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## How Can Teachers Support School Readiness Skills Through Social and Emotional Development for Male Students?

Tara Funseth  
funsetht@csp.edu

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How Can Teachers Support School Readiness Skills Through Social and Emotional  
Development for Male Students?

Tara Funseth

Concordia University, St. Paul

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Dr. Kelly Sadlovsky

Second Reader: Professor Elisabeth Amirahmadi

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### Abstract

Gender has an influence on how children learn. According to data, preschool males fell behind females in social and emotional development (Kent and Pitsia, 2018). Teachers support school readiness skills through social and emotional development for male students. To ensure male student learning styles are supported, teachers need to modify teaching methods. One challenge is educators are female dominant and expectations of children may have been designed for females. This paper synthesized peer reviewed journal articles and book research on why children needed social and emotional skills and how males and females differed in social and emotional development. The research reviewed factors leading to low social and emotional skills, and how teachers could support the development of social and emotional skills. The findings concluded teachers need to understand the difference of male's and female's development of social and emotional skills, create classroom expectations supporting males, and understand how teaching styles play a role in how males develop social and emotional skills. Schools need to ensure teachers have training related to how males develop social and emotional skills and have the freedom to incorporate large amounts of active learning in preschool.

*Keywords:* social and emotional skills, males, preschool, early childhood, teachers

## Chapter One: Introduction

Preschool helps prepare children for kindergarten. Preschool children are defined in this paper as ages three to five; and early childhood is defined as ages birth to five relating to programs or children. According to Kent and Pitsia (2018) females were ahead of males in all areas of school readiness, including social and emotional development. Social skills were defined as learning how to engage with others; and emotional skills were defined as recognizing and managing emotions (Denham, Bassett, Thayer, Mincic, and Sirotkin, 2012). Social and emotional skills are needed for children to be successful throughout life. Denham, Bassett, Thayer, Mincic, and Sirotkin (2012) discussed how high social and emotional skills in early childhood predict success in the future. Social and emotional skills are needed before academic learning. Children learn social and emotional skills beginning at birth. Preschool teachers play a vital role in making sure children are successful and prepared for kindergarten. To prepare children for school, teachers use a variety of teaching methods. The method of teaching needs to fit the male active learning style. Educators should understand how children develop social and emotional skills, especially the difference between how males develop these skills versus females. In order to teach social and emotional skills, teachers need to understand the best strategies to use. Since females were ahead of males in social and emotional development (Kent and Pitsia, 2018), educators understanding how children develop these skills and ways to teach these skills is even more important. It is essential children learn social and emotional skills as these skills predicted future success in school. This paper examined qualitative, quantitative, and secondary analysis research studies examining social and emotional skills of all children focusing on the differences of male and females.

### **Communication and Behavior**

Some males learn at a different rate and by different teaching styles than females. According to research, males displayed more aggressive behaviors. Maguire, Niens, McCann, and Connolly (2016) explained males tend to have slightly higher aggressive behaviors than females. Instead of aggressive behaviors, these behaviors were mislabeled. Gartrell (2003) discussed mistaken behaviors being caused by inappropriate expectations or lack of communication skills. Mistaken behaviors were behaviors teachers may see in a child; however, the behavior was caused by another source, for example, lack of communication skills.

Children need communication skills to develop social and emotional skills. A child with low language skills cannot discuss emotions leading to using aggression to communicate with other children versus words. According to research reviewed, children learned language, and social and emotional skills through play (Veiga, Neto, and Rieffe, 2016). Research showed free play time is decreasing in an early childhood classroom (Veiga et al., 2016). Free play was the time children developed social and emotional skills. Veiga, Neto, and Rieffe (2016) studied the relationship between the amount of free play and social and emotional functioning. Research found more behaviors happen when free play was lessened, and children learned communication skills to support social and emotional development during free play (Veiga et al., 2016).

### **Teacher and Family Factors**

Family factors play a role in children's social and emotional development. Teachers need to recognize what is happening in a child's home as there are factors contributing to lower social and emotional development. According to reviewed research, divorce had an effect on male children managing emotions (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, and Booth, 2000). Divorce was not the only family factor found to have an effect on social and emotional

development. According to research, mothers stress had an impact on children's social and emotional well-being leading to lower social and emotional development levels (Bretherton, Prior, Bavin, Cini, Eadie, and Reilly, 2014). Socioeconomic status played a role in children's social and emotional development. Higher behaviors occurred in children from low income families (Bretherton et al., 2014).

Teacher factors affects a child's social and emotional development. Research demonstrated education level and experience had a positive effect on a child (Lang, Mouzourou, Jeon, Buettner, and Hur, 2017). Behaviors decreased when a teacher had higher education and more experience. Experience, education, and ongoing professional development gave the teachers the skills to promote positive responses to children's social and emotional development.

Teachers have an impact on how children develop social and emotional skills by the types of teaching methods used, relationships formed with children, and quality of interactions with children. Physical play, including rough and tumble play, was found to be important for children (Chalke, 2016). Research showed the relationship between a teacher and child mattered (Ahn and Stifter, 2006). Ahn and Stifter (2006) explained social skills between children increased when the teacher and child had a relationship and quality interactions.

### **Conclusion**

As preschools prepare children for school, male success in preschool and beyond is important. To examine supporting males in social and emotional development, first the importance of social and emotional skills was reviewed. After understanding why social and emotional skills were important, why social and emotional skills were low was examined. Teacher and family factors were explored to gain an understanding of what circumstances led to lower social and emotional skills. Understanding the factors which had an impact of social and



emotional development, how free play played a role in developing social and emotional skills was surveyed. The differences of males versus females were indicated throughout the paper; however, a deeper exploration of a comparison of males and females was noted in one section. The teacher's role in supporting social and emotional development for males was explored. Teachers needed to incorporate active learning, build relationships with males, and help males to name and understand emotions. This paper examined how can teachers support school readiness skills through social and emotional development for male students.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

As preschools prepare children for school, social and emotional skills need to be the foundational building blocks for learning. Males and females differ in the development of social and emotional skills; however, teachers play a large role in helping males prepare for school and develop social and emotional skills. This paper reviewed research to understand the importance of social and emotional skills and teacher and family factors contributing to low social and emotional skills. Research found children need social and emotional skills to increase achievement in school and decrease the dropout rate (Denham et al., 2012). Social and emotional skills gave children the ability to communicate with peers and adults, and label and regulate emotions (Aitkulova, Alimbaeva, and Lazareva, 2012). Children developed friendships and relationships with adults with adequate social and emotional skills (Ahn and Stifter, 2006).

Family and teacher factors influence the development of children's social and emotional skills. Traumatic experiences such as divorce had an impact on how children develop social and emotional skills. According to research, males were more affected than females during a divorce (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2000). Children, from families with low socioeconomic status, had higher behaviors (Bretherton et al., 2014). Research showed mothers distress affects the child's social and emotional development (Bretherton et al., 2014). Not only did family factors influence children's social and emotional development, but teacher factors had an influence. According to research, higher education played a role in higher social and emotional skills for males (Lang et al., 2017). Professional development for teachers increased social and emotional outcomes (Williford, LoCasale-Crouch, Whittaker, DeCoster, Hartz, Carter, and Hatfield, 2017). Research found teacher-child relationships had an impact on children's social and emotional development (Williford et al., 2017).

Free play is important in the development of social and emotional skills. During free play, the teacher's role is to interact with children with engaging interactions. According to research, teachers did not view the free time as a time to engage, but instead as a time to complete other tasks (Aras, 2016). Engaging interactions assists in developing teacher-child relationships. Relationships are important to develop social and emotional skills. This paper analyzed the importance of social and emotional skills, family and teacher factors involved in supporting social and emotional skills, how play has an influence on the development of social and emotional development, a comparison of males and females, and what the teacher's role is in supporting social and emotional skills for males.

### **Importance of Social and Emotional Skills**

Social and emotional skills support success in school for children. High social and emotional skills in preschool predicted higher achievement in kindergarten (Denham et al., 2012). Children, who enter kindergarten, with higher social-emotional skills had an easier time adjusting to school and better success in school (Denham, 2006). In early childhood classrooms, social and emotional skills need to be one of the main focus' children work on. According to research, when social and emotional development was the focus, children did better in school (Sprung, Froschl, and Gropper, 2010). In the past years, preschool programs have placed more focus on academic skills versus social and emotional skills (Veiga et al., 2016). Teachers needed to understand the importance of ensuring social and emotional skills are developed before academic learning. Children with high levels of social skills had higher academic achievement (Denham et al., 2012).

**Communication**

Children need social and emotional skills to communicate effectively. Research found social and emotional skills are important for a child to communicate and interact with teachers and peers (Denham et al., 2012). In order to communicate with peers and teachers, children needed language skills. Research pointed out language is essential in social and emotional development (Bretherton et al., 2014). There were times when a child was exhibiting behaviors; however, if the child lacked language skills, it was a communication problem versus a behavior. Children who could communicate expressed emotions to peers and adults. When children knew how to express emotions, communicating feelings and expressing empathy to others occurred (Denham et al., 2012). Knowing how to express emotions is an important skill every child needs to communicate and develop friends. A child without social and emotional skills struggled in school and making friends (Denham, 2006).

**Relationships**

Children who had lower social and emotional skills were less liked by peers and teachers resulting in teachers interacting less and children learning less (Denham, 2006). When a child understands how to express emotions, the child develops friends easier. Children who were positive to each other developed meaningful relationships with other children (Sallquist, DiDonato, Hanish, Martin, and Fabes, 2012). In a quantitative study, the emotional knowledge and executive function of three and four-year-old children was examined for 352 Head Start and private child care children (Denham et al., 2012). Observations and assessment tools were utilized to measure children's skills, ability to identify emotions, executive function, and school adjustment (Denham et al., 2012). The results of the study showed positive emotions led to self-regulation and the ability to communicate with peers and others (Denham et al., 2012). Negative

emotions made it difficult to learn and created difficulties in school (Denham et al., 2012). Children needed to develop positive emotions to develop friendships.

When a child develops social and emotional skills, certain adjustments in childhood and experiences in the child's adult life are avoided. When a child does not have social and emotional skills, behaviors are more prevalent. These behaviors lead to more challenges through life. Children with high levels of aggression and low levels of social skills had trouble adjusting to classroom routines (Denham et al., 2012). When children did not develop social and emotional skills at a young age, children struggled to adjust to school. A child who had not adjusted to school led to more difficulties later in school. According to research, children without social and emotional skills at a young age have higher dropout rates (Denham, 2006). The lack of social and emotional skills accompanied struggles beyond school. In a qualitative study by Maguire, Niens, McCann, and Connolly (2016), emotional understanding, competence, and inhibitory control was examined to see if it has an impact on classroom behaviors and if gender makes a difference. Seven-hundred and forty-nine children from year one and two of formal education from 12 schools in Northern Ireland participated in an interview from a researcher (Maguire et al., 2016). The results of the study showed males tended to have slightly higher aggressive behaviors than girls (Maguire et al., 2016). The way males expressed emotions related to externalizing behaviors (Maguire et al., 2016). Helping children to understand emotions reduced classroom behaviors (Maguire et al., 2016). Children expressing aggressive behaviors at a young age were more likely to experience juvenile delinquency (Maguire et al., 2016).

### **Family Factors Leading to Low Social and Emotional Development**

This paper focuses on the teacher and classroom role and factors in a child's social and emotional development; however, family factors also play a role in a child's social and

emotional well-being. Events happening in child's home lead to lower social and emotional skills. Family events included in this paper are divorce, maternal distress, and socioeconomic status.

### **Divorce**

Separation and divorce are traumatic experiences for young children. When parents are divorced, a child has higher emotional and behavior problems. Males and females manage emotions differently through a divorce. According to Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, and Booth (2000), males struggled more with emotional distress and behavior problems than females during a divorce. These behaviors were not only shown at home, but also in the classrooms. According to research, males had more academic difficulties than females during divorce (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2000). When males show more behaviors in a classroom, academics suffered. A child, from a family of divorced parents, struggled in the classroom socially. According to research, males were more negatively affected in social adjustments than females during divorce (Clarke et al., 2000).

### **Maternal Distress**

In a quantitative study, environmental, child, and maternal factors were analyzed in the relationship between low language skills and behaviors of 1,257 two and four-year-old children (Bretherton et al., 2014). Questionnaires and phone interviews were used to measure behaviors, strengths and challenges, gestures, expressive vocabulary, non-verbal intelligence and language assessment in children; maternal distress, vocabulary and education; and socioeconomic status (Bretherton et al., 2014). The results of the study showed maternal distress contributes to lower social and emotional skills (Bretherton et al., 2014). According to research, maternal distress increased when the mother was a mother of males (Bretherton et al., 2014). Maternal education

had an impact on behaviors; however, maternal vocabulary was not significant. The higher the education level of the mother, less behaviors were prevalent (Bretherton et al., 2014). Mother distress showed significant impact on behaviors; however, socioeconomic status played a role in higher behaviors also.

### **Socioeconomic Status**

Socioeconomic status plays a part in a child's social and emotional well-being. Research examined socioeconomic status (Bretherton et al., 2014). Research showed low income children had higher internalizing and externalizing behaviors, especially if the mother had lower education levels (Bretherton et al., 2014). This study showed the importance of teachers understanding the family backgrounds. Teachers need to understand how all family factors, including how socioeconomic status, and divorced families have an effect on the child's social and emotional development. It is important for teachers to learn each family's dynamics to understand why a child is behaving a certain way and how to work with each child on social and emotional development.

### **Teacher Factors Contributing to Social and Emotional Development**

Teacher factors leads to higher or lower social and emotional development in children. According to research, education level and years of experience made a difference in the social and emotional skills children developed and how teachers responded positively or negatively to children (Lang et al., 2017). Lang, Mouzourou, Jeon, Buettner, and Hur (2017) completed a qualitative study examining 1,129 preschool teachers ages 20-72 and the relationship between teacher education level, professional development and observations to children's emotional climate. Teachers were given a survey asking questions about teacher professional backgrounds,

child-centered beliefs, motivation for professional development, and teacher responsiveness (Lang et al., 2017).

### **Education and Experience**

According to research, higher education correlated to higher emotional climate in the classroom (Lang et al., 2017). The emotional climate in the classroom led to positive or negative responses to children. Lang, Mouzourou, Jeon, Buettner, and Hur (2017) found teachers who have courses in early childhood were less likely to have negative responses. When a child had fewer negative responses, the children exhibited less behaviors. Teachers with more years of experience had increased positive responses to children (Lang et al., 2017).

### **Relationships**

Relationships between teachers and children make a difference in the amount of behaviors children have and also how teachers perceive these behaviors. In a qualitative study, teacher-child relationships were studied compared to behaviors (Williford et al., 2017). Four-hundred and seventy preschool children and 183 teachers participated in the study using observation tools (Williford et al., 2017). The results of the study showed children, who were engaged by a teacher one on one each day utilizing teacher-child interactions; for example, identifying the child's actions and labeling emotions, had less behaviors (Williford et al, 2017). Quality interactions from teachers with children, who were at risk for experiencing behaviors, decreased the amount of behaviors displayed (Williford et al., 2017). When teachers had a positive emotional bond with the children, behaviors decreased. Behaviors decreased when teachers bonded with children; however, teachers who had the education and skills to build relationships with children noticed less behaviors. DiCarlo, Baumgartner, Ota, and Jenkins (2015) completed a quantitative study on 94 teachers studying the relationship of teacher



education level and the perception of behaviors. Teachers watched videos and scored the children in the videos as being aggressive or appropriate behavior (DiCarlo et al., 2015). The study showed teachers with higher education and more years of experience saw less aggressive behaviors in males (DiCarlo et al., 2015).

### **Professional Development and Coaching**

Professional development and coaching have an impact on how teachers respond to children. According to research, when a teacher had coaching, motivation was higher (Lang et al., 2017). Coaching influenced the interactions with children. Observational feedback and reflective practice were associated with positive reactions when working with negative emotions in children (Lang et al., 2017). Teachers who were given feedback had fewer negative responses (Lang et al., 2017). Ongoing professional development and support led to higher teacher retention rates. Teachers who were given ongoing feedback had a higher commitment to the early childhood field (Lang et al., 2017).

### **Assessment and Teaching**

Workshops and professional development opportunities focused on implementing social and emotional skills versus assessing the skills (Holtge, Ehm, Hartmann, and Hasselhorn, 2019). A qualitative study was completed on how comfortable staff are in assessing and promoting school readiness around math, reading, and social and emotional (Holtge et al., 2019). Participants included 105 teachers who completed an online survey on how confident teachers felt about teaching math, reading, and social and emotional skills (Holtge et al., 2019). The results found teachers were confident in assessing the children's social and emotional skills, but not confident in teaching them (Holtge et al., 2019). Teachers had higher confidence in assessing children's skills than promoting social and emotional skills (Holtge et al., 2019). Since teachers

were not confident in teaching social and emotional skills to young children, the teachers tended to mislabel delays in social and emotional skills as behaviors. Children, who were told about the misbehaviors, began to misbehave. When a child was labeled as aggressive multiple times, the child believed it and became aggressive (DiCarlo et al., 2015).

### **How Play Affected Social and Emotional Development**

Children need time to engage in free play to develop social and emotional skills. Free play supports social and emotional development (Veiga et al., 2016). Children learn many skills during free play. While children played with other children, what is socially acceptable was learned (Guirguis, 2018). Children learned problem solving and social skills through play (Guirguis, 2018). Children needed to work out problems and be given the chance to solve the problem. Teachers allowing time during the day for children to interact with other children and develop social and emotional skills is important. Unfortunately, research showed the amount of free play children received at school is decreasing (Aras, 2016). Research showed as the time allotted for play decreases, the emotional regulation of children also decreases (Guirguis, 2018). Long lengths of uninterrupted free time was essential for children to develop the necessary social and emotional skills. Free time gave children the opportunity to engage with other children, learn what is socially acceptable by friends, and learn communication skills to express feelings. Free play time allowed children an opportunity to understand other children's emotions and communicate own emotions (Veiga et al., 2016). To teach children emotions, teachers need to engage with children during free play.

### **Teachers Role and Perception**

Teachers role during free play need to be an engaging time with the children. Unfortunately, teachers see this time as time to do other tasks. In a quantitative study, Aras

(2016) studied the perceptions teachers have, how teachers engaged in a children's play, and decisions teachers made on free play. Four early childhood teachers from different background participated in the study through interviews and observations (Aras, 2016). Aras (2016) showed how teachers utilized free play to complete managerial tasks and did not engage with the children unless behaviors occurred. Teachers need to understand the benefits of offering free time and engaging with the children during free time. Free play was important for the development of social skills (Veiga et al., 2016). Free time not only developed social and emotional skills, but children learned all skills during free play. When a child did not have free play, there were lower outcomes (Veiga et al., 2016). Teachers did not value free time and viewed it as lost time. The belief was children will have higher outcomes if academics are pushed versus allowing children to engage in free play (Veiga et al., 2016).

Teachers perception of free play is important. According to Aras (2016), teachers viewed free play as a time to allow children to discharge. Teachers need to recognize the benefits of free play. According to research, longer free play lessens behaviors (Veiga et al., 2016). The amount of free time declined in the past half century (Veiga et al., 2016). There are many benefits associated to social and emotional development with long lengths of free play. Research showed free play promotes social and emotional skills which cannot be taught through teacher-directed activities (Aras, 2016). Engaging with other children is important. Since males engaged in cooperative play later than females, being given the time to build these skills during free play is important (Barbu, Cabanes, and Le Maner-Idrissi, 2011).

### **Active Play**

Research showed behaviors decrease when free play time was given during the day (Veiga et al., 2016). Males are active and learn by being engaged in active play; however,

teachers view physical play as aggressive or bad behaviors. It is hard for a teacher to understand the difference between challenging behaviors and active play. Active rough and tumble play is important for male children. In a qualitative study by Chalke (2016), teachers observed children, learned each child's likes and dislikes, and incorporated large motor activities into the day. The study began with one child during the first round. A teacher connected with the child and engaged the child in physical movement activity daily (Chalke, 2016). The second round of the study included a group of boys; and the teacher completed the same types of intervention as the first round (Chalke, 2016). Chalke (2016) found when physical activities were incorporated into the teaching, males achieved higher outcomes. Chalke (2016) found building relationships with boys upon initial start in the program and observing skills was important. The study found completing the physical activity resulted in increased social skills (Chalke, 2016). Children learned to interact with other children, wait for a turn, and gained confidence (Chalke, 2016). Chalke (2016) discussed how physical movement was important in the development of social and emotional skills; and if one was not developed, the other one was affected. DiCarlo, Baumgartner, Ota, and Jenkins (2015) explained how rough and tumble play is displayed as aggressive; therefore, teachers intervene and stop the play. According to research, children learned social skills through rough and tumble play (DiCarlo et al., 2015). Males engaged in rough and tumble play to learn. Children learned how to engage with others and manage emotions during rough and tumble play. Rough and tumble play taught management of emotions to children (DiCarlo et al., 2015).

Teachers do not understand the benefits of rough and tumble play and see it as fighting or expressing anger. Teachers associated superhero play with rough and tumble play which was assumed to be aggressive play (Galbraith, 2007). Teachers need to recognize the benefits of

superhero play and how it helps male children learn. The benefits of superhero play included enhancing problem solving, negotiation, and conflict resolution (Galbraith, 2007). Superhero play was one form of play where males learned many social and emotional skills; however, teachers perceived this play as aggressive. Research showed superhero play allows children to engage in discussions to problem solve, form peer groups, and determine who the leader is and who is not the leader (Galbraith, 2007). Rough and tumble and superhero play was typically discouraged in a group setting. When this is discouraged, males are unable to develop problem solving skills and other social and emotional skills. Perceived behaviors occur when a child does not develop social and emotional skills.

### **Comparison of Males Versus Females**

In a secondary analysis study by Kent and Pitsia (2018), the difference in males and females surrounding cognitive development, school readiness, and quality interventions was studied. The participants for this study were 233 women; 118 assigned to the low treatment group and 115 assigned to the high treatment group (Kent and Pitsia, 2018). Both groups received toys, preschool access, a support worker, and public health workshops; however, the high treatment group received home visits, more supports, and the ability to attend a group parent training (Kent and Pitsia, 2018). Males and females scored higher in all school readiness domains in the high treatment group versus the low treatment group; however, males fell behind females on all areas of school readiness development domains in both treatment groups (Kent and Pitsia, 2018). Teachers need to know how males develop and the differences between males and females to support males in early childhood. Females engaged in play differently than males. Males engaged in more active play. Research showed males have higher aggressive behaviors than females (Bretherton et al., 2014). These behaviors are labeled aggressive but are mistaken

for active play. Gartrell (2003) discussed how behavior is likely caused by inappropriate expectations for the children. When male expectations are the same as female expectations, the aggressive type play is mistaken as aggressive behavior. The types of teaching methods differ for males and females. When schools taught using mostly sedentary methods, males were unable to learn as easily as females in this type of environment and therefore became further behind females academically (Sprung et al., 2010). Males engaged in active learning to acquire academic knowledge. Teachers need to plan for active learning throughout the day.

### **Communication**

Communication skills play a role in the difference between the social and emotional development of males and females. According to a study by Kent and Pitsia (2018), female maturity and communication levels were higher than males. When a child could not communicate, emotions were unable to be expressed. Young females had better verbal and non-verbal skills than males; however, this changed as children became older (Kent and Pitsia, 2018). Low language skills were a factor leading to low social and emotional skills. Children with language delays struggled with social and emotional skills (Bretherton et al., 2014). Research showed low language correlates to increased behaviors (Bretherton et al., 2014). Since there are many mistaken behaviors, teachers do not always identify low language as the reason for the behavior. Teachers not understanding the reason leads to the child being labeled. Research demonstrated children were given labels when exhibiting challenging behaviors (Chalke, 2016). When a child was labeled as having challenging behaviors, the child was targeted when any quarrel occurred. Teachers blamed the child with behaviors when an altercation occurred even if the child was not involved (Chalke, 2016). Gartrell (2003) explained the importance of understanding why a child was behaving a specific way. Teachers need to understand why the

child is behaving a certain way and understand if the perceived behavior is intentional behavior or normal play.

In a qualitative study by Barbu, Cabanes, and Le Maner-Idrissi (2011), social interactions between males and females ages two to six from sixteen classrooms were observed during playtime. Males engaged in solitary play more than females; and females engaged in associative play and cooperative play a year earlier than males (Barbu et al., 2011). Teachers need to understand how males and females communicate and engage in play differently.

### **Expressing Emotions**

Children need to learn how to express and explain emotions. Sala, Pons, and Molina (2014) completed a quantitative study examining 69 children ages three to six years old on the understanding and naming of emotions. An observational test was completed by asking questions about emotions while looking at pictures or reading a story (Sala et al., 2014). Sala, Pons, and Molina (2014) found males used behavior strategies to express emotion while females used social support. The more knowledge a child had about emotions; the more the child was able to find strategies to support own emotions. In a qualitative study by Aitkulova, Alimbaeva, and Lazareva (2012), facial expressions and impressions on emotions were examined on 80 children ages five to six years old. An interview was done on children by showing pictures and asking the children to name the emotion (Aitkulova et al., 2012). The results of the study showed anger was an easily identified emotion in females; however, five-year-old females fell slightly behind six-year-old females (Aitkulova et al., 2012). Anger was easily identified for both age groups of males (Aitkulova et al., 2012). Both males and females struggled to identify fear; however, both age groups were able to identify the emotion of fear in a male better than a female (Aitkulova et al., 2012). Knowledge about emotions was the first step to express emotion. When children were

able to identify and understand emotions, children were more successful in school (Denham et al., 2012). Males and females expressed emotions differently. According to Ahn and Stifter (2006), females showed positive emotion, smiled more often, and were less angry and fussy than males. Teachers reacted differently to male and female expression of emotions. Ahn and Stifter (2006) found teachers were more likely to match a female's emotional expression than a male's expression; and teachers discouraged emotional expression more in males than females. When a teacher discourages males emotional expression, expressing emotions are not taught; and instead emotions are hidden.

Females and males use language to teach others about different topics and express emotion. In a quantitative study of 78 children ages two and a half to six years old, observers recorded children's conversations and coded them into specific categories to determine how males and females interacted with each other versus the opposite sex (Sigelman and Holtz, 2013). Females talked more about the similarities of themselves or others, activities, and possessions more than males (Sigelman and Holtz, 2013). Males talked more to each other about conduct and made more negative comments to each other than females (Sigelman and Holtz, 2013). Negative emotions were associated with decreased knowledge of emotion (Ahn and Stifter, 2006).

### **Peer Relationships**

A quantitative study by Sallquist, DiDonato, Hanish, Martin, and Fabes (2012) completed an observational study on peer relationships with 166 Head Start children an average of fifty-two months old. Sallquist, DiDonato, Hanish, Martin, and Fabes (2012) initially found females were higher than males in positive emotion when interacting with males; however, there was a variable of the number of interactions as the number of interactions with another gender was



lower than with the same gender. When the number of interactions were taken into account, there was not a significant difference (Sallquist et al., 2012). Males and females both spent more time playing with the same gender (Sallquist et al., 2012). Even though males and females spend more time with the same sex, studies were done on outcomes of children if in rooms with mainly students of the opposite sex. Moller, Forbes-Jones, Hightower, and Friedman (2008) completed a quantitative study on 806 preschoolers on if sex composition made a difference in children's outcomes. Children were observed using the Child Observation Record (COR) to measure all preschool developmental domains; and the utilized Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised (ECERS-R) to measure the environment of the classroom (Moller et al., 2008). Males obtained higher developmental outcomes when in classrooms which were predominately females, but not when in classrooms with males (Moller et al., 2008).

### **African American Males**

African American males are treated differently than other ethnicities. African American males were viewed as troublemakers (Wright, 2019). Teachers watched for bad behavior in African American males more than Caucasian males. In a quantitative study by Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, and Shic (2016), teachers were asked to view a video and press enter each time a potential for a challenging behavior was shown. The study was to measure implicit biases to specific ethnicities (Gilliam et al., 2016). One-hundred and thirty-two preschool teachers or student teachers of early childhood programs who attended a large conference were recruited to participate (Gilliam et al., 2016). Participants were asked to view a video and press the enter button on the keypad every time the participant saw a potential challenging behavior (Gilliam et al., 2016). The computer tracked the teacher's eyes to see what child was the main focus for the teacher (Gilliam et al., 2016). Even though the video clips contained no behaviors, teachers spent

more time watching the African American male than the other children (Gilliam et al., 2016). This study showed how African American males were targeted and watched for more aggressive behaviors. African American males felt targeted about displaying aggressive behaviors and then started exhibiting the behaviors. African American males felt watched in school and this caused them to be less likely to engage with other children where social and academic skills were learned (Wright, 2019). When African American males do not learn social skills, it is difficult to know how to engage with friends and exhibit behaviors. Children, who were aggressive and displayed challenging behaviors due to lack of social skills, were suspended. African American males were suspended more than other ethnicities. Forty-seven percent of suspensions were of preschool African American males (Wright, 2019).

### **Teachers' Role in Supporting Social and Emotional Development in Males**

Teachers play an important role in the development of social and emotional skills for males. There are many strategies teachers do in classrooms to support social and emotional development. Research suggested movement and physical activities are strategies used for children to develop social and emotional skills (Sprung et al., 2010); however, time given to children to engage in physical activity was limited (Veiga et al., 2017). Increasing the amount of time males engaged in active play was important for social and emotional development in males.

Stating emotions with a child and using parallel talk helped a child to understand feelings. Ahn and Stifter (2006) explained how naming a child's emotions and discussing how each felt helped children understand own emotions. The teachers' role was to name a child's emotions and help each child understand what each emotion felt like. Talking to children about emotions and recognizing each child's emotions develops relationships with the child.

**Relationships**

Developing strong relationships with children supports social and emotional development. Children who had a better attachment with the teacher had higher social skills with peers (Ahn and Stifter, 2006). Building individual relationships with each child and taking time to spend one on one time with each child daily was important for social and emotional skill development leading to decreased behaviors. Teachers who spent time with and engaged in conversations with each child daily had less behaviors in classrooms (Williford et al., 2017). Relationships was not only key to developing social and emotional skills, but also to development of all academic learning. Teacher-child relationships was the key to academic success (Sprung et al., 2010). Building relationships with the children led a teacher to understand each child's strengths. Sprung, Froschl, and Gropper (2010) discussed how teacher should identify strengths in each child and focus on those strengths. Once strengths were identified in a child, a teacher built on these strengths to increase a child's learning. Sprung, Froschl, and Gropper (2010) pointed out teachers needed to find something each male was interested in and spend one on one time with each male daily on that interest. Wright (2019) found teachers focused on what skills children brought to school versus what was lacking. Teachers, who built on a child's interest, showed interest in what the child was doing. When teachers showed interest in how a child felt, children gained higher social and emotional skills (Ahn and Stifter, 2006). When a teacher accepted and was sensitive to a child, the children grew an attachment with the teacher which allowed for children to feel comfortable engaging in classroom activities (Williford et al., 2017).

### **Teacher Responsiveness**

In a longitudinal, quantitative study by Hamre, Hatfield, Pianta, and Jamil (2014), two parts of self-regulation were studied, inhibitory control and working memory, and compared to teacher-child relationships. Surveys and assessments were used with the participants which included 325 preschool teachers and 1,407 children (Hamre et al., 2014). Teachers were responsive to children when a relationship had been developed. The results showed responsive teaching led to increased outcomes across multiple learning domains (Hamre et al., 2014). Responsive teaching led to a decrease in child-teacher conflict (Hamre et al., 2014). Decreased child-teacher conflict played a role in ensuring the classroom has high classroom organization and management. Classrooms with higher classroom organization, as defined in an assessment of teacher-child interactions called CLASS, found children had gains in inhibitory control (Hamre et al., 2014).

Teachers do not intend to treat a male different than a female in a classroom; however, it happens. Females were encouraged to learn how to express feelings more than males (Maguire et al., 2016). It was important for teachers to understand how males and females learn differently to support both in the classroom. Gartrell (2003) discussed how focusing on strategies to support males helped all children. Teachers reflected on own perceptions of the children including biases to African American males (Wright, 2019). When a teacher reflects on own practice and perceptions, male children are supported in school.

### **Conclusion**

The research demonstrated as teachers prepare children for kindergarten, social and emotional skills were important to develop to support all other academic learning. There were reasons children's social and emotional development in males were lower. Males solved

problems by engaging in rough play; however, time allotted for free play was found to be decreasing (Guirguis, 2018). Studies found during free play teachers need to spend time engaging with children to support social and emotional development and to build relationships. Strong relationship with male children created higher social and emotional skills (Ahn and Stifter, 2006). Teachers needed to understand the family factors involved in low social and emotional skills. Once a teacher understood the whole family, understanding why the behavior was occurring was easier. The next chapter examines the key findings from the literature review around the importance of social and emotional development, family and teacher factors leading to low social and emotional skills, how males and females differ in development of social and emotional skills, and what the teacher's role is to support social and emotional development for males.

### Chapter Three: Research Summary and Conclusions

Examining how teachers can support school readiness skills through social and emotional development for male students was explored. Social and emotional skills are important for children in preparation for kindergarten; however, research showed male children do not develop these skills as early as female children (Kent and Pitsia, 2018). Since male children fell behind female children, understanding specific strategies to support male children in the development of social and emotional skills is important. To understand how males develop social and emotional skills included first understanding the importance of social and emotional skills for all children. Next, teachers needed to understand the teacher and family factors contributing to lower social and emotional development in male children. The effects of play and a comparison of male and females in the development of social and emotional skills was examined. Lastly, strategies teachers could incorporate in classrooms was explored.

#### **Importance of Social and Emotional Skills**

Social and emotional skills were considered more important to develop than academics in the early years. Social and emotional skills supported children's success in school. Children did better in school when social and emotional skills were developed before focusing on academic skills (Sprung et al., 2010). Communication was key to incorporate social and emotional skills; however, males developed communication and language skills later than girls (Kent et al., 2018). Language and communication were needed to label and express emotions. When a child did not have communication or social and emotional skills, peer and adult relationships suffered. Children with low social and emotional skills struggled with self-regulation and developing relationships (Denham et al., 2012). When a child struggled with self-regulation, the child exhibited behaviors. Exhibiting behaviors, especially aggressive behaviors led to less friends

(Denham, 2006). When a child was able to understand and regulate their emotions, relationships developed, and children did better in school.

### **Family Factors Contributing to Social and Emotional Development**

Family factors had an impact on children's development of social and emotional skills. It was important to understand the family factors to understand why a child may be exhibiting behaviors. Divorce, maternal distress, and socioeconomic status played a role in male children's social and emotional skills. Males struggled with emotions during a divorce more than females (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2000). Maternal distress was found to be a factor of lower social and emotional development; and mothers of males increased the distress (Bretherton et al., 2014). The last family factor discussed in this paper having an impact of social and emotional development was socioeconomic status. Behaviors increased when a child was from a low socioeconomic family (Bretherton et al., 2014). Understanding family factors helped to understand the support each child needs.

### **Teacher Factors Contributing to Social and Emotional Development**

Education level, professional development opportunities and coaching, and relationships with children played a role in a child's social and emotional development. The higher the teacher's education level the more behaviors decreased which assumes social and emotional skills increased (Lang et al., 2017). Teachers, who attended professional development and received ongoing feedback and coaching, had fewer negative responses leading to less behaviors (Lang et al., 2017). Children, who had engaging teachers with quality interactions, showed less behaviors (Williford et al., 2017). When a child has less behaviors, the overall atmosphere in the classroom was positive.

### **How Play Affected Social and Emotional Development**

Free play was considered an important time to learn social and emotional skills. Unfortunately, free play time for preschoolers has decreased (Guirguis, 2018). During free play, children engaged with each other, learned problem solving skills, and learned to communicate with other children expressing emotions (Guirguis, 2018). Engaging with children during free play was important; however, some teachers perceived free play as a time when children play alone. Teachers' perception of free play was for children to play independently and teachers to complete managerial tasks (Aras, 2016). Male children needed free play time and needed to be allowed to engage in rough and tumble play. Even though teachers were found to terminate play when males engaged in rough and tumble play, social skills were developed during rough and tumble play for males (DiCarlo et al., 2015). Free play and rough and tumble played an important role in the development of social and emotional skills in males.

### **Comparison of Males Versus Females**

Males and females learned differently and developed at a slower rate. In all school readiness outcomes, males were lower than females (Kent and Pitsia, 2018). Males had lower outcomes when teaching was sedentary which indicated males need active learning experiences (Sprung et al., 2010). Communication in males were lower than females (Kent and Pitsia, 2018). Lack of communication skills caused children to be unable to express emotions and feelings. Males were behind females in communicating; therefore, negative behaviors were higher than females due to lack of being able to communicate appropriately. Since males were not able to communicate and exhibited higher levels of negative behaviors than females, teachers may have assumed male children should be like a female child and labeled males as aggressive targeting the male child if a quarrel occurred. Aggressive behaviors were mislabeled (Gartrell, 2003).



African American males were watched closer for aggressive behaviors more than Caucasian males (Gilliam et al., 2016). Aggressive behaviors may have been mistaken for rough and tumble play which was an important part of males developing social and emotional skills. Males and females engaged with each other differently. Females played in groups before males engaged in groups (Barbu et al., 2011). Males and females expressed emotions and teachers responded differently. Teachers discouraged males to show expressions while encouraging females to show expressions (Ahn and Stifter, 2006). Males had higher outcomes when placed in classrooms with a high number of females (Moller et al., 2008). Males and females developed differently and at different rates. Understanding and supporting the differences helped to ensure males gain skills needed to be prepared for kindergarten.

### **Teachers' Role in Supporting Social and Emotional Development for Males**

To support social and emotional development in children, teachers implemented a variety of strategies; including, building relationships with children, incorporating active teaching methods, and reflecting on own practice and biases toward males. The importance of active learning and building relationships were addressed in the previous paragraphs. Strategies teachers did not only support males, but all children; however, ensuring extra emphasis for males while teaching was important.

### **Conclusion**

Research reviewed showed the importance of ensuring male children have social and emotional skills and factors associated with lower levels of social and emotional skills. Social and emotional development is the foundation for all other academic development (Sprung et al., 2010). Communication skills were found to be key in developing social and emotional skills. Children needed to be able to communicate to express emotions. Family factors of divorce,

maternal distress, and socioeconomic status contributed to lower social and emotional skills in male children. Teacher factors of higher education, more experience, coaching and professional development opportunities, and the ability to develop relationships with children contributed to higher social and emotional skills in male children. More free play and active learning for male children related to higher social and emotional skills. Understanding the meaning behind behaviors and the difference between male and female children presented with a positive outcome for social and emotional development when teachers focus on relationship building and incorporation of active play. The next chapter gives a summary of insights gained, how it will inform instructional and educational practices, and what future studies may include.

## Chapter Four: Discussion and Application

As teachers strengthen teaching, many teaching strategies can be implemented to ensure male learning is supported as much as females. In previous chapters, research examined the importance of social and emotional skills, teacher and family factors, the role of free play, comparison of males and females, and the teacher's role in supporting social and emotional development in males. Higher teachers' education and experience, supporting and understanding families, increased free play, building relationships with children, and understanding the meaning of behaviors help children develop social and emotional skills. Although social and emotional development has been studied, the differences between males and females in social emotional development is limited. Future studies studying the environmental factors, analyzing the differences between male and female dual language learners, and examining biases would be helpful in gaining a better understanding of how teachers can support social and emotional development in male children.

### **Summary of Research**

Communication and behavior play an important role in a child's social and emotional development. A child needs to be able to communicate in order to express emotions. Expressing emotions is essential when developing relationships with peers and adults. When a child cannot communicate emotions, the child expresses emotions in other ways. The expression of emotions may come out as challenging behaviors; therefore, the child may be expressing emotions negatively and have a difficult time making friends (Sallquist et al., 2012).

Mistaken behaviors are common when a child lacks social and emotional skills. Teachers view negative conduct by children with low social and emotional skills as aggressive behaviors;

however, these are mistaken behaviors because the actual cause is something else (Gartrell, 2003). When a child can communicate, some problems are solved without using aggression.

Family factors have an effect on a child's social and emotional development. Family factors which affects social and emotional development in males include divorce, maternal distress, and socioeconomic status. Males exhibit more challenges with behaviors and management of emotions during divorce than females (Clarke-Stewart, 2000). Maternal distress and socioeconomic status have an impact on male children's social and emotional development. A mother is under more distress when raising a male child than a female child; and the higher the distress for a mother, the lower the social and emotional development in a child (Bretherton et al., 2014). Children from lower socioeconomic status have higher behaviors (Bretherton et al., 2014).

Teacher factors have an effect on male children's social and emotional development. When a teacher has a higher education level and more experience, the climate of the classroom has more positivity and the negative responses to children decrease (Lang et al., 2017). Strong teacher-child relationships lessen behaviors in the classroom. Connecting with each child daily lessens behaviors (Williford et al., 2017). Teachers with higher education and more experience label males with less behaviors than teachers with less education and experience (DiCarlo et al., 2015).

Free play is decreasing across early childhood programs (Aras, 2016). Teachers' perception of free play has been to decrease the time allotted for free play as teachers believe it will increase academic outcomes (Veiga et al., 2016). The benefits of free play include children learning problem solving skills, increased emotional regulation, increased communication and expression of emotions, increased cooperative play skills, increased turn taking skills, increased

positive engagement with other children, increased conflict resolution skills, decreased behaviors, and increased academic outcomes (Guirguis, 2018; Veiga et al., 2016; Barbu et al., 2011; Galbriath, 2007). During free play, supporting rough and tumble and active play for male children is important for males to learn social and emotional skills (DiCarlo et al., 2015). Free play offers many benefits and the time children engage in free play in early childhood needs to increase and be the largest portion of a child's day in the classroom.

Male and female children have many differences. Male children have more aggressive behaviors (Bretherton et al., 2014), do not learn with sedentary methods (Sprung et al., 2010), have less verbal skills (Kent and Pitsia, 2018), have lower communication skills (Kent and Pitsia, 2018), and engage in solitary play (Barbu et al., 2011). Teachers react to male expression of emotions by refraining from encouraging the emotions (Ahn and Stifter, 2006). Teachers role in supporting males in social and emotional development is important. There are numerous education practices teachers can do to ensure male children gain social and emotional skills in early childhood.

### **Informing Instructional and Educational Practices**

Teachers need to gain an understanding of each family and how factors within the family may decrease social and emotional skill development in male children. When a child enrolls into an early childhood program, the teacher should ask questions to understand the family dynamics. Since divorce, maternal distress, and socioeconomic status have an effect on male social and emotional development, understanding family dynamics helps teachers to understand a child's behavior.

Teaching teachers how to build relationships with children is an effective way for reducing behaviors. The more a teacher understands and has a relationship with the child, the

less behaviors the teachers sees in a child (Williford et al., 2017). Professional development will give teachers the knowledge and skills to build relationships with children and understand why a behavior is occurring. Attending professional development events will also benefit the teachers' understanding of the importance of providing long lengths of free play during the day.

Allowing long lengths of free play will increase social and emotional development (Veiga et al., 2016). During free play, male children need to be allowed to engage in rough and tumble play. Typically, teachers stop children's play when the children are engaging in rough and tumble play as this play is perceived as aggressive. Free play time is best for male children to develop social and emotional skills; however, if long length of a free play is not given, at a minimum, active teaching methods need to be incorporated throughout the day.

### **Future Studies**

Research on the difference of males and females in social and emotional development in early childhood classrooms is limited. Many of the studies reviewed social and emotional development and only had a small section discussing the differences between males and females. Future studies could include environments, dual language learners, and biases of male students. To learn how to support males in early childhood classrooms, studying and analyzing the different environments males learn best in will support male success in school. Numerous studies showed the importance of allowing free play time to support male social and emotional skills; however, the studies did not include if any environmental factors play a role in higher or lower social and emotional development in males. The studies included children from multiple races and ethnicities; however, the data on males was not broken down by language spoken. Differences may exist in how male dual language learners learn. Studying the differences between male and female dual language learners may help understand the differences in the

development of social and emotional skills when a child speaks a second language. The last proposed future study could be on biases toward male students. Teachers have biases. One article discussed how teachers' biases play a role in perceptions towards children; however, most articles did not address this. Studying how teacher biases play a role in male children's social and emotional development would be beneficial.

### **Conclusion**

Early childhood age is the time when children develop as an individual (Aitkulova et al., 2012). The development of social and emotional skills is a large part of preparing children for kindergarten. This paper examined how teachers can support school readiness skills through social and emotional development for male students. Supporting male children in the development of social and emotional skills is important as male children learn differently than female children. Before being able to support males in social and emotional development, it is important to understand why social and emotional development is important and factors leading to low social and emotional skills. The results of supporting social and emotional skills includes higher achievement levels in kindergarten and being able to communicate and develop relationships with adults and children (Denham et al., 2012; Sallquist et al., 2012). Divorce, maternal distress, socioeconomic status, education, experience, professional development, and coaching all have an effect on the development of social and emotional skills (Bretherton et al., 2014; Lang et al., 2017; DiCarlo et al., 2015). Active learning and free play are important for male children to develop social and emotional skills; however, teachers' perception on free time and active play differ (Veiga et al., 2016).

Males and females differ in development. Communication, expressing emotions, and peer relationships are areas males develop differently than females. Teachers can support male's

social and emotional development by incorporating active play and allowing free play time during the day, building strong relationships with children, and being responsive to children's needs. Ensuring teachers have the knowledge, skills, and resources to support male children in social and emotional development is essential for all early childhood programs.



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