Part 2

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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. In recent years there has been a growing emphasis on social-emotional learning (SEL) and the importance of fostering these skills with our earliest learners. The increasing recognition of skills derived from SEL practices have highlighted the need to provide teachers with opportunities to expand their SEL skillset as well as continued professional development. (Ferreira, Reis-Jorge & Batalha, 2021). Additionally, one must also consider the possible effects that COVID-19 had on our youngest learners, which may have contributed to delays in the development of social emotional skills and behavior. (Sprayberry, 2024). Research indicates that many preschool teachers report feeling underprepared to address the complex emotional and behavioral needs of their students. Because of this, teachers often experience burnout or frustration when lacking effective tools or strategies to support self-regulation in the classroom.

Healthy People 2030 and The World Health Organization stress the importance of early childhood mental health, and the importance of social emotional development are critical to lifelong success, school readiness and lifelong success.

*Healthy People 2030-* states that " the health and well-being of all people and

communities is essential to a thriving, equitable society, and promoting health and well-

being and preventing disease are linked effort that encompass physical, mental, and social

health dimensions." (Healthy People, 2030, Framework).

The contextual factors that and the outcome measures that I aim to address with my program is social-emotional development and sensor integration strategies for preschool children. Social emotional skill development in early childhood settings is not only a strong predictor of future academic success but the overall skill development, it influences a wide range of social skills including emotional resilience, interpersonal relationships, self-regulation, and long-term mental health outcomes. For example, children are at risk for children reported to have better social skills (e.g., sharing, cooperating, helping other children) in kindergarten are more likely to graduate from high school on time, are more likely to get a college degree and have a full-time job and be less likely to be arrested or engage in substance abuse (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).

The need for social emotional learning opportunities in preschool classroom is imperative to decrease challenging behaviors and support foundational skill development opportunities. A key contextual factor contributing nationally is the potential demise of the Department of Education and recent cuts in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. These changes could significantly impact West Virginia by limiting access to essential programs. These early intervention supports benefit children need potentially limiting access to crucial early intervention supports and federally funded programs such as HeadStart and other preschool services. (www.whitehouse.gov).

For my program development, I plan to incorporate strategies from The Pyramid Model, The Person, Occupation and Environment (PEO) model and sensory integrative theories to formulate three group outcomes that will assist preschool children with social emotional learning strategies. The Pyramid Model is based on underlying principles of positive behavioral support that have been altered in a way that is developmentally appropriate for early childhood practices (Rothstein & Rivard 2023). The framework is divided into three tiers. In the first tier of the program, universal practices are taught to educators to promote all children’s social and emotional development in a highly supportive classroom setting. Nurturing relationships are an integral part of tier one practices. The second tier develops interventions for children at risk of social-emotional delays. The third tier of the model is developing individualized interventions for children who are experiencing severe social or emotional skill deficits that include challenging behavior (Hemmeter ,et.al, 2022). The PEO model is where a person’s occupational performance is assessed and shaped by the interaction between person, environment, and occupation that overlap with activities of daily living. In allows the user of the model to apricate a lifespan perspective and so all three domains and occupational performance would change over life. Law et.al. (1996). A Sensory Integration model could be particularly useful in preschool classrooms by guiding interventions and strategies aimed at helping children decrease challenging behavior and improve self-regulation. By addressing under or over responsiveness to sensory input, can help create more inclusive and responsive learning environment for children. Hinojosa, J., Kramer, P., & Royeen, C. B. (2017).

The table below outlines three group outcomes, along with corresponding activities, materials, and goals. These outcomes can be evaluated using a variety of data methods to address deficits in SEL in preschool classrooms. Future assessments of the program may include measures such as children’s ability to identify emotions, improved use of calming strategies, and enhanced social behaviors like problem-solving, cooperative play, and turn-taking.

Table 1

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| Outcomes | Activity | Supplies | Goal |
| 1. Students will learn to identify their emotions | Preschool children will use puppets and books to learn about emotions | * Puppets * Books (examples: *Bear feels Scared*, *Happy Hippo Angry Duck, What if I know my feelings*   Adaptations   * Books on u tube, braille or large print * Puppets with different textures * Send books and activities home to parents of children who need extra assistance in this skill. | Children will learn self-regulation strategies and techniques to decrease maladaptive strategies when dealing with difficult emotions |
|  | Preschool students will draw a picture of when they feel regulated and then when they feel dysregulated | * Crayons * Markers * Paint * Paper * Visual representations of emotions   Adaptations:   * Larger markers or crayons * Pictures of students in your classroom or daycare | Children will learn self-regulation strategies and techniques to decrease maladaptive strategies when dealing with difficult emotions |
| 1. The activity will focus on how to assist preschoolers in exploring sensory tools and movement-based regulation techniques | Preschool students will explore sensory play stations and describe given a word bank how each activity makes them feel. | * Sensory bins examples: rice and beans, water table, slime, playdough * Heavy work activities (proprioceptive)cards * Visual tools (lights, * Oral motor tools (blowing tubes, bubbles, deep breathing exercises |  |
|  | Preschool students will create a personalized calm down kit. | * Breathing cards * Blowing tubes * Heavy work examples (Cards) * A soft item (blanket, small toy) |  |
| 1. Teach preschoolers how to apply self-regulation techniques in preschool settings. | Students will be given opportunities during preschool routines to practice self-regulatory techniques | * Pre-planned social opportunities within the classroom setting to practice such as line leaders, * Problem solve individually with students who are experiencing difficulty with skill to determine skill deficit   Adaptations   * Scripted stories for children who require more support * Provide graded levels of support * Provide visual examples |  |

The legislative issue of this policy analysis in the insufficient federal and state level policy supporting of SEL in early childhood education, particularly related to funding for trainings for staff and access to services. While there is obviously a need from society and a developmental need for SEL practices in preschool settings, current legislation does not have policies and budget line items in place to fund this integral part of development. The lack of mandated SEL programming creates a gap between best practices and what is needed for preschool classrooms, especially in rural areas and communities in West Virginia.

The Every Student Success Act (ESSA) permits but does not require the inclusion of SEL goals or teacher training in state education plans. ESSA includes provisions around school climate and student support but offers little discretion on how to implement these components (www.ed.gov). The Head Start Program Performance Standards provides guidance on positive behavioral supports and emotional development but does not include specific frameworks or mandate training for SEL education (www.headstart.gov).

The dismantling of the Federal Department of Education and the dissolution of diversity, equity and inclusion at the federal level could have monumental effects to early intervention services, professional development around SEL, and classroom supports (Vala, 2025). This is especially concerning in WV as they are one of the second most federally funded state in the nation (Harris, 2025). Programs such as Early Intervention, and HeadStart rely heavily on federal grants. Without, legislative support effort these services may cease to exist. (Vala, 2025).

At the state level, advocacy can include lobbying delegates and senators to adopt policies that protect preschool services by pushing for state funding for preschool programs and professional development opportunities for teachers. Advocacy efforts could be expanded by partnering with early childhood programs within our state to unify. These agencies could include Early Intervention, The WV State OT organization, parent groups, WV Head Start, WV Council for Disabilities, The WV Behavioral, Mental Health Technical Assistance Center and The WV Department of Education. By standing together we can provide examples of successful outcomes with stakeholders and policymakers on the importance of SEL.

A program that could be utilized for advocacy is the PEO framework and aligned with evidence-based SEL practices, could be replicated in rural and underserved areas of WV. By integrating school staff and occupational therapy practitioners to provide framework practices and training on SEL practices. Occupational therapy practitioners can provide evidence-based practices that align with universal design principles that ensure accessibility to all. Sustainability of the program would be supported through state and federal funding for early childhood SEL initiatives, professional learning opportunities for teachers and partnerships with stakeholders. By embedding SEL outcomes into performance standards would further enhance the program and ensure long term success.

Barriers within the program include the current political climate, which makes it difficult to predict the outcomes of ongoing and proposed policy changes, particularly those that impact early childhood educational funding. With the dissolution of the Department of Education and DEI initiatives, advocacy groups must remain vigilant. It is essential that they continue to highlight the importance of SEL to ensure that policymakers recognize its critical role in supporting young children’s development, school readiness, and long-term well-being. This advocacy is especially important given the ongoing teacher shortages.

While barriers for SEL efforts remain, supports for programming with existing evidence-based frameworks such as the PEO and The Pyramid Model have long term research backgrounds. Training programs such as The WV Behavioral Mental Health Technical assistance center offer valuable supports through professional development and programs that are implementing SEL strategies. These combined supports provide a strong foundation even in the midst of funding and political challenges.

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