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The Impact of Social-Emotional Development in Preschool

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The Impact of Social-Emotional Development in Preschool

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Abstract

The development of children's cognitive and social-emotional learning is of significant importance in education, specifically in early childhood education. Early childhood administrators, educators, and support staff have noticed an increase in the amount of students displaying underdeveloped or lacking social-skills within preschool classrooms. This paper will analyze and summarize research to explain the relationship between social-emotional skills and temperament, classroom environment, and educational outcomes in preschool aged students. It was found through research that a lack of social-emotional understanding and skills was impactful to a child's future emotional responses and academic achievement. In order for leaders to best prepare teachers to support student's social-emotional needs, direct teaching of social emotional skills to students, educating parents and guardians, and providing effective curricula and free choice opportunities in the classroom were important factors to social and academic success.

Keywords: social-emotional learning, early childhood education, social skills, free choice

The Impact of Social-Emotional Development in Preschool

In public preschool and prekindergarten settings in Minnesota, administrators, teachers, and support staff have noticed an increase in underdeveloped social-emotional skills in preschool and prekindergarten students. Indicators include children's inability to express emotions and use effective self-management, problem solving, decision-making, relationship building, and communication skills within the classroom. Not only does a lack of social-cognitive skills impact a child's temperament and classroom environment but the development of social-cognitive abilities is also an indicator of future success. During the early childhood years many skills are crucial including making positive "overtures" to play with others, initiating and maintaining conversations, emotion knowledge, self-regulation, attention, cooperation, listening, taking turns, seeking help, and friendship skills (Denham et al., 2012, p. 248). It is essential for administrators, teachers, support staff, parents and families to understand and support social-emotional learning (SEL) and development in early childhood classrooms.

Scope of Research

The scope of research reviewed included an emphasis on the importance of preschool students displaying age-appropriate social-emotional skills within the classroom to ultimately be successful academically and socially as citizens in a community. The additional strands involved in this report included parent education of social-emotional learning, classroom environmental factors such as student-teacher relationships, student temperament, and free choice. Lastly, interventions, teaching strategies, and academic success including effective social-emotional curriculum will be discussed.

Importance of the Study

This paper is significant to early childhood programs and professionals today in response to finding solutions for underdeveloped social-emotional skills and escalated behaviors in preschool classrooms. Social-emotional development and skills set the foundation for children's success or failure in adapting to preschool environments, and making the most of experiences within the classroom to learn and grow in social and academic functioning (Denham et al., 2012, p. 247). Elementary and secondary teaching professionals would benefit from this report to understand the current impact social-emotional learning has on preschool environments, parent education, and future academic success. Social-emotional learning, including social skills teaching and time for practice, works best for children who need it the most, but benefits are also evident in students not considered to be at risk (Gunter et al., 2012). For all educators, the information researched and analyzed in this report is essential in decreasing intense behaviors in the classroom, raising awareness of social-emotional learning, practicing social-emotional skills in the classroom, and communicating the importance of parent education in student learning and development.

Research Questions

How does the underdevelopment of preschool children's social-cognitive abilities impact temperament and achievement, and the classroom environment?

Connection to the Program Essential Question In light of what is known about how children learn and educational policy and practice, how shall teacher preparation programs and administrative leaders best provide teachers with the skills and resources necessary to support students with underdeveloped social-emotional abilities within the preschool classroom?

Definition of Terms

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is a teaching approach based on what is known about effective early education and how young children develop and learn (National Association of the Young Child, 2019).

Early Childhood Education (ECE) refers to private or public educational services and classes provided to children from birth through eight years old.

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) refers to fee-based public educational services and classes provided to children from birth through six years old and their parents or guardians.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to the perception and use of emotions to facilitate thinking, understanding, and regulate emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, as cited in Poulou, 2017).

Free Choice, or free play, is a term in ECE that refers to the duration of time during the preschool school day, where children are allowed to choose activities in which they wish to engage individually or with a peer.

Head Start Preschool (Head Start) is a preschool program serving children three to five years of age under a specific socio-economic status.

A ***Parent Educator*** is a licensed early childhood teacher that partners with parents and guardians to support a child's learning, development, and growth throughout early childhood programming.

Social-Cognitive refers to "learning that occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior" (LaMorte, 2018).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and

manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2019).

Social-Skills are a set of skills used when interacting with other people. Some examples of social skills include listening, initiating or joining a group, initiating and sustaining conversations, waiting, taking turns, asking for help, understanding other’s emotions may be different, solving problems, making and sustaining friendships.

Summary

In summary, the topic of this paper was to explore how the underdevelopment of social-emotional learning in preschool children impacts the classroom environment and future success of students. Additionally, this paper explores how leaders can best prepare teachers to support student’s social-emotional needs. The goal of this paper was to provide information and support leaders, teachers, support staff, and parents and guardians in the growth and development of a child’s social-emotional learning. It has been found that children who are socially and emotionally competent have increased socialization opportunities with peers, develop and maintain friendships, have better relationships with their parents and teachers, and enjoy academic and social successes (McCabe & Altamura, 2011).

Chapter two will synthesize and summarize the relationship between social-emotional development, temperament, classroom environment, future success, and how leaders can best prepare teachers to support student’s social-emotional needs. Chapter three will summarize the key findings from chapter two and review the importance of those findings and the topic. Lastly, chapter four will include an analytical discussion, application, and provide suggestions for future research to enhance learning of the topic.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter two summarizes and synthesizes various forms of literature to answer the research question regarding the relationship between social-emotional skills, temperament, classroom environment, and educational outcomes in preschool aged students. Additionally, this chapter will provide a summary of research in relation to how leaders can best support teachers in response to student's social-emotional needs. This review was grounded in literature provided by primary research on preschool classroom behavior, social-emotional learning and development, parent education, and student-teacher relationships. Research that investigated interventions and teaching strategies including free choice and social-emotional curricula, and academic achievement, including the correlation to elementary academics, was also included.

Preschool Classroom Behavior

Escalated behaviors are becoming more evident within preschool settings including student use of violent language and actions when upset with teachers and peers. Incidents of children acting out verbally and physically in the classroom have risen leading aggression to be one of the most common types of behavioral problems in preschool-aged children (Helmsen, Koglin, & Petermann, 2012). In this section of the review social-emotional skills and preschool classroom behavior will be explored. In addition, the importance of early childhood parent education and parent understanding of social-emotional development, and student-teacher relationships will be investigated.

In preschool classrooms (two to three and one half years old), the focus is on exploring basic social-emotional skills. In these young preschool classroom settings, children are exposed to various skills guided by teachers as they learn and attempt to use strategies to greet someone, identify emotions, self-regulate, communicate, cope, and seek interest in peer relationships. In

prekindergarten settings (four to five years old), children are expected to master basic social-emotional skills including emotion identification, self-regulation, communication, and seeking interest in peer relationships. Additional skills prekindergarten children are expected to improve in are coping with changes or the unexpected, entering and initiating play, taking turns, making friends, and solving social issues. If students fail to understand themselves within the classroom environment, they may have a negative attitude towards school, become inattentive, unengaged, disregulated, and unable to cope with undesired emotions.

Helmsmen, Koglin, and Petermann (2012) examined the correlation between social emotional components, including emotional regulation, social information processing, and aggression through 193 German preschool children between the ages of forty-two and sixty-seven months old. Measurement tools that were included in this study consisted of ratings by teachers through Children's Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ) Short Form (emotion regulation), interviews (social information processing), and observation of student responses to hypothetical social conflict (aggression). The results of this study revealed that children with underdeveloped self-regulation skills positively relate to deviant social information processing skills and aggressive behaviors within the classroom (Helmsmen et al., 2012). There are various contributions to a child's actions including learned behaviors, stressors at home, mental health, and underdeveloped social-emotional learning and application including the ability to regulate emotions, cope when disappointed, sad, frustrated or angry, and the ability to safely solve a problem. According to Helmsen et al., attaining emotion regulation skills is one of the key developmental tasks in early childhood, and difficulties with "adaptive emotion regulation increase the risk of psychopathology" (2012, p. 89).

Furthermore, a study conducted by Denham, Bassett, Thayer, Mincic, Sirotkin, and Zinsser (2012), utilized the Minnesota Preschool Affect Checklist Revised (MPAC-R) tool to observe the social-emotional behavior of 352 three and four year old children attending Head Start Preschool and private preschool settings. This study found that three-year-old children displayed more pro-social, positive, and productive behaviors especially in the Head Start programming, which was more structured than the private setting. Additionally the study by Denham et al. (2012) found that a student's understanding and use of emotion knowledge was foundational to scaffold additional social-emotional skills. The correlation between executive functioning and social-emotional learning was significant, according to Denham et al. (2012). Negative behavior and aggression within the classroom may be a result of low executive functioning skills and understanding, along with a lack of social-emotional skills such as emotion knowledge and self-regulation.

Garner and Waajid (2012) examined through interviews and assessments, including facial displays and vignettes, the social-emotional skills of emotion knowledge and self-regulation of 74 preschoolers (40 boys, 34 girls). The focus was to examine if emotion knowledge and self-regulation skills predict cognitive and social ability, and behavior issues. The study found that based on a student's understanding of emotion knowledge and self-regulation, escalated classroom behavior could be predicted. Additionally it was found that "situation knowledge" was a component of emotion knowledge and was correlated to the ability for preschool children to perform appropriately cognitively and socially (Garner & Waajid, 2012). Without the understanding and opportunity for application of basic social-emotional skills, when a child does not receive what he or she wants, or has to wait to take a turn, etc. a child may act inappropriately to achieve a goal, this may include defiance, non-compliance, or negative verbal

or physical behavior. Escalated behaviors impact all other children, teachers, and staff working within the classroom. There are various environmental factors that play a role in preschool classroom behavior. Research surrounding the importance of parent education and understanding of social emotional learning and development, and student-teacher relationships will be examined in correlation to preschool classroom behavior.

Parent Education and Social Emotional Learning. One of the most important stages of child development is social-emotional. Some, but not all, parents are fully aware of the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL). Early Childhood Education programs strive to reach parents of children zero to six years old, a child's most critical years in brain development. The goal of Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is to collaborate with families to support a child's developmental growth, and parent understanding of developmental stages.

A study conducted by Finders, Diaz, Geldhof, Sektnan, and Rennekamp (2016) concluded that parent education programs, serving families in the Pacific Northwest, resulted in substantial improvement in children's behavior, and parenting skills and understanding of child development (Finders et al., 2016). The study consisted of 2,344 parents who were participating in "evidence based" parent education programs and evaluated their individual perceptions of parenting skills and child behavior. The data came from the Parenting Skills Ladder (PSL), which included a survey asking parents to rate their own behaviors and skills along with their child's behavior and skills (Finders et al., 2016). The results of this study displayed that by attending a high-quality parent education program adults obtain an increased sense of parental knowledge and confidence in supporting the social-emotional learning and development of their preschool aged child

Lau, Rapee, and Coplan (2017), examined the efficacy of early intervention for anxiety behaviors in preschoolers through parent-education. The study included 72 children ages three to five years having a parent with high emotional distress. Families were randomly assigned to an intervention group, which consisted of six parent-education group sessions and six child social skills sessions, or a waitlist consisting of parent-education only (Lau, Rapee, & Coplan, 2017). Results displayed that early parent education for preschool development can reduce later anxiety and depression. Additionally, the quasi-experimental comparison study found that parent education and social skills for children reduced child anxiety, and the combination displayed stronger effects than parent-only intervention (Lau, Rappe, & Coplan, 2017).

Supporting adults that care for students outside of school is an essential component in the success of a teacher and leader. When teachers and leaders do their best to support parents and families, the wellbeing of students is enhanced. Teachers can help parents learn more about social-emotional development and learning by checking in with families and keeping communication open, sending home information, giving short presentations to parents at family nights, and or consulting a parent educator to assist. Most early childhood preschool programs include a parent involvement component where a licensed parent educator discusses various topics regarding child development. The parent education classroom is a safe place for parents to share ideas and tools, and discuss issues or triumphs witnessed at home with their child. The findings from Finders et al. (2016) prove the importance of continually providing parents with resources to support parenting skills and child development. A support system, such as parent education, ultimately leads to an improved perception of positive parenting skills and behaviors, “regardless of parents' socioeconomic status and/or cultural background” (Finders et al., 2016, p. 205). It is imperative that teachers collaborate with parents and encourage the attendance of

family nights, parent-teacher communication meetings, and consistent dialogue with teachers within the school to best understand their child's learning and development.

Relationships. A critical component to being a teacher or leader is the ability to build positive relationships with students, families, and colleagues. Within the classroom, teaching through modeling, healthy and supportive working relationships is critical in the development of supporting student's relationship building skills. "Children with higher levels of social-emotional skills are better able to develop positive relationships with their teachers and are more likely to receive teaching and feedback than are their less socially and emotionally competent peers" (Doctoroff et al., 2016, p. 399). Furthermore, a student's ability to create and sustain positive relationships with peers and teachers, and apply skilled social-emotional behavior can promote classroom learning (Denham et al., 2012, p. 247).

Poulou (2017) focused her study on the exploration of teacher's perceptions of their own emotional intelligence and social-emotional learning and skills in relation to teacher-student relationships in a preschool setting. Additionally this study explored preschool student's perceptions on student-teacher relationships. Ninety-two preschool teachers (91 female, 1 male), and 170 preschool students from 52 public schools in Greece volunteered to participate in the study. In preparation for this study, teachers attended a seminar conducted by the study's author, Maria Poulou. Data was collected through measurement tools such as interviews, self-rated scales, questionnaires, and observations of preschool students with teachers (Poulou, 2017). The results found that teacher's own perceptions of emotional intelligence correlated with their perception of positive classroom relationships, which in turn, indicated the level of emotional involvement a teacher had with students, and sensitivity in responsiveness to students (Poulou, 2017). The second part of the study examined teacher-student relationships from a preschool

student's perspective. The results of the second part of the study displayed the importance of teacher's competencies and skills such as social-emotional learning comfort and commitment (Poulou, 2017, p.433).

The study conducted by Polou (2017) supports the idea that when a teacher understands and takes ownership of his or her own social-emotional competencies, there is great potential for strong classroom relationships supported by social-emotional teaching and practice of skills. Teacher's emotional intelligence is linked with relationships, interactions, and responses to students (Poulou, 2017). When a teacher takes the time to build a classroom community of learners, and displays their classroom as a safe and nurturing environment, students will respond positively to the teacher, the classroom environment, and the teaching strategies and interventions implemented by the teacher.

Teaching Strategies and Interventions

It is critical for teachers and leaders to create a climate that supports social-emotional learning and development of preschool children. In this section, Teaching Strategies and Interventions, research surrounding the use of effective curricula and free choice will be investigated in response to the essential question emphasis on how leaders can best support teachers in response to student delay in social-emotional skills. Effective curricula and free choice subtopics are vital for early childhood teachers and leaders to understand and implement in able to support and enhance preschool student's abilities to learn and apply developmentally appropriate social-emotional skills within the classroom.

Effective Curricula. Social-emotional skills such as self-regulation are "robust" predictors of crucial outcomes across the life span, yet social-emotional skills are not intentionally taught to children in a school setting (Flook et al., 2014). The use of effective

social-emotional curricula is a topic of importance as leaders seek to improve teacher's knowledge and resources to support students in all areas of social-emotional development. Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, and Davidson (2015) investigated the effects of a twelve-week mindfulness-based resource called Kindness Curriculum. The Kindness Curriculum was designed specifically for preschool-age children and focused on cultivating attention and emotion regulation, along with teaching and encouraging practices such as empathy, gratitude, and sharing (Flook et al., 2015). The Kindness Curriculum targeted preschool student executive functioning, self-regulation, and pro-social behavior. The study sampled 68 children in a mid-western public preschool setting. Preschool participants were randomly assigned by classroom to either a mindfulness-based Kindness Curriculum intervention or a control group (Flook et al., 2015). Experienced mindfulness instructors taught the curriculum to students and instructional time was provided in the student's standard classroom consisting of two, twenty to thirty-minute lessons each week. The study results displayed that the Kindness Curriculum intervention group exhibited greater improvement in social competence and had higher achievement in domains of learning, health, and social-emotional development. The children in the control group exhibited more underdeveloped social-emotional skills such as inability of sharing resources with peers (Flook et al., 2014, p. 44).

Gunter, Caldarella, Korth and Young (2012) also studied social-emotional learning curriculum with preschool students. The purpose of Gunter et al., (2012) study was to evaluate the impact of the social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum, Strong Start Pre-K, on the social and emotional competence of 52 preschool students (p. 151). This study was stated to be a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control design group. Teachers and their classes were selected and assigned to groups at random to collect cause and affect data based on SEL curriculum Strong

Start Pre-K. “Participants included teachers and students from a Title I preschool in a metropolitan area in Utah” (Gunter et al., 2012, p. 151). Teachers were assigned to rate students’ using “dependent measures” such as the Preschool Behavior and Emotional Rating Scale (PreBERS), and the Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scales-Second Edition (PKBS-2), as well as the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) (Gunter et al., 2012). The results of this study indicated a substantial decrease of “internalizing behaviors” and an improvement in student-teacher relationships (Gunter et al., 2012). Implications included the researchers’ inability to alter classroom placement and randomize which students received the curriculum, sample size, and “low statistical power for some analyses, suggesting the need for further studies using large samples” (Gunter et al., 2012, p .157). Lastly, while social validity measured questions about the curriculum, interviews were not included (Gunter et al., 2012). The information provided in this article was important to the research question and essential question because leaders must provide teachers with the professional development and resources necessary to best support the teaching of social emotional skills within the preschool classroom. In addition, leaders must encourage teachers to recognize the importance of student-teacher relationships, as they are foundational in the development of student’s social-emotional skills.

Free Choice. Free choice, or playtime, is an essential component of an early childhood preschool school day. Free choice gives students opportunities to explore and discover in the classroom based on personal interest. Free choice provides opportunities for growth in all areas of development, but mostly, it fosters social-emotional skills. Free choice in preschool classrooms consists of at least 35 minutes of unstructured time in the classroom and allows students to visit and explore learning areas (math/manipulatives, literacy, writing, science, blocks, dramatic play, library, art, and sensory). Each area has an array of materials for children

to explore and discover their interests. Often times teachers guide student learning, based on need, in specific learning areas such as writing, literacy, and math.

A study conducted by Szumski, Smogorzewska, and Karwowski (2016), used a growth curve model to conclude that the program, “Play Time/Social Time” was positively impacting the development of children’s social skills by direct teaching of skills and providing students with opportunities for practice. “Play Time/Social Time” (PTST) program utilizes basic strategies to enhance the level of children’s social skills. Over 150 preschool children, with disabilities and typically developed children, participated in an intervention in the evaluation of “Play Time/Social Time (PTST)” program in Polish preschool classrooms (Szumski et al., 2016). The program allows teachers to directly teach sharing, persistence, requesting to share or join, initiating a play idea, agreeing with peers, and helping others, and then provide structured play activities for students to practice social-emotional skills (Szumski et al., 2016).

Research conducted by Szumski et al. (2016) supports the free choice framework and allowing opportunities for students to practice skills such as emotion management, expression of needs and wants, responding to emotional cues of others, communication, turn taking, sharing, initiating and joining play, solving problems, decision making. Free choice is a time where teachers are able to observe whether instruction of social-emotional skills are being applied as students attempt to self-manage, make decisions, and solve problems. It is also a time for teachers to observe whether children’s interactions are appropriate for their age and/or if a child is meeting an individual goal. Based on observations, teachers decide whether a specific skill needs additional direct instruction in the whole group setting, or if a specific child needs intervention to apply skills in real life situations. If children are not receiving adequate amount of time for free choice, they are unable to practice social-emotional skills. Additionally, if children

are not provided with opportunities to practice social-emotional skills in unstructured settings, teachers are unable to observe skill progression.

Neel, Neibrugge Jenkins, and Meadows (1990), used qualitative research methods to study a small sample of 20 children three to five years old in a free choice setting. The focus of Neel et al. (1990) study was to observe children's behaviors, strategies, and goals while attempting to solve problems during free choice or outdoor play (p. 39). A question to guide observation was included: "do aggressive children seek different social goals and do they use different social problem-solving strategies than their nonaggressive counterparts?" (Neel et al., 1990, p. 40). The research team consisted of two graduate special education research assistants. The research team purposefully chose the target group based on results "of the Revised Behavior Problem Checklist (RBPC; Quay & Peterson, 1982)" and whether students were considered aggressive or nonaggressive (Neel et al., 1990, p. 40). Target groups consisted of two groups of preschool children (three to five years old) from urban preschool settings. The experimental group consisted of 10 boys who displayed aggressive behavior. The control group consisted of 10 nonaggressive children. Student interactions were observed in five, 10-minute intervals within four classrooms and two outside areas (Neel et al., 1990, p. 40). Because of the adequate amount of time children were given for unstructured choice, researchers were able to observe various ways children enter or initiate play, take turns, communicate, solve problems, and make decisions. The results of this study found that aggressive and nonaggressive students displayed 9 social goals. Both categories of students used various social goals and problem solving strategies.

Academic Success

In this section, the development of children's social-emotional skills and academic success will be summarized and synthesized. Denham et al. (2012) study found a significant correlation between social-emotional skills with academic success, and that emotionally negative and aggressive behaviors did predict "school adjustment and academic skill" (p. 270). Arnold, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee, and Marshall (2012) examined the relationship between social-emotional functioning and emergent academic development with a sample of 467 preschool children. Teachers reported on social-emotional issues surrounding aggression, attention, and pro-social skills. Preschool children's pre-literacy, language, and early mathematics skills were assessed through standardized tests. The results of this study concluded that when preschool students have more regulated social-emotional skills they display stronger academic development. Additionally, attention problems proved to impact other social skills, trigger aggression, and negatively impact academic performance (Arnold et al., 2012). Arnold et al. (2012) also mentioned the importance of children's feelings about school, suggesting that positive feelings about school may lead to deeper engagement in academic and social content (p. 378).

Emergent Math Skills. Doctoroff, Fisher, Burrows, and Edman (2016) also examined the relationship between social-emotional skills and academics. In this study, social-emotional skills and early math skills were explored in 61 preschool children ages three to five years old. Math skills were assessed through the Test of Early Mathematics Ability-Third Edition (TEMA-3), which assessed "counting, number comparisons, cardinality, and early calculation skills" (Doctoroff et al., 2016, p. 394). The classroom teacher used the teacher-report tool Preschool Learning Behaviors Scale (PLBS) to assess children's social-emotional skills through observation. The children in the sample displayed average to high math skills along with average

range social-emotional skills. Doctoroff et al. (2016) found a positive correlation between interest in learning, mathematics, and goal-directed play. Additionally teacher ratings of social-emotional skills were significantly related to interest in learning, children appeared regulated during preferred tasks or activities (p. 399).

Emergent Literacy Skills. Tan and Dobbs-Oats (2013) conducted a cross-sectional study regarding the relationship between preschool social-emotional competence and emergent literacy development. The participants in this study included sixty-one preschool children and their parents and teachers. Student's emergent literacy skills were assessed through the "standard language and literacy tests" including Expressive Language Vocabulary Test, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and Test of Early Reading Ability (Tan & Dobbs-Oats, 2013, p. 1509). The literacy assessments measured expressive and receptive language and print awareness. The behavioral assessment tools chosen for this study were both rating scales called the Behavior Assessment System for Children and the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment. The results of the study by Tan and Dobbs-Oats (2013) found that aggression was negatively related to emergent literacy, and that internalizing behaviors generally were not related to emergent literacy skills (Tan & Dobbs-Oats, 2013). However externalizing behaviors such as attention skills, initiative, self-control, adaptability, "functional communication," and social skills were related to emergent literacy development (Tan & Dobbs-Oats, 2013). The results of this study displayed the correlation between underdeveloped social-emotional skills such as attention and self-control, and the risks for delay in the development of emergent literacy skills.

Link to Elementary Achievement. Rhoades, Warren, Domitrovich, and Greenberg (2011) examined preschool social-emotional competence in relation to attention skills and first grade academic achievement. The study goal was to determine the association between preschool

emotion knowledge, kindergarten attention skills, and first grade academic competence (Rhoades et al., 2011). Participants included 341 economically disadvantaged children in a public preschool program in an urban school district. The study was longitudinal and was taken over three years. Results indicated that attention skills displayed in kindergarten had significant correlation with first grade achievement. The findings suggested the support and implementation of curricula surrounding social-emotional development such as emotion knowledge and attention skills would be beneficial in enhancing future academic achievement (Rhoades et al., 2011).

Gormley, Phillips, Welti, Newmark, and Adelstein (2011) investigated, through teacher ratings of children's behavior from the Adjustment Scales for Preschool Intervention, and an attentiveness measure, the social-emotional outcomes of the early childhood education programs in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The study examined the effects of early childhood programs on the social-emotional outcomes at kindergarten entry of 2,833 kindergarten students of whom 1,318 attended Tulsa Public Schools prekindergarten program and 363 attended Tulsa County Head Start Program. The conclusion of this study displayed that high-quality, school-based preschool programs can enhance social-emotional development (Gormley et al., 2011). In addition to social-emotional skills, high-quality early childhood programs have a positive impact on emergent literacy and mathematics development. Children's social-emotional development builds the foundation for successive social-emotional functioning and contributes to academic achievement (Gormley et al., 2011).

The studies conducted by Arnold et al. (2012), Doctoroff et al. (2016), Tann and Dobbs-Oats (2013), Rhoades et al. (2011), and Gormley et al. (2011) provide critical information in specific response to the academic component of the research question and essential question guiding this paper. Ultimately, in order for preschool students to achieve academic success, they

must first consistently be exposed to social-emotional skills at school and at home. According to Denham et al. (2012) it has been found that children's ability to regulate emotion is related to their classroom adjustment and academic achievement. Along with being exposed to social-emotional skills, students must also have opportunities to practice skills with peers during unstructured free choice. When given adequate time to learn and practice social-emotional skills, children discover what works for them to be successful in the classroom with their peers and teachers. When students understand themselves within the classroom environment, they have a positive attitude about school and are able to engage in academics and contribute to classroom learning.

In overview, chapter two utilized research to explore various factors of social-emotional learning for preschool students including parent education, student-teacher relationships, effective curricula, free choice, and academic achievement. In order for a preschool student to be successful in classroom and community settings, one must have an understanding of foundational social-emotional skills including greeting, self-regulation, coping, communication, problem solving, and many other social skills. Not only must one understand these skills, they must also be able to apply skills to function appropriately within a classroom or community. If students fail to understand themselves within the classroom environment, they may have a negative attitude towards school, become aggressive, unable to cope with undesired emotions, incapable of creating and maintaining relationships, which leads to disengagement and lack of motivation to academics. Moving forward, chapter three of this paper will review the proposed problem, research question, and essential question. Additionally, chapter three will synthesize the main points of chapter two and formulate a conclusion.

Chapter Three: Research Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to use scholarly research to explore how the underdevelopment of social-emotional learning in preschool children impacts temperament, the classroom environment, and academic success of students. This review found that to support student's social-emotional needs, parents must be involved, engaged, and willing to learn and contribute to their child's development at home and in a school setting. Parent education in early childhood education is a critical component to preschool student developmental and academic success. Additionally, this review found that student-teacher relationships are vital in providing students with a learning climate that is positive and inclusive, which results in student motivation to learn. In order to support preschool students social-emotional needs, which in turn relates to academic performance, leaders must enhance teacher's use of developmentally appropriate social-emotional curricula, in addition to coaching utilization of free choice as a time for intentional teaching and practice of social-emotional skills.

Review of the Proposed Problem

Early Childhood leaders, teachers, and support staff noted an increase in intense, aggressive, noncompliant, and refusal behaviors in preschool aged children within a classroom setting. One of the biggest areas of developmental learning for preschool aged children is in the area of social-emotional. In the preschool years, children learn through modeling, from watching the adults in their world respond, regulate, cope, solve problems, create and maintain relationships, persevere, and many other social and life skills. The proposed research questions were: How does the underdevelopment of preschool children's social-cognitive abilities impact temperament and achievement, and the classroom environment? In light of what is known about how children learn and educational policy and practice, how shall teacher preparation programs and administrative leaders best provide teachers with the skills and resources necessary to

support students with underdeveloped social-emotional abilities within the preschool classroom? In order for teachers and leaders to best support preschool children in the development of critical social-emotional and life skills the following must be involved: parents and parent education of social-emotional learning, positive relationships between student and teacher, effective social-emotional curricula, free choice for student practice, and teacher professional development for social-emotional learning in preschool.

Importance of the Topic

Educators of all grade and ages levels would benefit from the information researched and analyzed in this paper. The information provided is essential in decreasing intense behaviors in the classroom, raising awareness of social-emotional learning, practicing social-emotional skills in the classroom, and communicating the importance of parent education in student learning and development. This paper is significant to early childhood programs and professionals today in response to finding solutions for underdeveloped social-emotional skills, escalated behavior, and low academic achievement, related to social skills, within preschool classrooms. Early childhood is the foundation of the educational journey; therefore, elementary and secondary educators would benefit from the information shared in this paper to better understand the current impact social-emotional learning has on preschool environments in order to best support children throughout their educational journey

Summary of the Main Points of the Literature Review

Chapter two of this paper included a literature review of fifteen scholarly sources to support and answer the research questions. The research emphasis focused on the importance of leaders coaching teachers to best support preschool students abilities to display age-appropriate social-emotional skills within the classroom to be successful academically and socially as

citizens in a community. The main points of the literature included that aggressive, inattentive, and impulsive behavior is an arising issue within preschool classrooms and that the social-emotional competency of students is a factor for negative behavior and academic performance. Additional main points in this paper included parent education and social-emotional learning, student teacher relationships, strategies and interventions including free choice, social-emotional curricula, and professional development for teachers, and academic success.

Preschool Classroom Behavior

Studies conducted by Helmsmen et al. (2012), Denham et al. (2012), and Garner and Waajid (2012), were summarized to provide information to the reader that the underdevelopment of social-emotional skills, or lack of understanding of basic social-emotional skills does have an impact on a child's behavior in a preschool setting. When a child does not acquire, at a developmentally appropriate level, the basic skills necessary to name and express emotions, self-regulate, focus attention, solve problems, ask for help, join playgroups, and many others, it becomes difficult for a child to be successful socially and academically.

Parent Education. Parent education is an important component in Early Childhood Education programs. Chapter two utilized research by Finders et al. (2016), and Lau, Rapee, and Coplan (2017) to explore the impact high-quality parent education classes had on a parent's ability to understand their child's development and behavior. Children whose parents attended a high-quality parent education class had improved behavior. When provided with parent education classes, parents felt an increased confidence in addressing their child's needs (Finders et al., 2016). The research conducted by Finders et al. (2016) regarding parent education is correlated to the research question and essential question in relation to preschool aged students as parent education, support, and encouragement is a key component in the development of young

children. Teachers and leaders must instill in parents and the community, the importance of parent education, engagement, and involvement throughout their child's educational journey in hopes that importance carries on throughout a child's EC-12 education and life.

Relationships. Building a learning climate with a mission of positive and supportive student-teacher relationships is an essential component to the social-emotional success of preschool students. Generally, preschool aged students are highly motivated by relationships within the classroom with both peers and teachers. The research Poulou (2017) conducted regarding student-teacher relationships in preschool supports the research and essential question because it was proven that when children feel as though teachers are sensitive, engaged, and supportive, students are better motivated to learn (Poulou, 2017).

Based on the research summarized in the literature review and the main points discussed in this chapter, parent education and relationships are critical components to the research and essential question. Parent involvement and engagement in a young child's education through parent education classes proved to enhance parent knowledge of social-emotional development and ability to best support their student through social situations. Lastly, student-teacher relationships also proved to be an essential factor in the support of a child's social-emotional development and engagement with teachers, peers, and academic content.

Teaching Strategies and Interventions

Teaching strategies and interventions are an essential component of the literature review because teaching strategies and interventions provide leaders and teachers with suggestions in hopes for improved behavior and developmental and academic growth of students. Free choice and effective curricula are essential components to successful early childhood education programming to support social-emotional learning.

Effective Curricula. The research surrounding effective curricula conducted by Gunter et al. (2012) correlates with the research and essential question because of the focus on providing students with a curriculum that directly supports social-emotional learning with a goal of decreasing internalizing behaviors. Furthermore, the research conducted by Flook et al. (2015) and Gunter et al. (2012) supports the idea that leaders must provide teachers with the training and resources necessary to support the teaching of a wide variety of capability when it comes to social-emotional skills of preschool students.

The goal of the research summarized through teaching strategies and interventions was to enhance early childhood program staff (teachers, leaders, and support staff) knowledge and skill set to best support underdeveloped social-emotional learning in preschool aged students. Additionally, the research analyzed supports the importance and proves effectiveness of providing teachers with quality resources to offer learners equitable experiences and environments.

Free Choice. Chapter two explored research conducted by Szumski et al. (2016) and Neel et al. (1990) on behalf of preschool student free choice, or playtime. The importance of dedicated unstructured time to provide students with opportunities to apply social-emotional skills at their own will was supported by research in chapter two. Free choice is a time where students are able to practice the social-emotional skills they have been directly taught, and teachers are able to observe and assess whether students are applying social-emotional skills. During free choice, students are given opportunities to manage their emotions, express their needs and wants, respond to emotional cues of others, communicate, take turns, share, initiate and join play, solve problems, and practice decision making skills.

Without unstructured time for free choice, children are unable to practice social-

emotional skills that are important to individual developmental growth, classroom climate, and academic achievement. Teachers also are impacted by inadequate amount of free choice because they have less time to observe each child's growth or underdevelopment of skills. It is essential for early childhood leaders to provide teachers with the skills, supports, and resources they need to successfully promote children's positive social-emotional development. Providing teachers with resources to be successful when working with children with challenging behaviors has been recognized as critical to children's well being (Green et al., 2012, p. 124).

Academic Achievement

Through research conducted by Denham et al. (2012), Arnold et al. (2012), Doctoroff et al. (2016), Tann and Dobbs-Oats (2013), Rhoades et al. (2011), and Gormley et al. (2011), it was concluded that the development of children's social-emotional skills correlated with academic success especially when it comes to attention, emotion knowledge, and self-regulation of emotions and actions. The findings of the research conducted for academic achievement including emergent math and literacy skills, connect with the research and essential question in order for leaders to best educate teachers on the importance of social-emotional skills, not only for a child's social development, but also in contribution to a child's future academic success.

In summary, the literature review research was beneficial in response to the research question and the emphasis on how the underdevelopment of social-emotional skills impacts student temperament, the classroom environment, and academic success of students. The research examined also provided insight on how leaders can guide teachers in supporting student social-emotional development. The next chapter of this paper will provide a summary of the insights gained from the research that will inform instruction and practice in early childhood

education. Chapter four will also discuss limitations discovered in the research, and possible future research ideas.

Chapter Four: Discussion, Application, and Future Studies

Creating a discussion based on the research summarized in the literature review in chapter two is an essential component to the improvement of instructional and leadership practices. The purpose of chapter four, discussion, application, and future studies is to discuss the insights gained from the research and inform the reader of educational application practices and discuss limitations. Additionally, this chapter will provide suggestions for future studies surrounding the research question and essential questions.

Insights Gained from the Research

Throughout the literature that was synthesized in chapter two, and summary of main points explored in chapter three, this paper revealed that children who are socially and emotionally competent have increased socialization opportunities with peers, develop and maintain friendships, have better relationships with their parents and teachers, and enjoy academic and social successes (McCabe & Altamura, 2011). Additionally, this paper investigated and validated the impact of various contributions to preschool social-emotional learning and academic success such as parent education, student-teacher relationships, social-emotional curricula, and free choice.

When it comes to behavior in the preschool classroom, parent education and student-teacher relationships are important factors. Early childhood programming will make the first impact on a child and family as they enter a school district for the first time. Leaders of early childhood programs must continue to advocate the validity and impact of parent education on the learning and development of young children. It is essential for early childhood educators and

parent educators to inform parents, families, and guardians about what social-emotional development is, and what skills children should be displaying at various ages. For some teachers communication with parents and families can be a difficult task. Early childhood teachers and leaders must be creative and work collaboratively to cultivate an inclusive, positive, and support climate welcoming to families. Creating partnerships with families is vital in the enforcement of parenting skills and supporting children growing through developmental shifts. When students are motivated and engaged because of a sense of comfort with teachers and peers, temperament is regulated, negative behaviors and outbursts decrease and achievement increases. Within a classroom setting at the beginning of the school year teachers should prioritize building a classroom that is safe, supportive, and an inclusive community of learners. Furthermore, early childhood leaders must encompass positive relationships as a value of the early childhood program in order for teachers to prioritize in classrooms, parents to be engaged, and students to value relationships with teachers and peers.

Effective curricula and free choice opportunities within the preschool classroom increase instructional practice and student learning. Effective curricula can be a huge factor to successful teaching and learning. Teachers must feel connected to the curriculum in order to be effective in teaching children. Ultimately, early childhood leaders are responsible for making decisions regarding effective curricula for the program in which they lead. However, classroom teachers should also be involved in the decision when choosing effective curricula relevant to preschool children. Effective curricula also supports student-teacher relationships and guides motivation for students to learn when relationships are supportive. Teachers strive to build a community of scholars who are kind, loving, and inclusive to others. Flook et al. (2017) noted that more work

is needed to enhance teacher buy-in, and in cultivating kindness and compassion in young children, families, and teachers (2017, p. 49).

Free choice is a time where teachers are able to observe whether instruction of social-emotional skills are being applied as students attempt to self-manage, make decisions, and solve problems. It is also a time for teachers to observe whether children's interactions are developmentally appropriate and if a child is meeting an individual goal. Based on observations teachers decide whether a specific skill needs additional direct instruction in the whole group setting, or if a child needs individual intervention to apply skills in real life situations. If children are not receiving adequate amount of time for free choice they are unable to practice social-emotional skills. Additionally, if children are not provided with opportunities to practice social-emotional skills in unstructured settings teachers are unable to observe skill progression. In order to support student development of social skills, early childhood programs must embody a mission and value of learning through play and real life experiences. Leaders must staff preschool classrooms with teachers who value the importance of learning or enhancing skills through free choice or play based framework in order to encompass a mission of learning by first hand experience.

The research provided insight that preschool social-emotional learning has a direct correlation to preschool student emergent math and literacy skills as well as link to elementary achievement. Academic performance standards have risen and there is a push for preschool students to perform at a higher level academically instead of attending preschool to gain exposure to a group setting. With the increase of math and literacy academics, it is essential for teachers to remember and address the vulnerability of a preschool student's social-emotional skills. A child's anxiety may increase due to the inability to regulate attention and emotions,

which may in turn interfere with the ability to focus on academics in preschool (Garner & Waajid, 2012). Additionally, strong emotions have the ability to derail cognitive thought (Helmsen et al., 2012), and “children who have difficulties dealing with negative emotions may not have the personal resources to focus on learning” (Denham et al., 2012 p. 248). When students have the support of parents and teachers and are exposed to effective social-emotional curricula and free choice opportunities to practice social-emotional skills, academic achievement will follow.

Application

The research summarized in this paper should inform early childhood leaders of the importance of incorporating parent education and the teaching of social-emotional development with each preschool class offered throughout an early childhood program. Additionally, the research summarized should motivate teachers to embody a collaborative framework with parents to increase involvement within the classroom. Teachers should be driven to cultivate positive and supportive relationships with the students within their classrooms in order for students to feel comfortable and motivated to learn. Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged by leaders to support students through ample opportunities for free choice, and use of effective curricula. Early childhood leaders must be obligated to consider and act upon the importance of the factors mentioned above and provide teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff with the resources necessary to ensure students receive equitable support and implementation of social-emotional learning.

Future Studies

The following suggestions pertain to future studies regarding the research and essential question. These study suggestions would further enhance the research in relation to how does the

underdevelopment of preschool children's social-cognitive abilities impact temperament, achievement, and the classroom environment? Additional suggestions would enhance knowledge and response to the essential question, *In light of what is known about how children learn and educational policy and practice, how shall teacher preparation programs and administrative leaders best provide teachers with the skills and resources necessary to support students with underdeveloped social-emotional abilities within the preschool classroom?*

Future Study 1 Parent-Child Relationships. In this paper, student-teacher relationships were examined in relation to a preschool student's social-emotional abilities. In future research, it would be helpful to examine the relationships between parents and children in both the home and school setting. This research would help to support the importance of parent education, consistency of co-parenting, teaching social-emotional skills, and give teachers and educational leaders insight on how to bridge the gap from home to school.

Future Study 2 Early Childhood Screening and Social-Emotional Development. The early childhood years from birth to kindergarten are an intense time of rapid growth of development and learning for children. Early Childhood Screening is required in Minnesota in order for a child to enter kindergarten. In future research, it would be insightful to explore the relationship between social-emotional data of students who are screened at three years old and at five years old. This research would help to support the impact of early intervention in response to underdeveloped social-emotional skills.

Future Study 3 Early Intervention and Social-Emotional Development of Preschoolers. Identifying a child's social-emotional underdevelopment, or delay, early is essential for the opportunity to use early intervention or early childhood special education to enhance student's development. Early intervention provides targeted services to students who

have developmental delays. In the future, research surrounding early intervention and social-emotional development of preschool aged children would be valuable in supporting the positive impact teaching strategies and interventions can have on young children.

Conclusion

The research study findings in chapter two, summary of main points, and discussion support the notion that the underdevelopment of preschool social-emotional learning *does* impact temperament, the classroom environment, and students' academic and social future. "Young children's social-emotional development sets the stage for subsequent social-emotional functioning and plays a role in later academic achievement" (Gormley et al., 2011, p. 2095). Through this paper, various factors leading to this conclusion were investigated and discussed including parent education, student-teacher relationships, free choice, social-emotional curricula, pre-emergent literacy and math skills, and a link to elementary academic performance. Social-emotional learning is highly impactful to a child's development as "social-emotional skills undergird young children's success or failure at adapting to sometimes challenging preschool and kindergarten environments, and making the most of their experiences there, to learn and grow in social and academic functioning" (Denham et al., 2012, p. 247). This paper is of significant importance to educators across grade levels to not only bring awareness to social-emotional development and provide suggestions in decreasing aggressive behavior, but to also bring awareness to the importance of early childhood education. Early childhood education is the beginning of a student and family's educational journey, and is considered a first impression when entering a school district. Advocating the importance of early childhood programming is an essential component to being a leader of programs supporting young children and families. The skills learned in early childhood are those that will follow a person throughout the lifespan.

The investment in early childhood education has the “potential to increase health and reduce risk behaviors over the life span, this reduces overall societal costs” (Flook et al., 2017, p. 44). The foundation early childhood education programs contribute to a person’s social-emotional life skills is undeniable. Every child deserves the opportunity to learn and grow academically and socially through inclusive, equitable, and high-quality preschool experiences.

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