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Impacts of Social and Emotional Learning Interventions in Special Education Students

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IMPACTS OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING INTERVENTIONS IN

SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

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SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

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APPROVED

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ABSTRACT

Social and emotional learning is educational programming that can help the student learn to recognize emotions, set goals, perspectively think, maintain positive relationships, make decisions and learn conflict resolution (McCormick, 2019). Research has shown that social and emotional learning is beneficial to not only the general education population but also special education students. The author of this thesis researched the impact of social and emotional learning on students with disabilities in the five disability categories; emotional behavioral disorders, autism spectrum disorders, developmental cognitive disorders, specific learning disability, and other health disabilities. A literature review was conducted to determine the impacts and patterns of social-emotional learning interventions on the specific disability as well as the impact this learning has on special education enrollment.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

History of Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning is embedded into all aspects of the school day (Heyward et al., 2020). This programming aims to change student behaviors through the support of recognizing emotions, goal setting, perspective thinking, maintaining positive relationships, decision making, and conflict resolution (McCormick et al., 2019).

According to the Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2021), social-emotional learning interventions started with the idea to provide an education that supports the social, emotional, and academic development of all children. In 1968, Dr. James Comer, along with his colleagues at Yale University's Child Study Center developed their ideas into a school-based practice to support what they called the "whole child" (CASEL, 2021). This practice was then adopted in the 1980s by two Connecticut-based schools that found a decline in behavior challenges with students and saw academic performance scores exceeding the national average after the implementation of social and emotional interventions (CASEL, 2021). From the 1980s to 1994, numerous researchers and developers extended the teaching of the whole individual in schools to pioneer new test groups (CASEL, 2021). This strengthened and improved the strategy of teaching social and emotional concepts to students in schools. It was now known as the missing piece in education (CASEL, 2021). In 1994, this practice had begun to be called social and emotional learning which was now described as a collaborative practice that addresses a student's social and emotional needs (CASEL, 2021).

As social and emotional learning developed, it was considered integral for not only education but human development (CASEL, 2021). Social and emotional learning is the process in which all adolescents and adults acquire and apply the understanding and skills needed to develop healthy self-images, manage emotions, advance personal and collaborative goal setting and establish and maintain healthy relationships using empathy and responsible and caring decisions (CASEL 2021).

The positive impact of universal social and emotional learning programs have been reported amongst all school children, regardless of students' race, socioeconomic background, or school location (Taylor et al., 2017; Cavioni et al., 2017). Research has shown that social-emotional competencies are directly related to greater well-being and school achievement (O'Connor et al., 2014). O'Connor et al. further indicated that failure to achieve such competencies, developed through social-emotional learning, predicts a variety of personal, social, and academic difficulties.

Special Education

Special education support and services became available to all individuals with a disability by law in 1975, after President Gerald Ford signed the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004). This has now become known as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (IDEA, 2004). IDEA is a law that governs that all students, regardless of ability, receive a free and appropriate education (IDEA, 2004). In the law, Congress states:

Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities (IDEA, 2004, section 1401).

Categorical Disabilities in Special Education

Students in special education need specialized instruction to meet their individual needs (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2021g). These needs are identified by an evaluation team consisting of members from the public school system (MDE, 2021g). Decisions on student support and services are based upon the student's disability and evaluation information. There are 13 categorial disability areas for students to be referred to for special education services (MDE, 2021b).

For the purpose of this thesis, the writer will look at the impacts of social and emotional learning interventions upon the five disability categories; autism spectrum disorders (ASD), emotional behavioral disorders (EBD), developmental cognitive disorders (DCD), other health disabilities (OHD), and specific learning disorders (SLD). In the disability category of OHD, the writer will specifically address attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD).

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Children with ASD present a variety of deficits that are a direct relation to the disorder of the brain's development (Cheng et al., 2018). Two core components related to the disorder of the brain include difficulty in social interaction, communication development, and repetitive patterns

of behavior, thoughts, and interests (Cheng et al., 2018 and MDE, 2021a). Due to these deficiencies, students with ASD often have difficulty with social interactions, relationship building and the maintenance of friendships (Cheng et al., 2018).

Emotional Behavioral Disorders

Students who meet the evaluation criteria for EBD must demonstrate a behavioral consistency or pattern of the following emotional and behavioral responses: withdrawal or anxiety, depression, mood difficulties, or low feelings of self-worth, disordered thought processes with unusual behavior patterns and atypical communication styles or aggression, hyperactivity or impulsivity (MDE, 2021d). These patterns of behavior must negatively impact the development and performance of the student in regard to intrapersonal, academic, vocational, or social skills (MDE, 2021d).

Developmental Cognitive Disorders

Developmental cognitive disorders (DCD), also referred to by the writer as intellectual disabilities, are categorized by below-average intellectual functioning that is concurrent with deficits in their adaptive behavior (MDE, 2021c & Faria et al., 2019). DCD can range from mild to moderate to severe (MDE, 2021c). Significant limitations of a person with intellectual disabilities must exist in at least two of the following domains; communication, self-care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, use of community resources, self-direction, functional academic skills, work, leisure, and health and safety (Aakhus et al., 2004).

Other Health Disabilities

The other health disabilities category (OHD) contains a wide variety of chronic or acute health conditions (MDE, 2021e). A student evaluated under the disability category of OHD often has medications, treatments, therapies, and or repeated hospitalizations that can affect the student's ability to learn and function (MDE, 2021e). Due to the many conditions under which OHD can represent, the writer will specifically address attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) when discussing the impacts of social-emotional learning within OHD.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), a common childhood psychiatric disorder, stems from a genetic and neurochemical basis that includes symptoms of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity that can impact the student both academically and behaviorally (Singh & Squires, 2014). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2016, it was estimated that 9.4% of individuals (6.1 million) 7-17 years of age are diagnosed with ADHD (as cited in Danielson et al., 2018). Over half of the children diagnosed with ADHD have a secondary disorder in regard to their mental, emotional, or behavioral status (2018). Many of these same individuals receive treatment through medication and or behavioral treatment, thus qualifying them to the label of OHD. (Danielson et al., 2018 & MDE, 2021e).

Specific Learning Disorders

Students categorized with specific learning disabilities (SLD) have a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes utilized in understanding and spoken or written language (MDE, 2021f). Students with learning disabilities are identified through academic

deficits in their ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or calculate, making it the most common type of disability among the student population (MDE, 2021f; American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Willoughby & Evans, 2019). These students tend to perform significantly lower in both academics and socio-emotional functioning compared to typically developing peers (Gallegos, 2012).

Personal Connection to Social and Emotional Learning in Special Education

In this writer's experience as a special education paraprofessional and one year as a special education teacher, she had the privilege to work with students of varying abilities. All of the students had diverse, miscellaneous disabilities in various severities. Although, they all shared a common trait; a deficit in social and emotional skills. Students were challenged in perspective thinking, building relationships, conflict resolution, goal setting, and self-regulation.

As the writer describes her first year as a special education teacher, she was introduced to the social and emotional learning intervention, *Everyday Speech. Everyday Speech* is a comprehensive social and emotional learning intervention program that utilizes video modeling to teach socioemotional concepts to students both in special and general education classrooms (Everyday Speech, 2021).

When the writer taught *Everyday Speech*, the lessons, being applicable, resonated with the students outside of the classroom and into their everyday lives. The students demonstrated their knowledge by interacting with peers in the lunch line, repeating phrases that were used for emotional regulation, and copying role-playing exercises with other friends during passing times. The impact of this program was amazing for the writer to witness.

The writer has seen firsthand that social and emotional learning programs can impact many different disabilities. This researcher would like to learn more to assess this program's impact on the five most common disabilities in the classroom.

As the writer continues the research on the impact of social-emotional learning on the five specified disability categories, this thesis will also address the impact that social and emotional learning interventions have on special education enrollment.

Thesis Questions

Through the review of literature, the writer will aim to provide research discussing these two questions.

1) What impact does social and emotional learning have on the categorical disabilities of EBD, SLD, OHD, ASD, and DCD?

2) What impact does social and emotional learning have on special education enrollment?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

To locate the literature for this thesis, searches of Academic Search Premier, ERIC, Google Scholar, and SAGE journal publications were conducted for studies and publications from 2010-2021. The keywords the writer used included "social-emotional learning", "social-emotional learning and adolescents", "social-emotional learning and academics", "social-emotional learning and behavior", "social-emotional learning and special education", and "social-emotional learning and autism spectrum disorder", "social-emotional learning and emotional behavioral disorders", "social-emotional learning and other health disabilities", "social-emotional learning and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder", "social-emotional learning and specific learning disabilities", "social-emotional learning and developmental cognitive disabilities", "social-emotional learning and intellectual disabilities" and, "social emotional learning and special education enrollment".

Search parameters were expanded from the found journal publications and resources to review original studies and prior research findings on the topic of social-emotional learning interventions in regard to academic and behavioral impacts of each special education disability category. Information on the logistics of social and emotional learning was taken directly from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning website and information database. To understand the evaluation criteria for each categorized disability The Minnesota Department of Education, Special Education website was utilized.

Social and Emotional Learning

Social-Emotional Learning Intervention Impact on Special Education Students

Maria Sciuchetti, Ph.D. from The Department of Special Education at Ball State University (2017) described Special Education as a field brought to education to assist students with disabilities in receiving a free and appropriate education pertaining to instruction, transportation, support, and services. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) protects students in special education to receive an appropriate education but often fails to identify the "gradual disengagement" of students with disabilities from the general school culture due to social, academic, and behavioral concerns that their disability constitutes (Sciuchetti, 2017; Gonzalez & Cramer 2013).

Students with disabilities receiving special education services often have an individualized education plan (IEP) goal associated with social competencies (Probst, 2017). The use of direct instruction in social skills is widely practiced to meet these goals. This direct instruction is often taught through social and emotional learning interventions as there is an existing correlation between academic achievement and social and emotional competencies in their effect on the educational setting (Brackett & Rivers, 2013; Probst, 2017).

The following literature describes how social and emotional learning interventions impact students receiving special education support in each of the following disability categories: EBD, DCD, OHD; specifically addressing ADHD, ASD, and SLD. It is important to note that many, if not all of the studies listed, identified social and emotional programming that was not developed specifically for students in special education. Rather they are intended for the general education

social-emotional learning practices and programs (Faria et al., 2018). Individuals in the following studies displayed an impact from social and emotional learning practices in regard to their categorized disability.

Specific Social Emotional Learning Interventions Impact Per Disability Category

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Individuals with autism spectrum disorders often find success in social and emotional learning as common deficits associated with the disability are correlated with CASEL's five core competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making) (Probst, 2017; CASEL, 2016). These competencies directly follow common IEP goals associated with students under the disability category of autism spectrum disorders (Probst, 2017).

Probst (2017) conducted an informal research study analyzing a media-based social and emotional learning intervention that utilized social media literacy to engage in conversation related to CASEL's five core competencies with a female student receiving special education services under the disability category of autism spectrum disorders. Through engaged conversations with the individual, it was apparent that the competency of self-awareness was not effectively being communicated. With the continued conversation the individual showed promising growth in social and emotional competency and demonstration.

A similar study conducted by Lera-Miguel et al. (2016), investigated a Spanish-adapted version of the social-emotional learning program, *Stories of Everyday Life Test,* to show the impact in students with autism spectrum disorders in their theory of mind abilities. These

included recognizing and responding to other individuals' thoughts and feelings in social contexts that were unlike their own; common behaviors and cognitions that are often lacking in students with autism spectrum disorders (Lera-Miguel et al., 2016).

Although the purpose of the study was to see if Spanish-adapted social and emotional learning practices show similar improvements in theory of mind competencies just as the English versions do (Lera-Miguel et al., 2016). Lera-Miguel et al. (2016) displayed comparative data on individuals with autism spectrum disorders and their typically developing peers. The data initially indicated considerable differences between typically developing teens and the students with autism, which is understandable as research shows that the majority of students with autism show much lower theory of mind abilities (Lera-Miguel et al., 2016). However, data displaying the impact the social-emotional learning program had on typically developing students was similar to the impact on students with autism.

Murphy et al. (2018), organized an extended look at the use of *Superheroes Social Skills*, a program aimed at younger students with ASD. The aim of the research was to extend prior knowledge and insight on the connection of explicit lessons versus generalized teachings on three target social skills; body basics, participation, and expressing wants and needs (Murphy et al., 2018). Although students with ASD did see a positive impact and increase in the three target skills in both generalized and explicit settings, the findings from this research did not match up with previous findings (2018).

Cheng et al. (2018) conducted a study looking at an individual computerized social-emotional learning program, *3D Complex Facial Expression Recognition* system

(3DCFER), and its impact on students with ASD and their ability to read emotions. When beginning the program, the control group; typically developing individuals, and the test group; students with ASD revealed similar standings on the pre-test. Although after the mobile intervention, students with ASD showed significantly higher post-test scores in comparison to their typically developing peers (Cheng et al., 2018).

Emotional Behavioral Disorders

Elias and Haynes (2008) and Stoiber (2011) described that students who experience social-emotional deficits are more likely to have an increased number of disciplinary infractions and or be referred for special education services and supports under the disability category of emotional behavior disorders because of these problematic behaviors (as cited in Daunic et al., 2021). This may be because internalized disorders are less apparent than conduct and disruptive behaviors. These behaviors are often associated with emotional behavior disorders, where skills such as engagement, self-control, interpersonal skills, and leadership are inadequate compared to typically developing students (Kimber et al., 2008; Daunic e al., 2021; Casciano et al., 2019). Although, Sciuchetti (2017) described contributing components to this increase could be school-based factors such as climate, structure, expectations, and referral practices.

Bierman and Sanders (2021) discussed the implication of social and emotional interventions in students at-risk for emotional and behavioral disorders. That oftentimes students who are already enrolled or at high risk for behavioral disorders find it challenging to meet the social and behavioral demands of school. Students tend to demonstrate poor interpersonal relationships, social competence, and self-regulation skills (Bierman & Sanders, 2021).

McCormick et al. (2019) had similar findings in that early behavioral issues are associated with a heightened risk for special education services or grade retention.

Zeng et al. (2016) conducted a five-week study to evaluate the effectiveness of a typical summer learning program, summer school, integrated with social and emotional learning interventions and students described to have emotional behavioral disorders. The test and control groups received extensive literacy instruction, but the test group utilized social and emotional enrichment lessons, *Triple Play,* during study time. *Triple Play* was designed to improve socioemotional skills through mind, body, and soul (Zeng et al., 2016; Boys and Girls Club of America, 2009). *Triple Play* explicitly teaches skills associated with self-regulation, appropriate peer interactions, emotion regulation, and conflict resolution (Zeng et al., 2016; Boys and Girls Club of America, 2009).

Results from the experiment indicated an insignificant increase in literacy development but a significant improvement in social-emotional behaviors (Zeng et al., 2016). The test group, receiving social and emotional support, saw an increase in scores for emotional symptoms and peer problem constructs. The control group exhibited a decrease in scores (Zeng et al., 2016). In the end, students provided feedback of overall satisfaction with the program and indicated that they would be motivated to enroll again.

Discussion from Zeng et al. (2016) specified how motivation may have increased the engagement of students compared to prior research findings. The fun environment and numerous inexplicit social and emotional learning opportunities alleviate negative emotions attributed to the increase of prosocial behaviors.

Cooper et al. (2009) and The World Health Organization (2004) described that as many as 20% of children enter school exhibiting aggressive, non-compliant, and disruptive behaviors that impact their ability to fully benefit from early educational experiences (as cited in Daunic et al., 2021). Jansen and Keifer (2020) believed that educators who recognize adolescence as a crucial time to invest in students educationally through research-based, practical, and developmentally appropriate interventions, such as social and emotional learning practices, can allow students to thrive. The following studies have developed conclusions in school-age children of the impact of social and emotional interventions on an individual and whole-class level in agreement with student behaviors.

Daunic et al. (2021) compared students in kindergarten and first grade that were predetermined to be at-risk for entering special education under the disability category of Emotional Behavior Disorders (EBD). The test group was given social-emotional intervention support while the control group continued with regularly scheduled lessons, specifically those not centered around socioemotional skills.

Researchers looked into the differences in students' general knowledge of social-emotional learning and their ability to self-regulate (Daunic et al., 2021). They found significant variation between the students receiving social and emotional learning support and those who were not. Students receiving social and emotional learning interventions both in small group and whole class lessons were reported to show an increase in knowledge of self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making (Daunic et al., 2021).

The impact of the social and emotional interventions did not show bias to behavior type or whether or not students internalized or externalized these key concepts (Daunic et al., 2021). These outcomes described that through social and emotional learning interventions, at-risk behaviors were being prevented and students had a significantly lower risk for emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Portnow et al. (2018) presented a study that asked multiple questions in relation to social and emotional supports and their impact on aggressive behaviors but in third, fourth, and fifth-grade students. They examined the impact on both the individual and whole class level of support in regard to their perceived level of hostility of the classroom and the number of teacher and student conduct write-ups (Portnow et al., 2018). Results from this quantitative study revealed that there was a significant decrease in aggressive behaviors, student and teacher conduct reports, and descriptions of a hostile classroom environment when social-emotional supports were given.

Classroom-wide decrease in aggressive behaviors, student and teacher conduct reports, and description of a hostile learning environment were amplified when the social-emotional supports were given to the whole class rather than just the individual (Portnow et al., 2018). The initial level of reported aggression or conduct had no impact on the ability to be positively impacted by social-emotional support.

In a qualitative research study conducted by Szlyk (2018), the author examined the impact on solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT), a social and emotional intervention that equips teachers, staff, and students with communication tools, empathy and perspective practices, goal

setting, and constructive methods in developing healthy adult to student and peer to peer relationships. This study was in an urban alternative learning high school setting, whose student population was considered at-risk or those who have been referred to the learning center for course failure, excessive absences, involvement in the juvenile justice system, those needing an individualized learning approach due to emotional and mental illness, or those with a learning disability. Every teacher in the school had extensive training in SFBT and the whole school followed a philosophy that put students' strengths first (Szlyk, 2018).

After students had received instruction following SFBT methods, teachers reported positive impacts in social responsibility, student-teacher interactions, school environment, and student independence (Szlyk, 2018). This did not decrease the number of student incidences, but teachers described that when a crisis arose, it served as an opportunity for growth (Szlyk, 2018). Students could learn to assess their own actions, ask for support appropriately, and develop solutions for emotions and stressors from the situations. Szlyk (2018) noted that not only were the students impacted by this approach, but teachers had developed a new appreciation and sensitivity to the issues. Teachers began to put the students' needs and strengths first, increase empathy, and help on an emotional level (Szlyk, 2018). Thus, this approach created fewer behavior-type referrals.

Developmental Cognitive Disabilities

The American Association for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) defines an intellectual disability, otherwise known as a developmental cognitive disability through the intellectual disability diagnostic criteria, as a limitation of intellectual and adaptive

functioning (AAIDD, 2013). Individuals with intellectual disabilities develop socioemotional regulation skills at a slower pace and exhibit less social behavior (Baurain & Nader-Grosbois, 2013). The inability for self and emotional regulation can lead to heightened emotions and challenging behaviors (Faria et al., 2018). Social and emotional learning is considered the missing piece in the education of students with developmental cognitive disorders as it teaches competencies that would otherwise be lacking (Faria et al., 2018).

Faria et al. (2018) conducted a study evaluating whether the implementation of the social and emotional learning program "Smile, Cry, Scream and Blush" had positive impacts on the promotion of socioemotional competencies in children with intellectual disabilities. The results indicated that students with intellectual disabilities showed improvement in the resolution of socioemotional problems and an increase in the recognition and understanding of emotions. They were immediately able to identify their own emotions, both of comfort and discomfort, and demonstrate a stronger ability to problem solve and be in control of themselves.

Other Health Disabilities (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

Students with ADHD demonstrate a profound impairment in social functioning (Singh & Squires, 2014). They do not lack the desire for social interaction, as you may see in other disorders such as students with autism, but rather, they have an underdeveloped sense to carry out social exchanges. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework specifically matches with the necessary competencies that are needed for students with ADHD; self-awareness, efficacy, confidence, social awareness in impulse control,

stress management, goal setting, motivation, and relationship building (CASEL, 2021 and Singh & Squires, 2014).

In a review by Storebø et al. (2019), students with ADHD were given social skills training that was focused on behavioral and cognitive-behavioral efforts to improve their social-emotional competence. This included teaching the individuals appropriate social cues such as waiting their turn, shifting topics in a conversation, emotion recognition, and other common social rules and expectations.

At the conclusion of the review, it was found that there was little difference between individuals without ADHD and those with ADHD in the effect of direct social-emotional interventions (Storebø et al., 2019). Social skills, emotional competence, and behavior all had similar findings between the test and control groups. At the end of the study, teachers noted fewer ADHD symptoms at the end of the intervention.

Specific Learning Disabilities

Students with specific learning disabilities are given special education support and services emphasized in reading, writing, and or math, and little attention is given to socioemotional aspects (Cavioni et al., 2017). Cavioni et al. (2017) highlighted that outside of the classroom, students with learning disabilities may feel characterizations such as isolation and social rejection. They tend to be chosen less by peers and have few opportunities to interact and build relationships due to their disability (Cavioni et al., 2017). On the flip side, they may find it easier to join social groups than those with higher behavior problems and lower social skill abilities. Students with learning disabilities tend to engage in more risk behaviors such as

substance and alcohol abuse, unprotected sexual activity, delinquency, and gambling. In the classroom, students with learning disabilities are often isolated because of their academic deficiencies (Cavioni et al., 2017). When receiving educational services outside of the classroom, they have fewer opportunities to experience relationship building and the time to develop self-efficacy and self-regulation skills (Cavioni et al., 2017).

McCormick et al. (2019) presented a study that looked at the impacts of the *INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament program* (INSIGHTS) on kindergarten and first-grade students' academic success in reading and math. This program focused on teachers and students interpreting students or their own behaviors to specific environments and addressing appropriate responses (McCormick et al., 2019). Teachers used strategies and scaffolding to support self-regulation and problem-solving.

Students participating in INSIGHTS were compared to a control group who received the supplementary reading lessons in place of the social and emotional learning interventions (McCormick et al., 2019). Academic success was measured by whether or not a student was retained from kindergarten through fifth grade after receiving the interventions in either kindergarten or first grade.

In comparison to the control group, those receiving supplemental reading interventions, INSIGHTS demonstrated a null impact in regard to the focus group (McCormick et al., 2019). McCormick et al. (2019) described that this null recording could be an indication that social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions such as INSIGHTS are not directly tied to academic achievement, but rather improving social and emotional skills that indirectly impact

academic success. Students who are at-risk for grade retention would benefit from direct academic support beyond social and emotional programming (2019).

However, the social and emotional growth in these students, who would otherwise be at risk for special education enrollment to receive services related to those with learning disabilities, displays a positive impact on socio-emotional skills (McCormick et al., 2019). Social and emotional learning interventions allow students to build relationships and equip students with skills and language they will use throughout their academic careers and into adulthood (Heyward et al., 2020).

Willoughby and Evans (2019) described that students with learning disabilities not only have weaker academic skills compared to typically developing peers but also rank themselves lower than the general population in intellectual self-confidence. They conducted a study looking at how the SEL practices of building self-confidence, self-compassion, and self-regulated learning impacted the students' individual perspective on themselves (Willoughby & Evans, 2019). This was completed through self-regulated learning, the process in which the individual leads the learning, motivation, and seeks resources.

Given the lower academic self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-regulation, students with learning disabilities may be vulnerable to lowered motivation (Willoughby & Evans, 2019). Poor motivation can lead to task avoidance and abandonment, procrastination, and fear of failure. Willoughby and Evans (2019) pointed out that low motivation is not the case in all students with SLD.

The conclusion of their study found that when students with learning disabilities increase their self-motivation, self-confidence, self-compassion, and self-regulation, their academic performance increases (Willoughby & Evans, 2019). To enhance these self-acceptance qualities, parents, special educators, and instructors should consider interventions (such as social and emotional learning practices) that allow students to not only understand their learning profile but also what makes them unique and valued. When student self-acceptance, compassion, and regulation are increased and improved, in turn, a student's capacity for learning and retention will increase.

Other Common Themes

When analyzing the literature describing the impact of social and emotional intervention programs and support for the five stated disability categories, another common theme arose; the impact of social and emotional learning interventions on the initial enrollment into special education. The writer will now review literature describing this theme.

Special Education Enrollment

In the McCormick et al. study (2019) researchers examined the effects of students receiving social and emotional learning interventions through the program *INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament* (INSIGHTS) in kindergarten and first-grade students and how it impacted their enrollment or not into special education by the fifth grade. Findings revealed that after continued social and emotional learning support, students were five percentage points less likely to receive special education services (McCormick et al., 2019).

Students who were considered to have a higher risk of receiving special education services found that after receiving instruction from the INSIGHTS program, the likelihood of needing special education services was reduced by six percentage points (McCormick et al., 2019). Although these numbers seem relatively small, Taylor et al. (2017) described that even the smallest improvement, or in this case reduction of enrollment into special education, emphasized the trajectory that social and emotional learning interventions are having on our students.

In a similar study from Bradshaw et al. (2009), it was found that assigning the "Good Behavior Game" reduced special education placement by 6 percentage points which was comparable to the impact that INSIGHTS had in the previously addressed study (McCormick et al., 2019).

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Summary of Literature

Social and emotional learning interventions are a crucial component of education. Through my personal experiences, I can attest to the multitude of benefits social and emotional learning programs can provide students of various abilities. Through topics of emotional regulation, self-control, goal setting and motivation, relationship building, and appropriate decision making allows students to learn lifelong skills to help develop their whole self.

The research covered in this literature review was aimed to provide information on if or how social and emotional learning practices can impact students in special education, specifically those categorized as EBD, ASD, OHD, DCD, and SLD. The research also reviewed how social and emotional learning practices impact special education enrollment. The research described that social and emotional learning practices can impact specific disabilities greater than others, but all students, regardless of ability, can benefit from social and emotional learning interventions.

In the disability category of EBD, students who qualify to receive special education services must demonstrate a consistency of withdrawal, anxiety, depression, mood regulation, disordered thought processes, ineffective communication processes, aggression, hyperactivity or impulsivity (MDE, 2021d). The characteristics of this disability can be directly correlated to CASEL's five competencies; self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2021).

When students with EBD participated in the programs *Triple Play* and INSIGHTS, both of which include practices in socioemotional skills, these students saw a positive impact at the end of their programming (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, 2009; Zeng et al., 2016, Daunic et al., 2021). These programs were taught to students in non-traditional learning environments but were taught directly to the students. It is unclear if this environment had a direct correlation to the positive impact from the programs.

Similar findings in the Portnow et al. (2018) and Szlyk (2018) studies looked at indirect social and emotional learning interventions in students. They found that when social and emotional learning interventions were indirectly woven into the school day, students still showed a decrease in at-risk behaviors often associated with EBD (Portnow et al., 2018; Szlyk, 2018). These everyday practices included goal setting, role-playing conflict resolution scenarios, and how to talk through self and emotion regulation.

In the disability category of SLD, for students to qualify for special education supports and services they need to demonstrate a deficit in their ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or calculate (MDE, 2021f; American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Willoughby & Evans, 2019). Because of these deficits, students with SLD are oftentimes more vulnerable to at-risk behaviors due to low self-perception (Willoughby & Evans, 2019; Cavioni et al., 2017).

The research displaying the impact of social and emotional interventions on students with SLD has varying results. McCormick et al. (2019) found zero impact in their students with SLD utilizing the INSIGHTS program. Researchers described that this could be because INSIGHTS does not have a direct correlation to the learning disability but, rather, the social-emotional

competencies that may be present in a different disability category, such as EBD (McCormick et al., 2019). Whereas, Willoughby and Evans (2019) found that social and emotional learning interventions can impact motivation in students with SLD.

For students with ASD, common traits of the disability include deficiencies in social situations or emotional regulation (Probst, 2017; CASEL, 2016; MDE, 2021a). Just as students with EBD, these deficiencies align with CASEL's five competencies of social and emotional learning (MDE, 2021d; CASEL, 2021).

Research from Murphy et al. (2018), Cheng et al. (2018), Probst (2017), and Lera-Miguel et al. (2016) all demonstrated a variety of social and emotional practices with students with ASD. When students with ASD are given direct group lessons on socioemotional topics, a positive or comparable impact is shown in comparison to their typically developing peers (Murphy et al., 2018; Lera-Miguel et al., 2016). Larger impacts are shown when students are given individual direct lessons, specifically found utilizing electronic or mobilized learning tools (Cheng et al., 2018; Probst, 2017).

Research suggests that it is unclear whether students with ADHD were impacted by social and emotional learning. This is because data cannot determine if the social and emotional intervention improved socio-emotional competencies or rather masked initial symptoms of ADHD (CASEL, 2021; Singh & Squires, 2014; Storebø, 2019).

Students under the disability category of DCD, are categorized for a limitation in their intellectual and adaptive functioning, including social behavior (AAIDD, 2021; Baurain & Nader-Grosbois, 2021). Although social and emotional learning interventions are described as

the missing piece in education to students with DCD, little research is actually found on this specific disability category. When direct instruction was taught to students with DCD on socio-emotional topics, a positive impact, indicating a stronger ability to regulate and identify emotions, was present (Faria et al., 2018).

In all five of the researched disability categories, students demonstrated an impact from social and emotional learning interventions. Of the five categories present in this thesis, EBD and ASD had the most studies and significant impact. It is unclear if it is due to the high social and emotional needs these disabilities present.

In the research by McCormick et al. (2019) and Bradshaw et al. (2009) utilizing social and emotional programs can limit a student's enrollment into special education. Under the disability category of OHD, students with ADHD who partake in social and emotional learning interventions showed fewer symptoms related to their disability (Storebø et al., 2019). This could, in turn, decrease a student's enrollment into special education.

Limitations of the Research

Each research study has its own set of limitations. These included limits such as teacher participation (Daunic et al., 2019), teacher and student bias in self-grading social and emotional learning programs (Taylor et al., 2017), and the initial class environment across test groups and student perception of the intervention (Portnow et al., 2018). However, three main similarities were expressed between studies.

The first limitation of the research included the fidelity of how the social and emotional learning intervention was taught or expressed to the students. Casciano et al. (2019) explained

that it is unrealistic to expect educators to follow social and emotional learning practices to their full extent. These interventions can take hours of training, not to mention the cost for school districts to send multiple educators to training (Casciano, 2019). McCormick et al. (2019) and Daunic et al. (2021) expressed similar concerns not just with the implementation of the program, but how the intervention was taught across groups. Duplication of interventions and program implementation training was a limitation of the research.

A second limitation to the research included that many of the social and emotional learning programs or interventions were not specifically designed for special education students. Faria et al. (2019) explained that the *Smile Cry Scream* program was not originally intended for students with intellectual disabilities. This program was modified for use in special education settings (Faria et al., 2019). This is a common occurrence in many other studies.

A third limitation to the research included teacher bias in its effect on the environment. This included how the teacher perceived the intervention (Daunic et al., 2021) as well as how the teacher impacted the learning environment (Jansen & Keifer, 2020). Jansen and Keifer (2020) described how a program's success or student impact has a direct correlation to the classroom environment and the organizational features of this environment. These features are developed from teachers (Jansen & Keifer, 2020). Portnow et al. (2018) agreed with these limitations and expanded the thinking to specify that the amount of praise and emotional support given by the program administrator impacts the overall class and individual outcome.

Implications for Future Research

The limitations of the research helped to introduce implications that should be taken for further research on the topic of social and emotional learning in special education. Of the many implications addressed in the studies, two implications stood at the forefront.

The first implication that should be looked at further would be the effect that the student environment has on the impact of the social and emotional learning program. Bierman and Sanders (2021) described that oftentimes social and emotional learning practices are implemented in a Tier 2 setting; a small group of individuals needing extra support. This setting may be more powerful than Tier 1, general education, programming and should be considered when analyzing data surrounding the impact of the interventions (Bierman & Sanders, 2021).

A second area for further research would be expanding the insight on the group of special education students receiving an intervention. McCormick et al. (2019) expressed that underlying domains such as economic status would provide students with a completely different outcome. Research points that low-income students may have a completely different social and emotional learning experience compared to those of middle to high incomes (McCormick et al., 2019). Whereas Lera-Miguel et al. (2016) described that something as simple as the functional ability of the student, even with similar disabilities could impact the socioemotional outcome. We have read in this thesis through research that special education students have a wide range of ability and functional skills. Addressing a test group with similar functions and abilities can be difficult and needs expanded research for clear data.

Conclusion

Social and emotional learning is impactful for all students, especially those in special education. These programs can help students socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and academically. Special education students benefit from direct instruction, as it fills the missing piece in their personalized education.

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