate a positive mental state in their students leading to better engagement (Kudliskis, 2013).

Additional benefits of SEL. An understanding of SEL is linked to less stress, better coping strategies, a more connected school community, and an increased ability to learn

(Hromek & Roffey, 2009). These factors are important in creating positive opinions of school and learning for students. There are many recommended responses to address the difficulties that students with learning disabilities face at school in addition to teaching growth-mindset. These recommendations tend to revolve around teaching coping strategies, improving feelings of self-worth, increasing understandings of others, building cooperative skills, and improving the understanding and regulation of emotions. Increasing the students' understanding of their disability and their individual strengths can help increase their feelings of self-worth (Karin, et al., 2012). The establishment of anti-bullying programs can also help improve social relations between special education students and their general education peers (Karin, et al., 2012). Karin, et al. (2012) recommend informing the general education students more about their peers with disabilities in order to decrease bullying and increase understandings of others.

Issues to address with SEL. There is a clear need for increased SEL instruction in the school system. Students with disabilities are found to have lower graduation rates, higher dropout rates, and often feel stigmatized by being labeled as disabled (Kirby, 2017). Furthermore, teachers have decreased expectations of students identified with learning disabilities, and these students are often found to put less effort into academic tasks, have less self-efficacy, and a more negative mood (Kirby, 2017). Students with learning disabilities further struggle because the difficulty they face when attempting to understand academic tasks can also cause difficulties with understanding their social environment (Elias, 2004). The need to focus more on academic tasks than their peers can result in little remaining attention for reading social cues (Elias, 2004). All of these factors can make school even more difficult for students with learning disabilities, increasing the importance of SEL interventions.

Social skill development. Involving SEL within academic lessons has been shown to lead to long-term benefits and understandings (Hromek & Roffey, 2009). This argument appears to support the model of inclusion-only teaching because students receive academic lessons alongside typically developing peers throughout the whole school day when placed in inclusion classrooms. However, Elias (2004) argues that inclusion is not enough and interventions are needed to help develop social skills in students with learning disabilities. Just because a student is around peer interactions does not mean that these interactions are positive, or that the student is able to learn the correct lesson from the peer modeling (Elias, 2004). The SEL skills that students need in order to be a participating member in the school environment include recognizing emotions in self and others, regulating and managing strong emotions, and recognizing strengths and areas of need (Elias, 2004).

Small group game opportunities provide SEL instruction, modeling, and practice opportunities that benefit students who struggle with the social skills needed for school (Hromek & Roffey, 2009). A cooperative community with opportunities to interact is necessary in order for students to gain progress in SEL (Hromek & Roffey, 2009). These opportunities are more frequently met in small-group learning environments. Nepi, Fioravanti, Nannini, and Peru (2015) found that special education students were “less accepted and more rejected” when the expectations were more intense, such as during academic time, as opposed to playtime activities (p. 332). Playing games has been found to be a valuable way to provide students with SEL instruction (Hromek & Roffey, 2009). When a group of individuals has fun together, it increases the individual’s sense of belonging and positive emotions (Hromek & Roffey, 2009). These are both important elements of long-term satisfaction with school and life.

Transitions and SEL. Social-emotional skills are vital for success beyond school and into adulthood as well. MacIntyre's (2014) research examined the inclusion of individuals with learning disabilities within society as they transitioned into their post-secondary education life. Researchers interviewed twenty 18-21 year-olds in Scotland with moderate learning disabilities, and their self-selected significant others, about their transition into adulthood (MacIntyre, 2014). MacIntyre (2014) found that individuals who had scheduled daily tasks, whether school or work, also reported having more confidence and feelings of self-worth. The individuals who were interviewed placed a lot of importance on finding a job and "being like everyone else" (MacIntyre, 2014, p. 866). Social inclusion is a popular reason for fully including students in general education classrooms (Karin, 2012). MacIntyre (2014) equates being a citizen to having a sense of belonging, which those interviewed gained through attending further education programs or obtaining a job. However, these plans did not seem to bring with them social acceptance. Most of those interviewed were also unable to sustain friendships with school or work friends but rather spent most social time with family (MacIntyre, 2014). Only 2 of the 20 participants were able to attend mainstreamed further education classes, which meant that the majority of them were not included in the general social events (MacIntyre, 2014). As for those who were working, the disabilities benefit system limits the number of hours an individual can work, which caused some of the participants to miss out on team building portions of the workday (MacIntyre, 2014). Additional supports are needed in order for those with learning disabilities to gain access to social inclusion (MacIntyre, 2014). In order for this to occur fully throughout society, policy change has to occur, differences need to be highlighted, and the contributions from those with disabilities must be acknowledged for their positive impacts

(MacIntyre, 2014). Only then can individuals with learning disabilities fully access social inclusion (MacIntyre, 2014).

Summary

The findings from the literature indicate that the current way of educating students with learning disabilities is certainly not ideal. There are academic, social, and emotional concerns, both with pulling students out of their general education classrooms for special education support and with including students with disabilities for the full day in general education. Of the studies that do interview students, most report being happy with pull-out support services. Students recognize the benefit of the attention and extra support they can receive in small group lessons, and studies show that small group academic instruction results in at least an equivalent level of skill growth, if not more, when compared to inclusion teaching. Providing teachers and students with quality support is needed for student growth and success.

In reviewing this research, a central theme was an agreement among researchers about the importance of teacher collaboration opportunities and more training in special education in order to increase the quality of classroom instruction. The studies also agreed that individuals with disabilities tend to have lower self-confidence and feel more excluded than their higher-achieving academic peers. These qualities can greatly impact a student's happiness and ability to increase academic skills. SEL was shown as a method to help support students.

An apparent weakness of these studies is the lack of information regarding student opinions towards different educational placements. Due to the legality and moral issues surrounding educating students, practically those with disabilities, most studies were unable to use randomization when comparing student placements. Students were likely placed in an

educational program that their teachers, parents, and the rest of the IEP team felt was optimal for that individual student, which impacts the collected data.

There is controversy surrounding the placement of students with learning disabilities. Some argue that these students should be taught through full inclusion, with a special education teacher providing collaboration/co-teaching support in the classroom. Others argue that small group instruction is necessary in order for students with learning disabilities to learn important academic and SEL skills, which occurs best in small groups outside of the classroom. There is also little research exploring how elementary students with learning disabilities in the United States feel about being in an inclusion class versus being pulled out of their classrooms for special education services. Finally, few studies have considered how special education teachers can support the social and emotional inclusion of students with learning disabilities when they are in the general education classroom. This study researches the process of implementing a social-emotional curriculum with students with learning disabilities and examining the effect of the program on students' interactions in the general education classroom.

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of implementing a social-emotional curriculum with students with learning disabilities and examining the effect of the program on students' and their behavior in the general education classroom. Qualitative methods were used in order to investigate how social-emotional learning (SEL) impacts students with learning disabilities' access to the grade level environment. This study explores the question, what are the effects of teaching elementary age students with identified learning disabilities SEL strategies? In particular, this research asks, how do mindfulness and mindset strategies taught through the MindUP curriculum enable their capacity to manage feelings of frustration and anxiety?

Description and Rationale for Research Approach

This study followed the constructivist worldview. The constructivist approach to research involves heavily weighing the participants' views of the concept being studied (Creswell, 2014). The researcher then attempts to make sense of these views and create a theory (Creswell, 2014). This approach is appropriate for this study because it relies predominantly on interviews with teachers and students that the researcher interacts with daily in order to better understand the role of social-emotional instruction on students' experiences of inclusion in a general education classroom. The views and experiences of the participating teachers and students are of the utmost value to the study because measuring social-emotional skill development involves social interactions. While quantitative data can be quite meaningful, qualitative data is needed in order to better understand how students are affected by social-emotional instruction. Students and their teachers are in the best position to observe any potential changes that may result from the studied curriculum instruction. The researcher depended on their shared experiences in order to

determine the effects of the study because they are the ones who experience the potential changes first hand and thus have the greatest understanding of any outcomes.

Research Design

This is a qualitative research study. Data was collected primarily through interviewing students and teachers from one elementary school. Behavior and attendance records were also reviewed as part of the researcher's normal instructional process in order to determine student progress.

Research sites. The research took place at an elementary school in a suburban, upper-middle-class, area of the San Francisco/North Bay. There are about 500 students receiving instruction at this school including Transitional Kindergarten (TK) through fifth grade. Fifty-eight percent of the student population identifies as white, and twenty-four percent of the student population identifies as Hispanic (GreatSchools, 2017). Fifteen percent of all students are identified as having limited English proficiency (GreatSchools, 2017). Twelve percent of the students are identified as having a learning disability (GreatSchools, 2017). Students with disabilities receive services in a pull-out resource room setting or are placed in a Special Day classroom. Teachers and parents have high expectations for the students, and teachers are noticing an increasing number of students struggling with anxiety and other social-emotional issues. A school counselor works with select students three days a week, both individually and in social groups. The school adopted the MindUP social-emotional learning curriculum during the 2016-2017 school year, but it is not being used universally in all classrooms. The resource room began implementing the program through small group instruction during the 2017-2018 school year.

Participants. The students involved in this research were elementary students who have been found to be eligible for special education services under the eligibility of Specific Learning Disability. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), a specific learning disability is:

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.

The participating students included two second-graders, four third-graders, three fourth-graders, and one fifth-grader. Six of the students are male and four of the students are female. All ten students receive pull-out resource support for English Language Arts support. Six of the students also receive support in mathematics. All participating students spend the majority of their school day in the general education classroom setting. Pseudonyms are used to identify each participant throughout the thesis.

Three teachers were recruited from the group of teachers at the elementary school site who had students participating in the study. Teachers were selected based on the number of students participating in their class and their grade level. A second-grade teacher, third-grade teacher, and fourth-grade teacher participated in the research. Each teacher has taught at the research site for at least three years. Each teacher had two or three students who were also participants in the study.

Sampling procedure. All seventeen students at the research school site who had been found to be eligible for special education services under the eligibility of Specific Learning Disability were recruited for participation through a request sent home to obtain parental consent.

Parent consent for student participation was solicited through a written request sent home in the student's Friday Folder. A copy of the letter translated into Spanish was also sent home to families of students who are English Learners. The letter was enclosed in its own envelope for confidentiality. Ten parental consents were returned. Once parental consent was received, student consent was also obtained face-to-face and by the student choosing to participate in the interview. Teacher consent for interviews was solicited face-to-face, based on the students who were participating in the study. Teachers who were interviewed needed to have at least one student participating in the study. Three teachers were recruited for the interviews, based on student participating, teacher availability, and teacher grade level.

Methods. Students began receiving MindUP Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) instruction on a weekly basis within their already scheduled small-group, resource pull-out time beginning in January. Two lesson plan books were used in order to provide developmentally appropriate instruction. The program has lessons directed towards Pre-Kindergarten through second-grade, and a second lesson book with lessons directed towards third-grade through fifth-grade students. The main concepts of the lessons are very similar to each other, with slight differences in order to better target the different grade-level groups. The researcher took research notes throughout the process, which was stored on a password-protected computer with no real student names ever included (pseudonyms only). After receiving six weeks of instruction in a small-group setting, students were interviewed for about 10 minutes, with considerations made for age and stamina. No names or identifying information were included and students were given the option to not participate if they did not want to. Student attendance and teacher-supplied behavior reports were reviewed from this year and last school year as part of the researcher's normal instructional process. Three teachers were recruited from the group of teachers who had

students participating in the study to be interviewed for about 45 minutes regarding their observations involving the students who have received the MindUP instruction in the resource setting and their experiences with MindUP and SEL in their general education classrooms. Interviews took place at a location and time convenient to the teacher being interviewed. Notes were taken during interviews and later typed and stored on a password-protected computer. Teachers and students were identified with a numerical code, with all students also being given pseudonyms. The master list of these codes was kept separate from the notes in a locked file cabinet.

Research Positionality

The researcher has taught at the central research site for three years as a resource specialist. The teachers who were interviewed for this study are colleagues and general education teachers at the research site. The students who participated in this study are all pulled out for special education instruction as part of their Individualized Education Program (IEP) by the researcher. Many parents and teachers reported social-emotional concerns relating to students who were receiving special education services. The principal at this school site has also made social-emotional skill development a focal point of staff training to help address the needs of individual students throughout the school. With this being said, there is an existing bias towards the belief that social-emotional learning is an important aspect of an elementary curriculum. While the researcher is aware of this bias and will attempt to analyze the data as objectively as possible, there is a possibility that positive results will appear emphasized within the data. In addition, the researcher is in a position of power over the students being interviewed due to the teacher-student relationship. This could result in biased data because students may answer

questions in a way they feel they are expected to as a result of the classroom emphasis on growth mindset ideals.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed throughout the research process. Notes and interviews were hand-coded to reveal common themes and categories. Frequently repeated codes were grouped into related categories. The codes in each of the categories were reviewed in order to determine three overarching themes that could explain each category of data. Attention was paid to the occurrence of unexpected versus expected codes. Differences were compared across each interview. A table was created to compare student responses and teacher reports regarding these students' behavior in the classroom. A second table was created to compare the types of SEL used by each of the participating teachers. Comparing the perspectives of teachers and their students using qualitative data led to a more thorough understanding of the effect of SEL on elementary students with learning disabilities because students and teachers often have different opinions and the interview process allows more freedom for participants to share these views.

Validity and Reliability

Validity was established through the collection and examination of data from multiple sources. This was done in order to determine if potential conclusions were similar across data points, or if a finding was specific to a particular source. Data that did not fit into the main themes of the research findings were identified as such and also included in the findings section. Such data will likely result in further questions for future study. In order to increase reliability, data and codes were constantly compared throughout the study to ensure that the meaning of codes did not shift. Careful attention was given to the context of the data, as well as the researcher's own biases, in order to further ensure the validity of findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

“Nerves go off the chart. It’s like I’m steady and then it goes high when I’m in a stressful situation. I feel nervous for tests and hard work because I want good grades.” Luke

All students experience stress and frustration to some degree during their time at school. However, students with identified learning disabilities can have increased cause for stress and frustration in the classroom due to the nature of their learning differences. Students who qualify for special education services under the eligibility of specific learning disability have, “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written” (IDEA, 2014). This can impact the students’ ability to process written or verbal information, or accurately share their learning in the expected way. In addition, students with learning disabilities generally have gaps in their understanding of basic skills (Fuchs et al., 2015). All of these aspects can make the expectations of general education classrooms even more stressful or frustrating for students who have learning disabilities. How students handle these emotions can impact their academic growth and the type of relationships they have with others in the classroom. It is important that they are given the support and strategies needed in order to help maximize their ability to make academic and social progress.

This study examined how the implementation of a social-emotional instructional program impacted students with learning disabilities, as well as their general education classroom environments. Three central themes emerged when reviewing the data. First, the SEL MindUP program was effective, but not a complete solution. The findings from this study demonstrate that most students increased their coping skills given social-emotional instruction, which helps to reduce the instances of these students being upset at school as well as minimizes their reaction to academic struggles. Behavior instances were still reported by teachers, but the intensity and

frequency of behaviors reduced. Second, social-emotional instruction should be kept simple and repeated often. While participating teachers were able to fit simple social-emotional strategies into their daily lessons, none of the teachers reported using the entire MindUP program. All participating teachers cited a lack of time as the main reason why they could not fit a complete social-emotional curriculum into their daily classroom schedules. However, teachers were able to fit various, shorter, aspects of the curriculum into each day. Teachers, as well as students, were able to see the positive results of the regular practice of these simple social-emotional coping strategies and thus continued to make time for effective social-emotional practice regularly. Students were most likely to express an understanding of social-emotional coping strategies when these strategies were simple and practiced frequently. Third, SEL was found to be great for students with learning disabilities and also good for their whole class. While mindfulness practices have not completely stopped instances of anxiety and frustration, teachers do report a reduction in their occurrence and its impact on the class. This benefits not only the students who are struggling but also the class environment as a whole.

Effective but Not a Complete Solution

The social-emotional curriculum used in this research study has not eradicated all instances of behavior, frustration, or anxiety; however, teachers report that it has helped the students minimize reactions when faced with difficult tasks, support others through their difficult tasks, and reflect on their actions afterward. According to the participating second-grade teacher, *“The behaviors haven’t stopped necessarily, but they shorten. Not all students are using it on themselves, but they are using it with each other. We can give advice to others but we may not necessarily take it ourselves.”* While not all students are able to routinely employ mindfulness strategies independently, they are displaying an understanding of the strategies they have been

taught. Students in the class are able to observe when their peers need to use mindfulness strategies, and they can prompt these students to breathe or take a break. Relatedly, the same students benefit from prompts from their peers to use mindfulness strategies as well.

Similarly, the participating fourth-grade teacher shared about her class, *“They are able to be reflective and very honest about how the class does each day, so that shows a positive sign that they can be thoughtful.”* The participating third-grade teacher noted that the MindUP program *“helps immensely anytime children start to feel any type of anxiety.”* This benefit was also noted when comparing the behavior of individual students participating in the research study. All students who shared that they regularly use mindful breathing independently, also showed signs of reductions in behavior, if this was a concern, as measured by teacher observations.

The following table shows the participating students, whether they independently used coping strategies, and if there were teacher-reported behavior improvements.

| Student | Age | Grade | Gender | Independent Mindful Breathing/Coping Strategies | Teacher-reported behavior improvements |
|--------------|-----|-----------------|--------|---|--|
| <i>Andy</i> | 8 | 2 nd | Male | Yes | Yes |
| <i>Chris</i> | 9 | 3 rd | Male | Yes | Yes |
| <i>Henry</i> | 9 | 3 rd | Male | Yes | Yes |
| <i>Simon</i> | 9 | 4 th | Male | Yes | Yes |
| <i>Luke</i> | 10 | 5 th | Male | Yes | Yes |
| <i>Jenny</i> | 8 | 2 nd | Female | Yes | No noted behavior concerns |
| <i>Sarah</i> | 8 | 3 rd | Female | Yes | No noted behavior concerns |
| <i>Kim</i> | 9 | 4 th | Female | No | No noted behavior concerns |
| <i>Joe</i> | 8 | 3 rd | Male | No | No noted behavior concerns |
| <i>Julia</i> | 10 | 4 th | Female | No | No |

Table 1 Students' Mindful Breathing and Behavior

Of the ten student participants, seven reported independently using coping strategies such as mindful breathing. Five of the students displayed improved behavior per teacher observations and four had no noted behavior concerns per teacher observations. All of the five students who displayed improved behavior also reported independently using mindful breathing or other coping strategies. This shows that the students who need the most support are able to benefit from targeted social-emotional instruction when they adopt instructed strategies.

One student, *Julia*, continues to display behaviors of frustration and work avoidance and did not show any marked improvement over the course of the research. *Julia* responded that she doesn't use mindful breathing in class because, "*During class, it's kind of like everywhere. The third graders come in at 11:30 and then I leave and then I run over here [resource room] because I'm late because I don't have a watch. I'm not in class like ever.*" *Julia* is in a dual grade combination class, which she says adds confusion to her already "*funky schedule.*" She comes to the resource room twice a day. These transitions coupled with the transitions of other students in and out of class appear to distract *Julia* to the point that she is unable to remember to use coping strategies. Currently, *Julia* exhibits frequent instances of work refusal. She responds by rolling her eyes, putting her head on her desk, and/or arguing with her teacher when faced with difficult tasks. She is often distracted in class, even when accommodations and modifications are provided. *Julia* is a student who will need more teacher support and guidance in order to experience success with social-emotional strategies so that she might begin to independently use them when needed.

Comparably to *Julia*'s behavior, teachers also reported that *Chris*, *Simon*, and *Luke* exhibit visible signs of frustration and work refusal. However, all three boys reported independently using coping strategies, namely mindful breathing, when they became frustrated

in class this year. This not only impacts the students who need the direct emotional support, but it also helps improve the whole classroom environment. Their teachers shared observations of improved behavior to support the boys' advancement. *Simon's* teacher shared:

Simon will never admit when it helps him, he'll never admit that, but the last few times when we've done math. The tears have come, but they've never fully formed. I've just seen his face get red and his eyes welling up. But then he takes a deep breath and that seems to help him a lot. We haven't had any down underneath the counter, screaming, crying. He'll do the sighing thing, but he'll still do the work, so that's like heavens opening angels singing. We've reached him.

Chris and *Luke's* teachers also reported noticeable decreases in the boys' reaction to frustrating work and situations in the classroom since the beginning of the school year, and when compared with behavior from last year. All three boys have had success with using mindful breathing and appear to be able to use this strategy when it is needed. *Chris* also reported using fidget tools to help him calm down and focus in class. The boys still show signs of frustration, but more classwork is being attempted, and their responses to frustration are less noticeable to other students. This benefits *Chris*, *Luke*, and *Simon* academically and socially because they are participating more in general education lessons and they are no longer standing out as often in negative ways.

Students and teachers both reported benefits of the mindful breathing strategy, but not all students reported using this strategy. The students who did not report using mindful breathing independently either showed no signs of behavior improvement or were not observed to need social-emotional support. However, not all students display outward signs of being frustrated or anxious. *Jenny*, *Sarah*, *Kim*, and *Joe* do not have a history of displaying behavior concerns at

school. While their current and past teachers have never reported issues, all four students shared negative feelings towards portions of school and, in particular, math. These students may have enough coping skills to fit in with their peers visually; however, this research demonstrates that it does not mean that they are not also adversely affected by their feelings. *Jenny* and *Sarah* reported that they deal with feeling frustrated by asking for help from their teacher and also independently taking a moment to use mindful breathing. *Sarah* said, “*I feel frustrated during reading. I do a lot of breathing in my class just by myself. It’s relaxing.*” Neither *Sarah* or *Jenny*’s teachers reported issues with outward expressions of frustration or anxiety. Similarly, *Kim* said that she deals with frustration by asking for help from her teacher. *Kim* reported, “*I don’t like math because sometimes it’s hard, and when we learn new stuff like dividing it’s hard to know what to do. I ask my teacher for help and she helps me.*” While *Kim* is able to ask for help and receive what she needs, she also reported that she feels calmer when her teacher leads the class in mindful breathing. However, she does not independently use these mindfulness strategies that she has been taught when she is in the classroom. This could be because her teacher regularly guides the class in mindful breathing exercises at the start and end of each day, which is enough to support her. It is also possible that *Kim* has not made the connection between the calmness she expressed that she feels after these mindful breathing times and the potential benefit of using this strategy at other points in the day.

Like *Jenny* and *Sarah*’s teachers, *Kim*’s teacher reports that she never gets frustrated in class. When comparing her to other students in the class, her teacher said that *Kim* has better coping skills. If she makes a mistake she doesn’t show that she cares that she is expected to re-do the work. *Joe* is also reported to be a very hard worker in class who does not display his concern when tasks are difficult. He shared that he sometimes feels nervous when math is coming, but

otherwise shared positive thoughts about school. Based on his inability to remember a specific time when he had to face a difficult task in class, it is possible that his feelings of nervousness are more mild or rare, and thus he does not experience many opportunities when he needs to use coping strategies individually.

This data shows that even students who outwardly display signs of keeping-it-together in the school setting might still be struggling with inner feelings of self-doubt, frustration, worry, or anxiety. The MindUP program contains aspects that can be simple and effective strategies for students and teachers, but it is not a total solution for social and emotional difficulties. There also appears to be a correlation between gender and the display of behavior concerns. The two students with no noted behavior concerns who still reported using mindful breathing independently in class are female. It is possible that the extra pressure girls feel to follow the rules and avoid negative attention may also impact their reactions when faced with frustration or anxiety. Comparatively, the five students who were reported by their teacher to display behavior concerns were all male.

Andy and *Henry's* instances of anxiety were major concerns for their teachers last year. These concerns still exist, but both teachers have seen improvement and now feel that they are better able to address the boys' anxiety when it occurs. Previously, both *Andy* and *Henry* were reported to have instances of crying in the classroom and needing to leave the room in order to calm down. This resulted in lost instruction time and also caused the boys to stand out socially. *Henry's* current teacher reports that while he still "*crumbles*" when he is anxious or panicked about something, given a prompt to use mindful breathing he is able to calm down and rejoin the class activity without needing to physically leave the learning space. In the resource room, *Henry* has been observed independently using mindful breathing to help when he is anxious. He has

also been observed using positive self-talk like *“okay, okay I got this”* to get back on track when distracted. While there continue to be social-emotional concerns, *Henry* is showing an increased awareness of his needs and signs that he is able to regulate his emotions and actions more quickly. Similarly, *Andy* has been markedly more positive about his learning experiences and academic abilities. Last year when a task was difficult, he would often say that he couldn't do it because he was bad at reading/spelling/math. This year, when presented with new or difficult tasks he is observed to advocate for himself rather than putting himself down. For example, he frequently says that he needs a quieter workspace or that he needs to practice different strategies to find the one that works for him. When asked if he uses mindful breathing in class, his response was, *“All the time!”* Most remarkably, he says that after taking a mindful breathing break, *“I tell myself, ‘you can do this’ and then I get back to work.”* This shows a large improvement in his feelings towards his own abilities when compared to last year. Additionally, *Andy* was often late or absent from school in 1st grade, as well as at the beginning of this school year. In 1st grade, he was absent sixteen days, four of these days were marked unexcused. As of March, *Andy* was absent nine days, this year, all of which were excused. Seven of these days also occurred in the first trimester. While this is not a major improvement, it does show signs of progress and a potential decrease in his fear of school.

Keep it Simple and Repeat

A frequent concern that teachers raised when the MindUP program was first introduced was the issue of time. Elementary general education teachers are expected to schedule and plan for reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, technology/computers, PE, music and art lessons. In addition, frequent assessments and district-wide initiatives, such as Project Based Learning (PBL) place additional constraints on already limited instruction and teacher planning

time. When asked if she uses the MindUP curriculum regularly the participating second-grade teacher stated that: *“Even though it [MindUP lesson] only takes 10-15 minutes, those 10-15 minutes are huge. I’m still amazed at how much that chunk of time is within the day.”* The simplicity of the strategy of mindful breathing led to teachers and students being able to frequently weave it into most school days, despite reports from teachers that there is not enough time in the day to fully follow an SEL curricula program like MindUP. As a result, students were not only taught the strategy in their general education classrooms and in their pull-out resource classroom, but they were also given frequent opportunities to practice it in both academic settings and see it modeled by teachers and other students.

The following table shows the participating teachers and their use of SEL instruction strategies.

| Teacher | SEL Instruction Strategies |
|---------------|---|
| Second-grade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reviewed the parts of the mind/brain ● Guided mindful breathing ● Breaks |
| Third-grade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MindUP lessons ● Guided mindful breathing ● Celebrate mistakes/Growth Mindset |
| Fourth- grade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MindUP lessons ● Guided mindful breathing ● Guided positive self-talk |
| Resource | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MindUP lessons ● Guided mindful breathing ● Breaks |

Table 2 Teacher Use of SEL Strategies

All participating teachers used components of the MindUP curriculum within their class this year. The first few lessons of MindUP involve reviewing the roles that different components

of the brain play, specifically the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and hippocampus. The curriculum then transitions into mindful breathing. Following units focus on mindful awareness of all five senses, learning about attitude, and finally taking mindful action. Due to issues of time, only the fourth-grade teacher reported a goal to make it through the full curriculum plan this year. The participating second and third-grade teacher each chose some lessons, but at the time of their interviews did not plan on continuing with specific lessons. However, all three teachers reported using guided mindful breathing in their classroom and expressed plans of continuing to work these activities into the school day. The third-grade teacher reported, *“I just pull it into the daily routine. We do the breathing. We take it [stress level] down and breath and help settle ourselves.”* The daily repetitiveness appears to be very helpful for the elementary students. Teachers reported not only seeing benefits in behavior when they took time for mindful breathing, but also that students would ask for it. All three teachers shared instances of students requesting a mindful breathing break. The fourth-grade teacher shared, *“There was one day when we didn’t do our breathing and the kids actually pointed it out.”* It is an aspect of school that students appear to have embraced.

All participating students demonstrated an awareness and understanding of mindful breathing, whether they shared that they used it independently or not. The simplicity and ease of this strategy are believed to be a big reason why elementary students were able to demonstrate understanding and begin using the strategy themselves. All participating teachers also reported using this on a daily basis, and it is also used in the resource room and identified with the same vocabulary. In addition, participating students received additional MindUP instruction in the resource room. Students who receive counseling also reported that they have worked on mindful

breathing with their counselor, which further cements the school-wide effect of the practice as well as the benefit of repetition when teaching elementary age students a new strategy or skill.

Great for One, Good for All

Participating teachers reported that SEL is most needed for their students with learning disabilities and others who face difficulties in the school setting; however, these are not the only individuals impacted by the inclusion of mindful practices in the classroom. All participating teachers reported improvement in their overall classroom culture since incorporating components of the MindUP program. Reductions in behavior resulting from student frustration and anxiety impact the whole class, which makes it easier for more meaningful inclusion when students with disabilities are placed in general education settings.

Both the second and third-grade teacher reported specific examples of increased respect in the classroom. The participating second-grade teacher reported that she has seen her class become more of a “*vocal caring community*”. This means that the students are using kind words and attempting to help others with verbal reminders when interacting with peers who are emotionally struggling. The students were observed using their learned social-emotional language to try and help other students when they are struggling in class. While the students may not always implement the skills themselves, they are able to see when others should use them and advise accordingly. Similarly, the participating third-grade teacher shared that she has seen an increase in kindness towards *Henry* who suffers from issues with anxiety in the classroom. Other students have been able to see what strategies and support he needs when he is panicking. “*They see he can get out of it if you walk him through it and they help him along.*” While there has been no reported history of bullying targeting *Henry*, his teacher did share that another student did not want to work with him at the beginning of the year. Now, this student checks-in

with him to make sure he is alright, knows the directions, and has the needed materials for homework and lessons. The third-grade teacher attributes this change to the increased community of respect that has resulted from an increased use of mindfulness and growth mindset activities. She sees these activities bringing her class together and helping the students realize that they can work together to overcome problems when they occur. She leads her class in mindful breathing before presentations and tests. These times are difficult for most students, not just those with learning disabilities. Breathing together helps show students that others are also struggling, and supports the message that students should help and respect everyone because they all need help at times.

The participating fourth-grade teacher also regularly leads her class in group breathing and adds positive messages for the students to repeat. *“I am important, I matter, I can make a difference, I will choose kindness, I will try my best today.”* While she did not observe increases in a caring community, she has seen other forms of improvement from her class. She reports that, while class behavior is still a large concern this year, her students are able to be reflective and honest about how the class’s day has gone when prompted by their teacher. They often are asked to converse with a partner during this reflection process, which shows progress towards being able to work together on topics of difficulty. The students are thoughtful and truthful during this time. In addition, *Simon’s* increased ability to control his frustration has resulted in fewer disruptions during high-stress activities, such as math. This is beneficial for the whole class because not only does can their teacher maintain more focus on a wider variety of students, but their learning environment also remains quieter.

Participating students frequently shared that noisy classrooms make it hard for them to focus. When asked about working with groups of students *Andy* shared, *“If they are funny, silly,*

or noisy it is hard for me to work. I like groups that are quiet and don't cause a lot of noise."

Jenny echoed this feeling. When asked about her class she said, *"It's distracting when it's loud."*

While one solution for students is to leave their class for the relatively quieter resource room, a more effective solution is to respond to the base issue of noise and frustration in the general education classroom. No elementary classroom will ever be perfectly quiet during learning times, but teaching students SEL coping strategies can help them better focus and also minimize their own outbursts due to frustration. All participating students who reported using mindfulness strategies responded that they felt calmer afterward. This was echoed by the participating classroom teachers who shared that they have noticed positive improvements in their students since implementing SEL strategies.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis

This research study aimed to discover how mindfulness and SEL mindset strategies taught through the MindUP curriculum impact the capabilities of students with learning disabilities to manage feelings of frustration and anxiety. The data showed that SEL instructional strategies resulted in decreased student behavioral concerns in their general education classrooms as reported by their teachers. Behavioral concerns still exist, but the majority of participating students were better able to handle and recover from emotional issues as compared to their behavior at the beginning of the school year. Participating teachers and students reported that mindful breathing is the most useful strategy. This is due not only to the strategy's effectiveness in helping students cope with school stressors but also to the fact that the strategy can be done quickly and slipped into the daily classroom schedule. Participating teachers reported that a lack of time in the school day is holding them back from implementing a more thorough SEL program. However, teachers are able to incorporate mindful breathing into the schedule multiple times a day if needed, which provides the students with repeated practice.

Although not a central focus of the study, findings from the research also indicate that SEL practices benefit not only the students with identified learning disabilities but also the class as a whole. The whole class can also be impacted when one student is struggling emotionally, so giving this student support can, in turn, impact their fellow classmates. Additionally, this research finds that students do not always show outward signs of their struggles with frustration at school. Regular mindful breathing practice can help address these concerns and strengthen students' coping skills.

Comparison of Findings to Existing Literature

Similar to the existing literature, this research study also found that SEL instruction is beneficial to students. SEL helps students increase their coping strategies and better respond to emotional difficulties (Hromek & Roffey, 2009). Of the ten participating students, seven students reported that they independently use taught coping strategies to deal with difficult or frustrating moments at school. Teachers also reported an improvement in their classroom culture and a decrease in behavior concerns for individual students. This shows that the taught coping strategies were beneficial for the majority of the participating students and their classrooms.

This study also found that collaboration and communication between teachers is beneficial for the students (Morgan, 2016). Five out of the six participating students who began the study with teacher-reported behavioral concerns demonstrated improvement in their behavior. These five students all received similar SEL instruction in the small-group special-education setting as well as their general education classroom. The emotional and behavioral benefits are similar to the academic benefits that Marston (1996) found when comparing inclusion only, combined services, and pull-out only models of special education. Marston (1996) found that a combined service model of academic instruction, which involved pull-out instruction and collaboration between the involved special education and general education teachers, resulted in the largest growth in the participating student reading scores from pre-test to post-test.

The data collected during this research study showed the benefit of simple interventions. While the main benefit of SEL was seen in the improved coping behaviors of the participating students with identified learning disabilities, the participating teachers shared that they have seen a benefit to their whole class community. This benefit was seen even though none of the

participating teachers felt that they were able to fully use the MindUP SEL program. Teachers reported that lack of time is the main issue preventing them from implementing a complete SEL program in their classroom. Despite the issue of time, participating teachers were able to universally support their students through the instruction in mindful breathing. This in conjunction with the use of some MindUP lessons, breaks, growth mindset practice, and guided positive self-talk resulted in improvements in students' ability to cope with frustration and anxiety in the classroom.

This research study helps to fill in the "gap in knowledge" by including student views in the data. Rather than solely relying on information provided by teachers, students also participated and provided their opinions. Secondly, this research examined the behavioral effects of a social-emotional curriculum that was, at least partially, implemented in both general education classrooms and in the special education classroom at a single school site. While the importance of collaboration and communication between special educators and general education teacher were common themes of the literature review, the literature did not specifically examine how students were impacted by a common social-emotional program.

Existing literature has shown that social-emotional practices, such as calming and visualization exercises, have been shown to help students focus on academic tasks more quickly (Kudliskis, 2013). However, the literature focuses on improvements in students who were already showing difficulties behaviorally (Kudliskis, 2013). According to teacher reports in this research study, four of the ten participating students did not have any noticeable social-emotional concerns at school. While these students were reported to not struggle with frustration, students themselves did share times when they are frustrated or anxious at school. Half of these four

students did report using coping strategies, such as mindful breathing, in class, but their teachers did not explicitly target SEL instruction towards them like they would with other students.

Implications for Practice and Policy

There is no question that elementary teachers have a high amount of instructional expectations, and finding time within the daily schedule to teach “one more thing” can be daunting. However, this research study shows that SEL strategies can be worked into the day in small chunks of time and still be beneficial. If teachers are able to make small adjustments to their schedule so at least mindful breathing is done regularly, a routine could be built. Teaching SEL strategies now when students are young could help set them up to have more successful academic careers. If a student is often struggling with anxiety or frustration behaviors, they are not properly accessing the curriculum anyway. Additionally, students who do not show outward signs of frustration or anxiety might still benefit more from a social-emotional curriculum, particularly if it was targeted more specifically at their needs. More students may benefit from SEL than just the students who show clear behavioral or academic improvements. Frontloading SEL strategies can help students’ build their toolkit so they are better prepared as academic expectations increase.

Students benefit from common language and expectations and teachers benefit from clear administrative support when implementing a newer program. It would be valuable if the school could agree to a manageable, minimum amount of SEL instructional time each week.

Participating teachers said that MindUP’s recommendation of 15-minute lessons each day was usually not feasible. However, these teachers taught at least a portion of the lessons at the beginning of the year, and also regularly implemented lessons on coping strategies. For SEL skill growth, the time does not necessarily need to be in one solid chunk, but rather could be split up

throughout the day. For example, five minutes in the morning, five minutes after recess, and five minutes after lunch might be a more manageable way to include SEL each day rather than asking teachers to find an “extra” fifteen minutes in their schedules. This type of clear plan would hopefully serve the dual purpose of motivating teachers who have not yet included SEL into their daily schedule and also reassuring teachers who believe they need to teach a full-length lesson in order to properly include SEL into their classrooms. Findings indicate that the more frequently students are taught social-emotional strategies the more they benefit, so it is advantageous for a larger number of teachers to incorporate SEL at each school site and throughout individual school districts.

Most districts have created a graduate profile listing the characteristics of an ideal high school graduate. These skills are worked on in age-appropriate ways starting in elementary school and ideally lead to continuity among the district schools. Qualities such as being responsible, having strong character, thinking critically, collaborating with others, communicating well, and being a conscientious learner are often included in the profile. While social-emotional skills might not be explicitly listed as an ideal characteristic, these skills are needed in order for students to make progress towards the graduate profile standards. Creating policies to teach students SEL strategies district-wide could help better support students as they work towards a future of becoming productive citizens. Everything is connected in education, so it is important to teach the whole child and not ignore students’ need to develop social-emotional skills because these skills are not strictly academic.

The teachers participating in this study shared that their students have noticed benefits of learning taught coping strategies, and are often able to explain these strategies to those who are currently in need of them. Continuing to support this caring response within the classroom and

school could help children learn the benefits of helping those who are currently struggling, while not judging them for their difficulties. Secondly, universally supporting SEL within the school setting could help increase the long-term social well being of all students. This research showed that students are able to use learned coping strategies in order to better manage their behaviors in the classroom. When students are able to help themselves, we can see growth in confidence and independence. These improvements could also improve their ability to contribute to society in a positive way.

Limitations of Study

Given more time, this research could have been strengthened by including parents, more classrooms, and separate school sites in the data collections in order to help increase the included perspectives in the study. Social-emotional skills are important throughout an individual's life, both in and out of school. This study, however, focused solely on how SEL impacted students in the school environment. Information about how SEL impacted each student outside of school is limited due to parents not being included in the data collection process. Furthermore, findings are limited to the participating classrooms and single school site. Including other classrooms and additional schools in this research could have helped increase the ability to generalize the findings to more types of schools.

The data for this research was collected at one elementary school with a majority white and upper-middle class student population. The majority of participating students identify as White, with one student identifying as Native American. While one student is identified as Limited English Proficient, all participating students do have parents who speak English with them at home. The participating teachers were all White, native English speakers, and female.

This resulted in a limited perspective, which did not fully include English language learners or male teachers.

This research site has been affected by traumatic events during the course of the research study. The whole school was distressed when a family was directly impacted by a mass shooting and then shortly afterward wildfires threatened the area. While the school was never directly in the path of the fires, students' friends and extended families were affected and students were well aware of the danger that was facing the surrounding communities. However, in general, the school is in a safe area with teachers and parents who are invested in helping students. High academic standards are placed on each student by teachers and parents. This could be a cause of the observed anxiety and frustration facing the students with learning disabilities, but it also leads to a school community that is looking for an appropriate response to the issues. This specific combination causes the findings to be limited to the research site and population.

The researcher is also the teacher at the school where the research took place and regularly teaches the participating students. This created a limitation in the research methodology due to the researcher's dual role of teacher and interviewer. Students were interviewed by a teacher who is regularly interacting with them as an instructor and teachers were interviewed by a colleague. This could have impacted the type of information that participants were willing to divulge. Additionally, the research began with the hope that there would be improvements in the students because the researcher cares about them and their learning. In order to help address this potential bias, the researcher relied on students' classroom teachers to report whether or not their behavior had improved. This potentially limited the findings because only one teacher's observation was used to determine the improvement in each individual student's behavior.

Directions for Future Research

This research uncovered an interesting discrepancy between the outward appearance of calmness that some students show, and the inner struggle that they report they are facing with these feelings. Further research could be done to further uncover how to best address these students' needs when the emotional needs of the students are not apparent to their teachers. In addition, further research could examine the difference between individual grade level needs and appropriate strategies.

Moving forward, this research could be continued by reviewing student academic progress more in-depth. A pre and post-test could have been designed and implemented to measure student academic progress. There are multiple factors that impact each students' academic growth, or lack thereof, which makes it difficult to definitively say if the SEL instruction was the direct cause of changes in academic performance. However, since academic progress is the central goal of school, it would be beneficial to look into the connection between social-emotional skills and academic growth more thoroughly.

In order to expand social-emotional knowledge in education, it could be constructive if future studies researched how teacher and student interactions are affected by the inclusion of an SEL curriculum in the classroom. By observing teachers and students before and during the implementation of an SEL program, we may learn more about specific classroom benefits and how specific teaching strategies impact students and teachers. This information could be helpful in more thoroughly implementing beneficial SEL programs in schools nationwide.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Anxiety and frustration are feelings that everyone experiences at one time or another. For elementary students, these emotions can be especially difficult to manage when they feel that they are struggling more academically than their peers. Special education teachers and general education teachers regularly collaborate to create academic accommodations such as shortened assignments, extended time, or use of special tools in order to support students with learning disabilities' progress towards grade-level standards, but it can be more difficult to create meaningful social-emotional accommodations that are effective in a classroom environment. SEL can be seen as just another addition to the already full workload of classroom teachers. However, social-emotional skills have been shown to be important throughout an individual's life and can lead to increased feelings of social connection and happiness which benefits everyone. Since social-emotional skills are not always innate, direct instruction is often required in order for students to gain expertise in SEL.

The purpose of this study was to explore how mindfulness and mindset strategies taught through the MindUP curriculum built the capacity of students with learning disabilities ability to manage feelings of frustration and anxiety in their general education classrooms. The social-emotional curriculum was implemented in a pullout setting with students who have been identified as having learning disabilities and was also implemented to varying degrees within their general education classroom. The majority of participating students who exhibited outward signs of frustration or anxiety did show a decrease in these behaviors after receiving SEL interventions. Findings from this study suggest that the combination of similar instruction, vocabulary, and methods that were used in both the special education and general education setting helped lead to this improvement. It follows that not only is explicit social-emotional

instruction important for students with learning disabilities, but this instruction needs to be repeated across learning environments.

According to the collected data, mindfulness and mindset strategies improved most students' ability to manage their displays of frustration and anxiety who need support in this area. Teachers reported seeing the improvement in their classrooms with all types of students, yet also reported that they do not feel they can fully implement the provided SEL program given the other expectations placed on them as teachers. A lack of time was cited as the main issue preventing teachers from fully using the MindUP curriculum. All participating teachers were able to still instruct and support students through the use of shorted coping strategies, mainly mindful breathing, despite time concerns. Simple coping strategies are able to be repeated throughout the day more easily since they are not as time intensive as full SEL lessons, which provides repeated practice for students who need the support. In addition, the mindful breathing strategy was taught in both the general education and special education classrooms, so there was a continuity between academic environments.

This study's findings support the importance of collaboration and communication among all teachers at a school site, particularly teachers who are working with the same students. Applying the same strategies in a similar way throughout the school supports student acquisition of the targeted skills and could lead to an improved school culture. The common practice and repetition appeared to be more important than a fully implemented SEL program. Improvements in student behavior were still reported despite all participating teachers reporting that they were unable to teach all aspects of the MindUP curriculum. Rather than focusing on one complete SEL curriculum, schools and educators should prioritize specific skills, such as mindful breathing and positive self-talk, that teachers and students can use throughout the day. By

focusing on a few select coping strategies, teachers will hopefully not feel as overwhelmed by the expectation of including SEL into their classroom agenda and students will also learn manageable ways to address their emotions. This particularly benefits students who are currently struggling academically, such as students with specific learning disabilities; however, social-emotional skills are important throughout life and providing all students with strategies and practice opportunities at a young age could potentially provide them with long-term support. Also, students can appear that they are coping well, but still feel frustrated and anxious about aspects of the school day. By making SEL a universal school-wide practice, all students can access the positive coping strategies and increase their ability to handle current and future emotional difficulties.

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Appendix

January 12, 2018

Kelsey Olson
50 Acacia Ave.
San Rafael, CA 94901

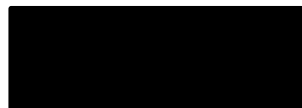
Dear Kelsey:

I have reviewed your proposal entitled *The Effect of Social-Emotional Instruction on Interactions in the Elementary Classroom for Students with Learning Disabilities* submitted to the Dominican University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRBPHP Application, #10627). I am approving it as having met the requirements for minimizing risk and protecting the rights of the participants in your research.

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, Ph.D.
Chair, IRBPHP

Cc: Jennifer Lucko

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants
Office of Academic Affairs • 50 Acacia Avenue, San Rafael, California 95901-2298 • 415-

257-1310 www.dominican.edu