

Calming Spaces in Preschool Settings

Marlo R. Hornsby

Shawnee State University

7006

C. Raber

8.8.2025

Audience

The audience identified for the presentation is preschool educators in public schools, childcare centers and Head Start. Teachers who work with young children in preschool classrooms are tasked with many challenges throughout the school day. Teachers are responsible not only for fostering students' social-emotional growth but also for ensuring their academic achievement. There has been growing recognition of the importance of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and the need to foster these skills in our earliest learners. The importance of SEL and the use of strategies have pointed to greater need to provide teachers with opportunities to increase their SEL skillset as well as continued professional learning opportunities (Ferreira, Reis-Jorge & Batalha, 2021).

Early childhood educators must balance these tasks while addressing the diverse needs of each child in their care. Early education programs have increasingly incorporated calming corners (sometimes referred to as "safe spaces", "calm-down areas" and "relaxation stations") as a strategy to help young children manage emotional, regulation and behavioral challenges (Maich, et.al., 2019). These areas are meant to provide an accessible location for students to practice self-regulatory skills, when they are experiencing emotions i.e frustrated, sad or scared. (Jiang & Jones 2016). These skills form the foundation for children's ability to interact positively with peers, manage emotions, and engage in learning activities. Children with strong social-emotional skills are more likely to succeed academically, build positive relationships, and handle life's challenges.

While calming areas serve as a valuable tool for supporting social-emotional development, their effectiveness must be reinforced through teaching practices daily embedded into daily preschool routines. As the occupation of children, play (Kuhaneck, et. al. 2024) is embedded throughout preschool curriculum. Strategies during play such as modeling, prompting, and reinforcing appropriate social behaviors can effectively support children's development of social skills (Case-Smith, 2013).

Learning Objectives

1. Participants will identify two benefits of calming space.
2. Participants will be able to list three tools to include in a calming space.

The provided learning objectives were specifically designed to equip preschool educators with a deeper understanding of the purpose and effective implementation of calming areas within classroom settings. This will assist preschool educators in providing opportunities to increase regulatory capacity within children.

Occupational Based Materials

The instruction was presented in a visual-audio format for twenty to thirty minutes using a mixed method media approach of videos, self-reflection of calming space items that can be used in their classrooms. Occupation based frameworks of Person Environment and Occupation (PEO) could be incorporated into social emotional learning in preschool classrooms that align with popular social emotional learning (SEL) frameworks of The Pyramid Model and Conscious Discipline. The PEO Model emphasizes the dynamic fit between the person, their environment, and the activities they engage in to support meaningful participation ((Law et al., 1996). The Pyramid Model provides a tiered framework of universal, targeted, and individualized support to promote social-emotional development in young children(Challenging Behavior, n.d.) Conscious Discipline offers practical strategies for building emotional regulation, safety, and connection within the classroom environment to support self- and co-regulation (Conscious Discipline, Inc., n.d.).

Methods

The audio-visual presentation was created with the adult learner of the preschool staff in mind. The video provides a real-life example of a preschool student with a preschool teacher and the use of calming spaces within preschool settings. The video of *“How to Use a Calming Space”* provided an example of how a preschool teacher guides a student into the calming space and the importance of

integrating the language of the nervous system which is sensation into the calming space. This will assist the child in their interoception of knowing how the body feels prior to becoming dysregulated. This has to be a guided practice that the teacher instructs the student on body systems and sensations before and after a dysregulated moment. This is vital to create opportunities that are embedded into a child's school day to practice self-regulatory capacities first through co-regulation, self-regulation, self-awareness that builds resiliency (Desautels 2016).

Outcome Measures

The outcome measures that were used within the presentation consisted of Post-Session Self-Assessment Survey for Educators were as follows:

- Quiz with multiple choice and true/false questions were provided to assess confidence and knowledge and implementation of calming areas.
- Survey given with one open-ended questions for reflection and two questions using a Likert scale to determine confidence of using the calming space.
- Website links were created with a visual handout for choice on creating and implementing calming spaces within classrooms.
- Worksheets were created and given to the participants to provide visuals for preschool classrooms.

Purpose

The purpose of the post session evaluation was to determine the educators' understanding and readiness to implement calming areas after the session.

Universal Design for Learning Alignment

The universal design for learning for the presentation consisted of aligning multiple learning methods to meet the needs of all learners. The following components were integrated into the presentation

- Reading levels of the printed handouts were evaluated using The Fleschman-Kincaid Reading level for printables provided to participants and were on a 1st to 3rd grade level.
- Printables that were created were diverse emotional expressions and skin tone inclusive visuals.
- Sensory items were curated with low-tech and high-tech options.

During this presentation, I reflected on how to embed transcultural approaches into professional development sessions. When creating modalities for this presentation, I was conscious of how I was delivering information (language preferences, use gender neutral pronouns, and research cultural perspectives) so it's better received and ensure that I am using culturally diverse representations in my examples and pictures on my slide decks. During the presentation I utilized various formats for learners to engage with the content, such as embedding real-life examples within the slide deck to demonstrate Universal Design principles in action (Bastable, et.al 2020). These examples helped illustrate how UDL strategies can be practically applied, making the content more relatable and accessible for diverse audiences (CDC, 2021).

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