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**EFFECTS OF SIMULTANEOUSLY INTEGRATING SEL AND CULTURALLY
RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT
THEMSELVES AND THEIR ABILITIES**

by

Daniele J. Jacob

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

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Dedications

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband, John. Thank you for cheering me on and supporting me through this endeavor. Although I may not have always remembered to express it in the moment, I truly appreciate all of the sacrifices you made. Thank you for the countless dinners you made, making sure everything ran smoothly, and for taking such good care of the dogs while I shut myself away to work. I love you!

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my dad. You knew that I would become a teacher long before I ever did. As it turns out, parents really are always right. Even though you'll never get the chance to read this, I know you would be so proud of everything that I have accomplished. Thank you for teaching me the value of hard work and for all of the sacrifices that you (and mom) made for me. I love you and miss you.

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge my students for participating in my research. I am so grateful for your willingness to try new things and openly share your thoughts and feelings with me. I couldn't have asked for a more amazing group of kids. I know that each and every one of you will accomplish great things one day and I can't wait to hear all about it.

Abstract

Daniele J. Jacob

EFFECT OF SIMULTANEOUSLY INTEGRATING SEL AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THEMSELVES AND THEIR ABILITIES

2020-2021

Valarie Lee, Ed.D.

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand what happens to students' perceptions about themselves and their abilities when social and emotional learning (SEL) and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) are simultaneously integrated into an elementary gifted and talented classroom setting. Prior to this research, a structured approach to addressing students' social and emotional learning needs did not exist. Additionally, culturally responsive practices were not being used purposefully or with intent. This left the researcher to wonder how the lack of these practices may be negatively impacting students. How SEL and CRP can positively affect students' perceptions about themselves and their abilities guided this qualitative research study. A teacher's research journal, audio/video recordings, student surveys, and student response journals were used to collect and analyze data from each class session over the course of fourteen weeks. The data was analyzed through inductive coding and thematic narrative analysis to determine themes that emerged from the study. Triangulation of all data sources was used to establish validity. Based on the data analysis, it was determined that the use of social and emotional learning and culturally responsive pedagogy can have positive effects on students' perception about themselves and their abilities.

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Chapter I

Foundations of the Study

If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far. (Daniel Goleman)

“I don’t know what to write,” Zoey groaned under her breath after letting out an exasperated sigh. Ms. Hannan looked on with concern as Zoey put her head down on her desk. The students were completing the writing task for their weekly ELA test. “What’s the problem?” Ms. Hannan asks as she kneels down next to Zoey’s desk. With a glint of tears in her eyes, Zoey whispers, “I don’t know what to write for the essay.” Knowing that Zoey always gets 100% on her tests, Ms. Hannan couldn’t understand what Zoey was so upset about. “You’re stressing too much. You read the story and I know you understood it. Just answer the question,” she replied before moving on to help another student. Several minutes later, Ms. Hannan notices that Zoey still isn’t writing. In fact, it’s clear that Zoey can’t seem to concentrate to get her work done. She appears stressed out and on the verge of a breakdown. Knowing that Zoey isn’t the type of student to exhibit behavior problems, she once again approaches her desk. “Zoey, I don’t understand what’s going on. Can you tell me why you’re so upset? Ms. Hannan asks quietly. “I don’t know what to write. I’m going to get it wrong,” Zoey replies in a defeated tone.

“Don’t forget to turn in your video for your solar water heater projects this week” Ms. Merrick reminds her students at the end of class. As the students begin to log off of

their virtual class meeting, she asks one student in particular to stay behind and wait for all students to log off before speaking. “Noah, I noticed you haven’t turned in any of your assignments for weeks. What’s going on?” Ms. Merrick asks. With his head hung low, he murmurs, “I don’t know.” Knowing that there has to be more to it than that, she tries again. “I know that virtual learning is different and can be difficult. We’re all learning how to adjust to these circumstances. What do you think is giving you the most trouble?” she asks gently. After several minutes of silence, Noah looks up with tears in his eyes. “I don’t know where to start. I have work to do for every class. It’s too much. I’ll never catch up” he said.

In a virtual staff meeting a few days later, our school principal asked the teachers to share some of the challenges that they were currently facing during remote learning as a result of the global pandemic restrictions caused by the COVID-19 virus. Many teachers shared their frustrations with trying to teach effectively while teaching remote. They shared stories of students who hadn’t attended any of their virtual meetings, students that hadn’t turned in any work, difficulties contacting and working with parents to help their students, and so much more. Several teachers mentioned that student (and teacher) morale was low. Students were unmotivated, missing socialization, and so much more. Our school principal responded by saying, “I know that we have never experienced quite a challenge before, but you are all doing amazing work. I have a suggestion that I think may really help with some of your concerns.”

Story of the Question

During my seventh year of teaching, I began a new position as my district’s only teacher for our elementary gifted and talented program. My transition to being the gifted

and talented teacher was a welcome change after spending my first six years jumping between teaching basic skills, third grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade to meet the changing needs of my school each year. While I was excited about having a more stable position, I was even more excited about the freedom that I had to create a new curriculum to spark my students' curiosity and reach their untapped potentials.

During the first few months of my first year in this position, I started to notice certain characteristics in many of my students that I found surprising. Many of my students were afraid to take academic risks. They did not want to go outside their comfort zone and try new things. When asked to try things they'd never done before, many students would either freeze up and not know where to begin or would ask me to check their work multiple times to make sure that they were "correct" before turning it in. No matter how many times I told the kids that our class was a safe place where they got to try new things and did not have to worry about whether or not they got it right, many students were still so focused on trying to be perfect.

Another characteristic that I noticed is that some of my students only put limited effort into their work. Because they are considered academically advanced compared to their classroom peers, their limited effort still tended to exceed classroom expectations. Many of my students had not experienced many situations where they really had to try to learn something or put forth all of their effort and concentration to succeed at a task. Simply put, they were not used to hard work. What would happen to these kids when they finally faced a challenge?

With some of my students, I noticed that they had difficulty with their social skills. Some students were afraid to talk in class and did not volunteer their ideas in class

discussions. They also tended to exhibit signs of being nervous when working as part of a group. There were also students who did not mind volunteering at all. So much so, that they tended to dominate classroom discussions without giving their classmates opportunities to share their ideas. These students would often forget to raise their hand, would take control while working in small groups, and had difficulty accepting other students' ideas when working together.

During the spring of my first year as the gifted and talented education (G.A.T.E) teacher, the world found itself in the midst of a global pandemic. Our school closed down and students began to engage in virtual or remote learning. As this was something unprecedented for our students and staff, we were in no way experts in what was being asked of us. Some students did not show up to virtual class meetings and did not turn in any of their work. It was almost as if they had dropped off the face of the earth. Other students logged in to their virtual classes, but did not turn on their cameras or participate in class discussions. On the other hand, some students that were not excelling in a traditional classroom seemed to bloom with online learning. It was almost as if everything we thought we knew about teaching had been turned upside down. Attempting to reach parents often proved futile, because either they could not be reached or they were just as overwhelmed and at a loss for solutions as we were.

At the virtual staff meeting mentioned earlier in the chapter, the school principal announced that she had a suggestion that may be beneficial to both students and staff. She suggested that we attempt to implement elements of social and emotional learning (SEL) into our instruction. A limited number of staff members took part in SEL professional development the previous year, but most teachers did not have any training

in this area. The principal suggested that we reach out to teachers that took part in the training or do some research to learn more and find resources via the Internet.

After reflecting on my students' needs, it became clear that they needed a different type of support than what I was providing. I began to wonder, would implementing SEL help my students? Could I actually teach them to be more confident, more self-aware, and more socially aware? Could I help them develop their relationship skills? Armed with those questions, my journey with SEL began.

Purpose Statement

As I described earlier in the chapter, my principal recommended using a SEL approach to attempt to solve the problems many teachers are experiencing during remote learning. She suggested that implementing intentional SEL activities would not only help with the new challenges that presented themselves during the pandemic, but would also help students with SEL needs that existed prior to the pandemic that are likely to continue once students return to school. Since my students were demonstrating a need for social and emotional learning both prior to and during remote learning, I decided that implementing SEL with my gifted students may help me provide them with the tools necessary to work through their challenges.

Because I was not part of the professional development sessions to learn more about SEL, I recognized that my journey would begin with research. As I conducted research to learn more about the main principles of SEL along with the reported benefits, I also began to think about what it would look like in my classroom. Would I be using a curriculum or finding my own resources? How would I introduce the skills? What would I be expecting my students to do? How would being in a virtual classroom change the

needs, procedures, and outcomes of such an endeavor? How would I know if I had been successful in my mission?

My research will focus on SEL, but more specifically, what effects it has on my gifted students' perceptions about themselves and their abilities. According to Durlak et al. (2011), "current findings document that SEL programs yielded significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school" (p. 417). While SEL can provide a variety of benefits to students, its ability to improve my gifted student's perceptions about themselves and their abilities is what this research will look into further.

Because students come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, each student may have unique SEL needs. Social and emotional learning also has natural connections to culturally responsive pedagogy. According to Ginsberg & Wlodkowski (2019), "No learning is culturally neutral. Teachers and learners are individuals with complex identities, personal histories, and unique living contexts" (p. 58). This idea also pertains to SEL. It will be essential to consider the cultural backgrounds of the students engaging in SEL lessons and activities. A motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching developed by Wlodkowski & Ginsberg (2017) has four components which include establishing inclusion, developing a positive attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence (p. 58). Each of the above components of the framework connects directly to components of SEL.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

One could argue that now, more so than ever, students need help developing their social and emotional skills. SEL helps students learn to work through or overcome

challenges, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and manage their own learning. It also helps them develop the skills necessary to be able to recognize and articulate their feelings as well as develop and maintain positive relationships with others. Each of the aforementioned skills are in even greater demand due to the pandemic.

To effectively integrate SEL into the current gifted and talented curriculum, it is vital to also consider the cultural backgrounds of my students. As Lisa Delpit (2012) asserts, “If the curriculum we use to teach our children does not connect in positive ways to the culture young people bring to school, it is doomed to failure” (p. 20). In order to do so, I need to understand the cultural backgrounds of my students. Moll et al. (1992) describes funds of knowledge as the background knowledge and skills that students have acquired through their home, culture, community, and life experiences. A student’s funds of knowledge can include a wide variety of knowledge and skills such as navigating social constructs, ideas about family structure and/or roles, and religious beliefs and practices. It could also include trade skills, financial literacy, childcare practices or household management skills. Understanding my students’ unique funds of knowledge will allow me to design engaging and motivating SEL lessons to help develop the specific skills that they need to navigate not only virtual learning, but to help them succeed in all areas of life. As a result, the research question I plan to investigate is as follows: What is the effect of simultaneously integrating SEL and culturally responsive pedagogy on students’ perceptions about themselves and their abilities?

Organization of the Thesis

The following chapters outline the organization of the thesis. Chapter II focuses on the literature supporting culturally responsive classrooms, social and emotional

learning, and giftedness. Topics that are discussed in the chapter include Culturally Responsive Classroom Practices, Social and Emotional Learning, The Need for Social and Emotional Learning, The Effects of Social and Emotional Learning, Social and Emotional Learning Through the Culturally Responsive Classroom Lens, A Definition of Giftedness, and The Need for Social and Emotional Learning for Gifted Students. Chapter III discusses the context of this study, qualitative research, data collection methods, and sources of data. Chapter IV explains the data that was collected during the study as well as major findings. Chapter V concludes with a summary of the findings, conclusions drawn from the study, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Social and emotional learning, or SEL, is a topic of interest among many educators. School districts around the world are beginning to implement social and emotional learning curriculums in an attempt to reap the multitude of benefits that research has shown it has for students. Chapter II presents literature in the area of social and emotional learning, particularly as it pertains to gifted students. It also explores the connections that SEL has with culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000) and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). Section one gives a definition of culturally responsive pedagogy. The next section defines social and emotional learning, its necessity in the classroom, the effects of explicit instruction, and the connection between SEL and culturally responsive pedagogy. The third section provides a definition for giftedness and the connections between gifted students and SEL. The final section explores research pertaining to the effects of explicit SEL instruction.

Culturally Responsive Classroom

Culturally responsive classrooms make learning relevant to students by taking into consideration their cultural backgrounds. Kathryn Au (2009) defines culturally responsive teaching as “teaching that allows students to succeed academically by building on background knowledge and experiences gained in the home and community” and “aims at school success for students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, acknowledging that a disproportionate number of these students typically experiences failure in school” (p. 179). She further explains that culturally responsive teaching can be successful in all classrooms, not just classrooms where the majority of the students

belong to a particular ethnic group. To do this, Au explains that the goal is “to make sure the values reflected in the diverse worldview find a place in the classroom because patterns typically observed in the classroom tend to reflect primarily mainstream values” (p. 180). All students benefit from classroom instruction that includes both mainstream and diverse values.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992) is credited as the researcher and theorist that coined the phrases culturally relevant pedagogy or CRP. Ladson-Billings (1995) explains that over 15 years of research aimed to connect students’ cultures to the classroom resulted in a variety of new terms to describe findings such as “culturally appropriate” and “culturally congruent” to name a few (p. 160). Ladson-Billings states that “culturally relevant teachers utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning” (p. 161). She shares stories about educators successfully utilizing CRP in the classroom. One story described an educator that used rap music to bridge the gap between culture and school learning as students analyzed lyrics to music familiar to them to study figurative language. Another story shared is of a teacher that invited family members into the classroom. The teacher “created an ‘artist or craftsperson-in-residence’ program so that the students could both learn from each other’s parents and affirm cultural knowledge” (p. 161). Finally, a third teacher encouraged her students to use their home language while expressing themselves in their classroom both in speaking and in writing. Then, they would translate their work to conventional classroom English which eventually resulted in students using both languages more successfully.

Geneva Gay (2018), building on the work of Gay, Ladson-Billings, developed a framework for culturally responsive pedagogy. She states “although called by many

different names, including culturally relevant, sensitive, centered, congruent, reflective, mediated, contextualized, synchronized, and responsive, the ideas about why it is important to make classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students, and how this can be done, are virtually identical” (p.

36). Gay’s framework includes five actionable steps to engage in culturally responsive pedagogy. Those five essential steps include “developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction” (Gay, 2002 p. 106). It is Gay’s belief that these actions will help us recognize and attend to the abilities and intelligences of ethnically diverse students that tend to go untapped so that we may help improve those students’ academic achievements (Gay, 2018).

Social and Emotional Learning

In recent years, schools have recognized the need to attend to students’ social and emotional needs. This has led to many schools making a concerted effort to incorporate social and emotional learning, or SEL, in their curriculums. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, CASEL, has defined social and emotional learning as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, 2021).

According to CASEL, the goals of SEL can be broken down into five widely recognized domains or competencies that should be taught to help students develop their social intelligence. These competencies include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. While different researchers may ultimately choose to describe these areas in different ways, most have the same goal in mind. Each of the five competencies aim to help students develop specific areas of social intelligence. The goal of self-awareness is for students to develop the ability to recognize and understand their own thoughts, emotions, and values as well as how each of those factors influence their behavior. Self-management builds upon self-awareness to help students learn to manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Social-awareness focuses on developing the skills necessary to understand the perspectives of others and to act in manners demonstrating empathy, compassion, and perspective-taking. The relationship skills component focuses on developing skills such as effective listening and communication to form and maintain healthy and supportive relationships with others. Finally, responsible decision-making focuses on developing skills to think through possible outcomes and/or consequences of one's choices (CASEL, 2021).

Experienced teachers have long recognized a need to attend to the social and emotional needs of their students to help them succeed in the classroom. It is not uncommon to hear educators talk about a time when a student struggled in the classroom due to problems at home or traumatic experiences that had left their emotional and mental health in a vulnerable place. Durlak, et. al (2011) explain that “emotions can facilitate or impede children’s academic engagement, work ethic, commitment, and ultimate school

success” (p. 405). SEL can help students recognize those emotions and develop strategies to keep them from impeding their success.

Maurice Elias (1997) asserts that “when schools attend systematically to students’ social and emotional skills, the academic achievement of children increases, the incidence of problem behaviors decreases, and the quality of the relationships surrounding each child improves” (p. 1). Research, such as that of Elias, may be beneficial in helping school districts understand the potential benefits of implementing SEL in their schools.

The Effects of Explicit Social and Emotional Learning

Durlak, et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 214 school-based SEL programs with 270,034 students in kindergarten through high school. They found “SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance that reflected an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement” (p. 405). They were also able to determine that SEL programs can be effectively conducted by teachers themselves and that they can be effective at all grade levels.

Ashdown and Bernard (2011) investigated the effects of implementing an SEL program with explicit, direct instruction with preparatory and grade one students in a Catholic school in Melbourne, Australia. Students engaged in structured lessons from a formal curriculum three times a week for ten weeks. Lessons were delivered by the students’ classroom teachers and focused on developing key skills such as resilience, confidence, and persistence. They found that the program “had a statistically significant positive effect on levels of social-emotional competence and well-being for the

preparatory and grade 1 students” (p. 397). Other significant results included an increase in reading achievement and a decrease in various problem behaviors. Ashdown and Bernard also found that because teaching social and emotional skills is a complex task, the use of explicit instruction from a formal curriculum is beneficial to both teachers and students.

Social and Emotional Learning and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

O’Brien and Rodgers (2016) assert learning is cultural in nature because people learn best when “the ways in which they learn are mediated by tools, including language, and their acquired disciplinary knowledge as well as the personal qualities they bring to situations” (p. 319). Bearing this in mind, it is important that SEL curriculums strongly consider students’ varying cultural backgrounds. Failing to do so has resulted in unintended consequences. Soutter (2019) explains that although teachers may have good intentions when it comes to teaching SEL, sometimes the messages are not perceived by students in the intended manner. For example, students may come to believe that being a leader means obeying or complying with rules. Soutter states “SEL programs have a larger purpose than merely creating compliant children who may be afraid to use their voices--especially if those children are from historically marginalized communities” (p. 61).

Yosso (2005) asserts that teachers need to recognize and utilize culture capital, which she defines as the “array of multicultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged” (p. 69). One way that educators discover their students’ culture capital is through learning about and valuing what Moll et. al (1992) called Funds of Knowledge

which they described as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133). Through their research, Moll and his colleagues conducted a qualitative study of families and their household dynamics. They aimed to discover how “household members use their funds of knowledge in dealing with changing, and often difficult, social and economic circumstances” (p. 133). Understanding and capitalizing on the Funds of Knowledge of students is undervalued means of increasing both participation and academic achievement.

Gifted Students

To understand the SEL needs of gifted students, one must establish a definition of giftedness. Bar-On (2007) explains that “Giftedness implies possessing exceptionally high cognitive intelligence, potential for superior academic and professional performance, enhanced capability and drive to do one’s best and realize one’s potential, as well as an advanced ability to apply a variety of different approaches to solve problems in more innovative and creative ways when compared with others” (p. 125).

Considering giftedness in conjunction with establishing a culturally responsive classroom, it is important to understand that “disadvantaged gifted are those who possess the same abilities and potential for gifted performance together with a well-developed sense of resiliency that is directed toward coping with the disadvantageous situations and conditions with which they are faced” (Bar-On, 2007, 125).

The Need for SEL Instruction for Gifted Students

To achieve academically, students must be able to handle their emotions, validate their feelings, keep things in perspective, solve problems, and possess self-motivation. In

his study on the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and giftedness, Reuven Bar-On (2007) found that problem solving skills are most impacted by one's ability to be optimistic, their degree of self-motivation, and their ability to use multiple approaches to problem solving. He also found that stress tolerance and the ability to regulate one's emotions have the most impact on one's cognitive intelligence. Since these skills are at the heart of an SEL program, it makes sense for gifted students to receive instruction in social and emotional learning. Bar-On states that gifted students "should be provided with coaching designed to enhance those EI factors that were found to impact cognitive skills, problem solving, creativity, and self-actualization in order to facilitate their continued development" (p. 133).

Conclusion

The literature presented in this chapter suggests that implementing implicit SEL instruction in a gifted classroom can have positive effects on the academic achievement of students. Research has shown the benefits of using culturally responsive SEL instruction; however, its connection to gifted students would benefit from further research.

Chapter III

Research Setting and Design

The strength of character and emotional intelligence to face your failures and learn from them are at the core of success. (Robert Kiyosaki)

Research Paradigm

The research methodology for this study is a qualitative approach to learning about the social and emotional needs of gifted students. Qualitative research focuses on answering questions such as “what happens when” or “why” which makes it ideal for teachers looking to describe what is happening in their classrooms. Qualitative research provides researchers with the “ability to probe into responses or observations as needed and obtain more detailed descriptions and explanations of experiences, behaviors, and beliefs—this is how we answer the why and how question” (Guest, et. al, 2013, p. 21). Manning and Kunkel (2014) claim that “qualitative relationship research is also an excellent outlet to make sense of understudied relationships and the people in them” and its methods “allow for natural observation of how people are working through such meaning making in their day-to-day lives” (p. 435). This study is especially suited for qualitative research because qualitative research will allow me to observe what happens as SEL and CRP are implemented in a gifted education classroom. It will allow me to dig deeply into what I am observing in my classroom as well as to uncover additional insights through the analysis of student response journals.

This study can be further classified as teacher research, which “has a primary purpose of helping the teacher-researcher understand her students and improve her practice in specific, concrete ways” (Shagoury and Power, 2012, p. 4). Teacher research

is best suited for this study because it focuses on observing things that naturally occur in my classroom and will help me answer questions that I have about my students as well as my teaching practices. As Shagoury and Power (2012) explain, “Every teacher has wonderings worth pursuing. Teacher research is one way to pursue those wonderings in a thoughtful, systematic, and collaborative way” (p. 9). Teacher research will allow me to take my wonderings about the social and emotional skills of my students and turn them into knowledge that will inform my teaching.

Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1992) explain the importance of teacher research by stating that “inquiry conducted by teachers is one way to build knowledge both locally and publicly-- for the individual teacher, for communities of teachers, and for the larger field of university-based researchers and teacher educators, policymakers, and school administrators” (p. 469). The knowledge gained through my research not only has the potential ability to transform my own teaching, but also the ability to help other teachers in my district that teach my students in their regular classroom settings. Furthermore, it may contribute to the collective body of knowledge for other teachers in the field.

Procedure of the Study

This study was conducted from November to March, spanning approximately fourteen weeks in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Due to the pandemic, all classes were conducted via virtual class sessions for approximately thirty minutes per class session once a week. If the study had been conducted under the original plan, students would have participated in forty-minute classes twice a week in their typical school setting.

At the onset of the study, I sought to understand the effects of simultaneously integrating social and emotional learning and culturally responsive pedagogy on students' perceptions about themselves, their abilities, and their relationships with their peers. Due to unforeseen circumstances caused by the pandemic, many aspects of the original research plan were modified. Time constraints played a major role in the modification of the research study. Schedule changes resulted in instructional time decreasing by 50 minutes each week. For this reason, I chose not to study students' perceptions about their relationships with their peers.

The pandemic significantly increased the responsibilities placed upon students and families. Many parents found themselves trying to assist their children with virtual learning while working from home and juggling many other responsibilities. Students not only had to learn to navigate virtual learning and new learning platforms, but also needed to learn how to follow schedules independently, log themselves on to virtual meetings, remain engaged in virtual environments, utilize time management skills, and handle the toll that the pandemic and being out of school took on their social and emotional wellbeing all at the same time. The increased academic demands in conjunction with the unique social and emotional challenges placed upon families by the pandemic required me to be mindful of the workload being assigned to students throughout the course of the research study. This led to more modifications to my initial research plans. Originally, one way that I intended to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy was for students to work on a project with their families to discover their own funds of knowledge. This information would have been used to plan for instruction throughout the research study as well as for my teaching in general. Asking my students

and their families to engage in such a time-consuming project during an already stressful and challenging time would have placed an unnecessary burden upon them and therefore was not included in the research study.

The increased responsibilities faced by many families may have also played a factor in the number of students that opted to participate in the research study. Families may have viewed the research study as adding additional responsibility to an already full plate. Culturally responsive pedagogy was intended to be a major component of the research study. My intent was to have a diverse population of students represented in the study and to integrate CRP into my teaching practices alongside social and emotional learning. Only eight students opted to participate in the research study and all of them were white, English speaking students. This caused me to shift the way that I needed to approach CRP in my classroom. Originally, I intended to learn about the cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, and funds of knowledge of my students to use that in conjunction with their academic skills and knowledge in order to create a culturally responsive classroom environment where all students' unique intelligences are not only valued but used as vehicles to help them succeed. Due to a lack of diversity in my classroom, my focus shifted away from cultural diversity and narrowed in on creating an inclusive and collaborative learning community where students were comfortable learning, working, and expressing themselves together. To achieve this, CRP was interwoven with the various components of social and emotional learning, such as self-awareness or self-management, and put into action through a series of mini-lessons or longer classroom projects. Creativity, choice, and student-centered learning, other essential factors of CRT, were also essential aspects of the research study.

Data collection took place during virtual class sessions once a week for approximately thirty minutes per session. The following outlines the procedures of the study:

- Week 1: Obtained parental consent for participation in the research study as well as to collect and utilize data in the form of student survey responses, video and audio recordings of lessons, student journal responses, and traditional teacher observation data.
- Weeks 2-3: Administered a questionnaire with questions concerning self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, and relationships to determine students' current thoughts and feelings surrounding these aspects of social and emotional learning (SEL).
- Weeks 4-5: Introduced students to SEL mini-lessons. Discussed the purpose of the lessons as well as rules for participation. Began with mini-lessons on self-management. Topics discussed included growth mindset, optimism, and brain science. Students completed various activities including a digital escape room.
- Weeks 6-7: Continued SEL mini-lessons with a focus on self-awareness. Lesson topics included identifying and expressing emotions. Students worked together to brainstorm lists of emotions and categorize them in multiple ways and explored complex emotions.
- Weeks 8-9: Students participated in a mini-lesson on social awareness. Discussed empathy and completed a read aloud and book discussion. Students reflected on empathy in their student journals.

- Weeks 10-11: Students participated in a mini-lesson on responsible decision making. They contemplated various difficult scenarios where they needed to make a decision on how to act. Before making a decision, students had to identify all stakeholders and how their actions affected them in order to make a responsible decision.
- Weeks 12-13: Students participated in a mini-lesson on relationships skills that focused on the importance of friendships, qualities of a good friend, and how to establish and maintain friendships. Students discussed friendship topics in their journals.
- Week 14: Re-administered the initial questionnaire about self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, and relationships to determine if students' attitudes and feelings about each topic changed throughout the study.

Data Sources

In order to examine what happens when SEL lessons are implemented alongside culturally responsive teaching practices, a variety of data sources were collected. The initial data source was a student questionnaire. At the beginning of the research study, all students completed a survey about growth mindset, self-management, supportive relationships, emotion regulation, classroom effort, self-efficacy, social awareness, and GRIT to determine their current thoughts and feelings surrounding these SEL topics. The same survey was given at the end of the research study to determine if there was any change in the way students thought or felt about each topic.

A second data source includes observations of students captured in a teacher research journal. As I observed students during live instruction (remote learning via an

Internet meeting platform), I took notes about students' participation. In particular, I paid close attention to whether they participated, levels of confidence (or lack of confidence) evident in their responses, the ways in which students interacted with others, and how attentive students were to both the topic at hand and the responses of their classmates.

Another data source is the student journal entries completed at the end of each activity or mini-lesson. Journal entries focused on the topics discussed during class and provided an opportunity for students to share their thoughts in a more confidential manner. It also provided all students an opportunity to be heard. Students knew that their responses would not be shared with their classmates without their permission.

A fourth data source is the audio and video recordings of each lesson. Each lesson was conducted via an Internet meeting platform and recorded for future analysis. The ability to go back and analyze the recordings after each lesson allowed me to see much more than I could see during the live class session. In particular, I could see more of how each student reacted to each other through their words as well as their body language or responses in the chat box.

Data Analysis

The main method of data analysis utilized in this study is a general inductive approach. According to Thomas (2003), "the primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies" (p. 2). In order for research findings to emerge, inductive coding was utilized. Multiple reviews of the data enabled me to identify common themes throughout student survey responses, journal responses, classroom conversations (captured via video/audio

recording or written in a teacher research journal). Common themes included ideas that were seen frequently in the data which were further categorized by correlation to specific components of SEL or CRP. The themes that I noticed when analyzing the data are how SEL and CRP encouraged students to believe that they can improve different skill sets with hard work and practice, how students can establish and maintain friendships, and how students can identify and express their emotions.

A second method of data analysis used in this study is thematic narrative analysis. Reissman (2005) explains that this method allows researchers to “collect many stories and inductively create conceptual groupings from the data” (p. 2). Stories are then analyzed and organized by emerging themes. Student journal entries and responses to open-ended questions were analyzed alongside transcribed audio recordings from class discussions in order to find common themes and patterns about participant’s experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

Data collected throughout the study was also analyzed utilizing triangulation to determine validity. According to Guion (2002), triangulation is a “method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies” (p.

1). Specifically, methodological triangulation was employed. This method uses multiple qualitative or quantitative methods which include methods such as observation, interviews, and surveys. With this method, validity is established when the findings of each method result in similar findings (Guion, 2002). Data sources utilized in this research study included student surveys/questionnaires, a teacher research journal, student journal entries, and audio/video recordings of lessons.

Context

District

The Treeford Public School District (pseudonym) is located in a suburban area of southern New Jersey. It is home to two early childhood centers, four elementary schools serving students in second through sixth grade, one middle school serving students in seventh through eighth grade, and a high school for students in ninth through twelfth grade. There are approximately 4,100 students in the district as well as approximately 347 teachers and 24 administrators. Instruction provided includes regular education, special education, ESL, gifted and talented, and basic skills instruction.

The teacher population of Treeford Public School District is 93.7% White, 3.7% Black or African American, 1.4% Hispanic, and 1.2% American Indian or Alaska Native. Females make up 79.8% of the teaching staff while males make up 20.2% of the staff. All certified teaching staff members have a Bachelor's Degree and 27% of the teaching staff also have a Master's Degree.

The district's student population is 58.8% White, 22.8% Black or African American, 11.4% Hispanic, 6.5% Asian, 0.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 0.1% Native Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% two or more races. English is spoken in 91.9% of the students' homes. Spanish is spoken in 3.3% of students' homes, Panjabi is spoken in 1.1% of students' homes, and other languages are spoken in 3.7% of students' homes. Approximately 36.6% of the student population is considered to be economically disadvantaged, 23.1% of the students have disabilities, and 2.1% of students are English learners (New Jersey Department of Education, 2018-2019).

School

Tall Trees Elementary School (pseudonym) is one of four elementary schools within the Treeford Public School District. The school is home to grades second through sixth grade. Approximately 376 students attend the school and are taught by about 36 teachers.

The teacher population of Tall Trees Elementary School is 88.9% White, 5.9% Black or African American, and 5.6% American Indian or Alaska Native. Females make up 86.1% of the teaching staff while males make up 13.9% of the staff. All certified teaching staff members have a Bachelor's Degree and 25% of the teaching staff also have a Master's Degree.

The student population of Tall Trees Elementary School is 71% White, 10.4% Hispanic, 15.7% Black or African American, 1.6% Asian, and 1.3% two or more races. English is spoken in 97.6% of the student's homes and Spanish is spoken in 1.6% of students. Less than 1% of the student population speaks a language other than English or Spanish at home. Approximately 31.6% of the student population is classified as economically disadvantaged, 26.3% of the students have disabilities, and no students are classified as English Learners. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2018-2019).

Participants

The students participating in the study are eight fourth-and fifth-grade students whose ages range from ten through eleven. Twenty-one students, in total, were originally asked to participate in the study; however, only eight students returned consent forms to use their data in the study. Of the eight students, four are girls and four are boys. Three of the students are in fourth grade and five of the students are in fifth grade. All of the

students identify as white/Caucasian with English being the only language spoken at home and in school. All participants are students in the school's gifted and talented program that I teach.

The school district's Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program for elementary students consists of sixty-five students in second through sixth grade. Each of the students attend one of the four district elementary schools. Of the sixty-five students, thirty-four are male while thirty-one are female. The program's student population is 66% White, 15.38% Asian, 13.8% Black or African American, 3.07% Hispanic, and 1.53% two or more races.

Admission into the GATE program consists of multiple measures. First, all students are universally screened in second grade using a group-administered IQ test. Students scoring in the top 10% of all student scores are further evaluated using grade level benchmark tests in both language arts and mathematics that are administered in the beginning of the school year. Additionally, a teacher rating scale is completed by the classroom teacher of any student being considered for admission. Students who receive enough points on a matrix that includes each of these three measures are offered admission into the program. If students are not admitted in second grade, there are future opportunities to be admitted that typically begin with a teacher recommendation or via a parent request for re-testing.

During gifted and talented classes, I am the only teacher present. Currently, fourteen students participate in the fourth-grade class and sixteen students participate in the fifth-grade class regardless of consent to participate since I am implementing social and emotional learning in all gifted and talented classes. Prior to data collection, all

students were informed about the research and their role within the study. The students were asked to participate through verbal consent. The eight participants also received written parental consent to participate. After understanding the purpose of the study and associated activities, all eight students expressed enthusiasm about participating.

Conclusion

The next chapter focuses on the analysis of the data collected throughout the research study. Common themes were identified that were revealed through the data.

Chapter IV

Findings of the Study

No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care. (Theodore Roosevelt)

This chapter focuses on the data collected to help understand the effects that social and emotional learning (SEL) and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) had on my gifted students' perceptions about themselves and their abilities. I focus first on my students' perceptions about themselves and their abilities prior to implementing social and emotional learning into our lessons. The remainder of the chapter outlines themes that evolved from the study. The results of the study are noted within each theme and focus on the five most widely recognized SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Prior to simultaneously integrating SEL and CRP into my gifted education classes, a structured approach to addressing my students' social and emotional needs did not exist. While I would, of course, address individual needs as they arose, there was no plan, curriculum, or strategies in place to proactively address these needs before they became a hindrance to my students' ability to succeed in the classroom. At the suggestion of my school principal, I decided to implement these practices in my own classroom and observe the effects.

Before simultaneously implementing social and emotional learning and culturally responsive teaching practices in my classroom, students were asked to complete an initial survey to help me learn about their thoughts and feelings in areas such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. These surveys helped me

learn more about their perceptions of themselves and their abilities. The results of each part of the survey can be found in the next section.

Self-Management

Initial Self-Management Survey Results

In the first part of the initial survey, students were asked questions related to self-management. In particular, they were asked a series of questions related to having a growth mindset. Students were asked to determine how possible it is for someone to change something (talent, level of intelligence, effort, etc.) by selecting one of the following answer choices for each question: completely possible to change, quite possible to change, somewhat possible to change, a little possible to change, and not at all possible to change.

In particular, students were asked how possible it was for someone to change being talented. Over half of the students (62%) stated that it was only somewhat possible or a little possible to change being talented. These results indicated that many of my students needed to work towards developing a growth mindset.

Developing a Growth Mindset

After analyzing students' initial beliefs concerning growth mindset, I realized that my students needed to learn more about how abilities, talents, and intelligences are developed. Culturally responsive teaching practices support helping students foster a growth mindset based on the belief that doing so will help them reach their full potential. My classroom practices hold students to high academic standards where my students know that I not only believe that they can succeed, but expect success. Helping

students develop a growth mindset will enable them to persevere through academic challenges to meet the academic demands found in our classroom and beyond.

To begin our growth mindset mini-lesson, students were asked to share something that used to be difficult for them that now seems easy. Students had no trouble coming up with endless ideas and shared responses such as solving the digital escape rooms that we do in class, finding the main idea in language arts class, math, drawing, and learning how to ride a bike. Then, I asked students to make a list of everything that they did to get better at what challenged them. The students responded with things such as training their brain by practicing riddles, paying more attention in language arts class, studying for math, asking for help until they understood, and practicing. When asked to consider what all of these responses had in common, students recognized that each person had to put in work or practice to get better at something.

Next, I asked students to consider why practicing helped them get better. Students struggled to explain why practicing helps them. Instead, they responded with ideas about how practice makes perfect so I asked them to watch a video about the brain to see what part their brain plays in learning new things. Together, we watched Khan Academy's *How to Grow My Brain* video which explains how the brain is like a muscle that can grow as neurons connect and work together. Afterwards, I asked them to think about what their brain can do and how it may have helped them get better at what challenged them. Captured in an audio recording, the students synthesized their learning:

- Mrs. J.: Now that you know a little more about how your brain works, how do you think that your brain helped you get better at whatever was challenging for you?
- Bella: (Raises hand to be called on) Well my brain got bigger. It's like a muscle.
- Tyler: (Interrupts by calling out) Like when my dad goes to the gym! He does the exercise until his muscles get bigger. But it takes a long a long time.
- Maria: (Raises hand) When I was learning how to ride a bike last year, I kept falling at first. Like, it was real hard to balance and remember how much to turn the handlebars and pedal. After I kept doing it, my brain took over and it just worked. I didn't have to think so much. My brain just took over because it knew what to do somehow.
- Tyler: (Interrupts by calling out) Your neurons connected!
- Mrs. J.: Ok. So now we know that our brain can do amazing things by helping it grow through practice. Let's see if we can use what we learned to train our brains in another way.

After our discussion, I showed my students a short video about how to develop a growth mindset. Then, the students worked together to complete a growth mindset virtual escape room. They read statements and had to determine if they represented a fixed mindset or growth mindset and read about famous people turning their failures into success. At the end of the escape room, students were asked to reflect on their thoughts about having a growth mindset. In a journal response below, one student shared that people with a growth mindset welcome change and understand that you can reach your goals instead of quitting or listening to negative thoughts:

I have learned that a growth mindset is when you believe in change and challenges, welcoming them with open arms. Having a growth mindset means that you allow your brain to grow. You don't just sit in a corner feeling bad for

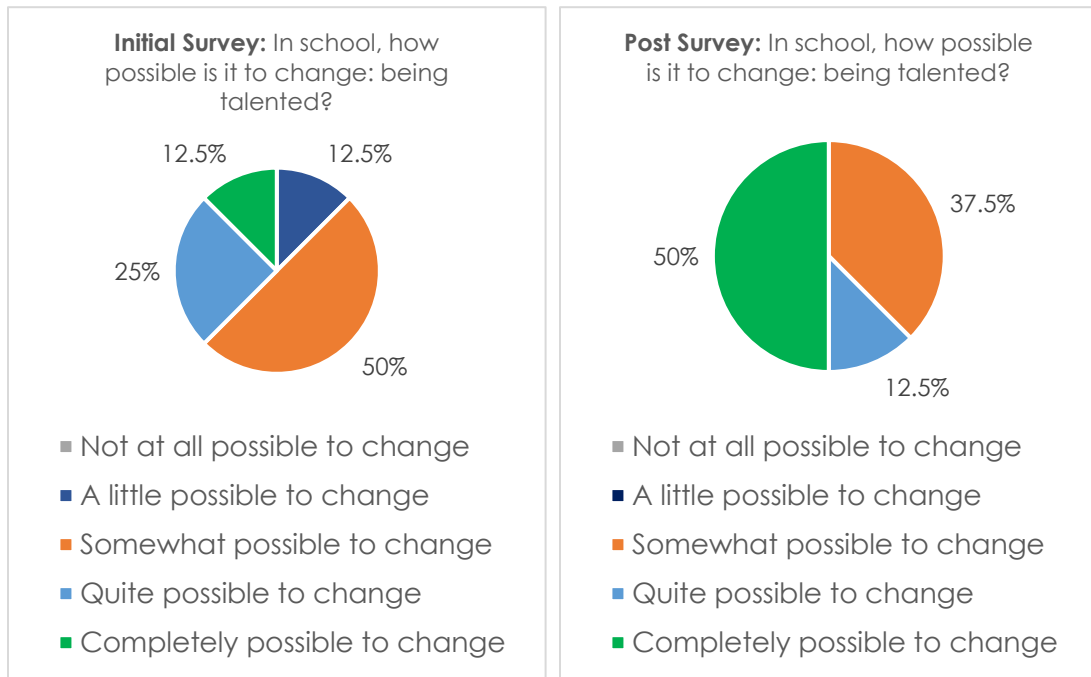
yourself. You take your goals and make them reality. To have a growth mindset, you can learn how to respond to negative thoughts and comments. You can try to accept challenges and do your best, even if you think it will be too hard.

Final Self-Management Survey Results

At the conclusion of the research study, students repeated the self-management student survey (Figure 1). Once again, students were asked how possible it was for someone to change being talented. This time, 50% of the students stated that it was completely possible to change, 12.5% said it was quite possible to change, and 37.5% said it was somewhat possible to change. Student responses show that many of the students now believe that they have the ability to change and grow things such as their talents, intelligence, and effort. These beliefs show that my class is beginning to develop their self-management skills by first believing that they have the ability to influence outcomes through their own efforts and actions.

Figure 1

Growth Mindset Survey Results for Initial Survey and Post-Survey



Self -Awareness

Initial Self-Awareness Survey Results

In the second part of the initial survey, students were asked questions related to self-awareness. In particular, they were asked self-efficacy questions about how sure they were that they could complete all their work, understand complicated ideas, and retain the information a year later. When asked about how clearly they were able to describe their feelings in the last thirty days, 87.5% percent (or seven out of my eight students) reported being able to describe their feelings only somewhat clearly or not at all clearly. Survey results indicate that many of my students may benefit from learning how to describe their feelings clearly and accurately.

Identifying and Expressing Emotions

Based on the survey results, I determined that my students need to learn how to identify and express their emotions in order to be able to describe them clearly to others. In order to do this, we started with a lesson about emotions. First, I asked my students to look around them and describe some of the colors that they see in their home environment. Then, I asked them how all of the different colors are formed. One student responded with information she learned from art class about how primary colors mix together to make other colors. Next, I asked the students to define the word *emotion*. Initially, students responded by listing various emotions, but eventually a student explained that emotions are the feelings that people have. Captured in an audio recording the students shared their definitions for emotions:

Mrs. J.: What does the word *emotion* mean?

Dale: (Calls out) Like being happy or angry.

Tyler: (Raises hand) Emotions are what you feel.

Parker: (Raises hand) Like Tyler said. It's what you feel when something happens to you like you might feel happy when you play video games.

Mrs. J.: Very good. An emotion is what you feel when you experience something. For example, when I saw a spider in my garage earlier this morning, I felt scared. My emotion was fear. Let's brainstorm a list of emotions and then see if we can sort them in different ways.

Together, the students created a list of as many emotions as possible. Then, I asked them to think of different ways to sort the emotions into categories. One student suggested that we sort them by positive or negative emotions. Another student suggested that we sort them by the common emotions they may be related to such as happiness,

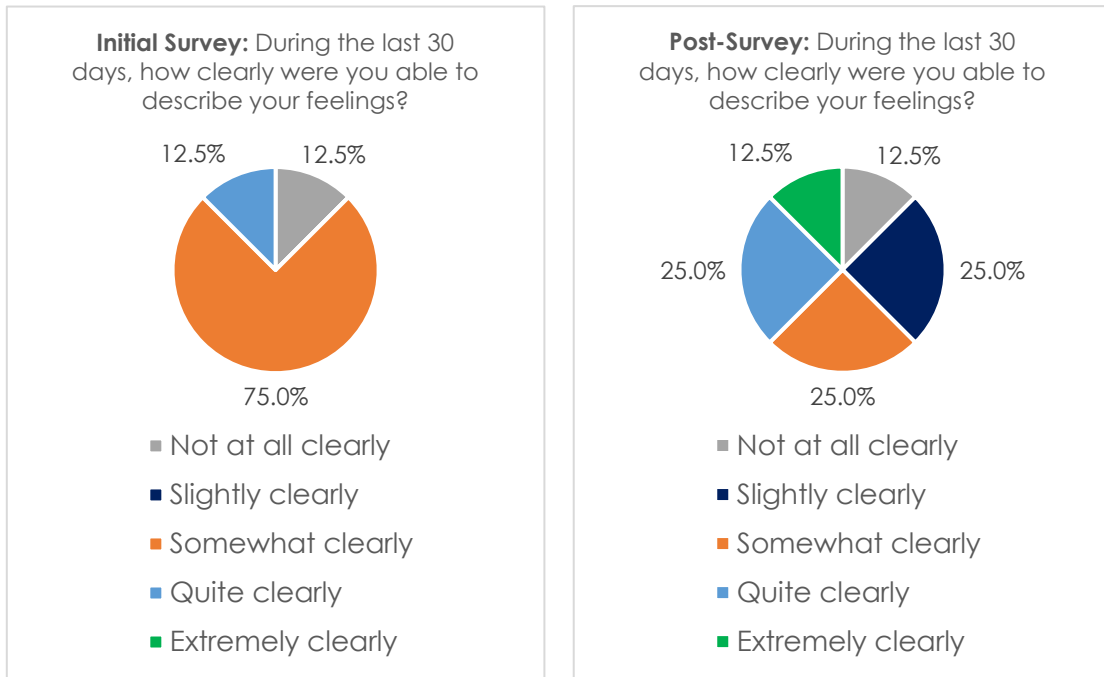
anger, or fear. Next students looked at examples of how two simple emotions can work together to become a more complex emotion that may be more difficult to describe. Then, students were challenged to combine two simple emotions to make a more complex emotion and described how those emotions worked together.

Final Self-Awareness Survey Results

At the conclusion of the research study, students repeated the self-awareness student survey (Figure 2). This time, when students were asked how clearly they were able to describe their feelings in the last thirty days, 62.5% of students reported being able to describe their feelings only somewhat clearly, slightly clearly, or not at all clearly. However, 37.5% of students reported being able to describe their feelings quite clearly or extremely clearly. Originally, only 12.5% of students reported being able to do so, which demonstrated that students are beginning to develop skills that help them understand and describe their emotions.

Figure 2

Self-Awareness Results for Initial Survey and Post-Survey



Social Awareness

Initial Social Awareness Survey Results

In the initial survey, students were asked questions related to how they interact with others. For example, they were asked to what extent they were able to stand up for themselves without putting others down, how carefully they listened to other people's points of view, and how much they cared about other people's feelings. When students were asked to what extent they were able to disagree with others without starting an argument, 62.5% of students responded a tremendous amount or quite a bit while 37.5% responded somewhat or a little bit. When asked to what extent they were able to stand up

for themselves without putting others down, 62.5% responded a tremendous amount or quite a bit while 37.5% responded with somewhat.

Survey results showed that, for the most part, students seemed to care about other people's feelings. However, they also showed that some students had trouble disagreeing with others without starting an argument or standing up for themselves without putting others down. For this reason, I determined that focusing on empathy would provide a solid foundation to start developing social awareness skills.

Understanding Empathy

A culturally responsive classroom should be a positive learning environment for all students. The classroom should be an inclusive space where all students feel safe being their own unique selves. When some students report that they have difficulty disagreeing with others without starting an argument or putting others down, this raises a concern that the classroom may not be a safe place for all students to voice their ideas, beliefs, or opinions.

In order for my students to be able to disagree with others without arguing and stand up for themselves without putting others down, they needed to understand what empathy is and how they can strengthen their ability to be empathetic towards others. First, I asked students if they have ever witnessed another student being picked on or bullied. Every student raised their hand. Then, I asked each student to write down how it made them feel to see another student be bullied and allowed them to share their responses. Student responses included being sad and upset, feeling angry or frustrated, and being worried or scared. When I asked students why they felt that way, one student explained that they remembered what it felt like to be picked on themselves so it made

them angry to see it happen to someone else. I explained to my students that what they were feeling was empathy and that when someone is able to understand and feel the feelings of another person, they are being empathetic.

Next, we read *The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig. Afterwards, students were asked to explain how the characters showed empathy towards one another in the story. One student wrote, “Brian knows what it is like to be invisible. He tries to talk to Justin to make him feel better about being the new kid.” A second student wrote, “By writing the note for Justin to cheer him up because he understood what it felt like to be alone.” These responses demonstrate that these two students understand that empathy involves not only feeling bad for someone because of something that is happening, but being able to feel what that person is feeling. They are able to distinguish between sympathy and empathy. In response to the same question, another student wrote “Brian showed Justin empathy because he left a friendly note for him.” This student is describing an action that the character took to show the other character that he cared about how he was feeling, but doesn’t acknowledge how the character needs to share the other character’s feelings. This student has not demonstrated a complete understanding of empathy yet.

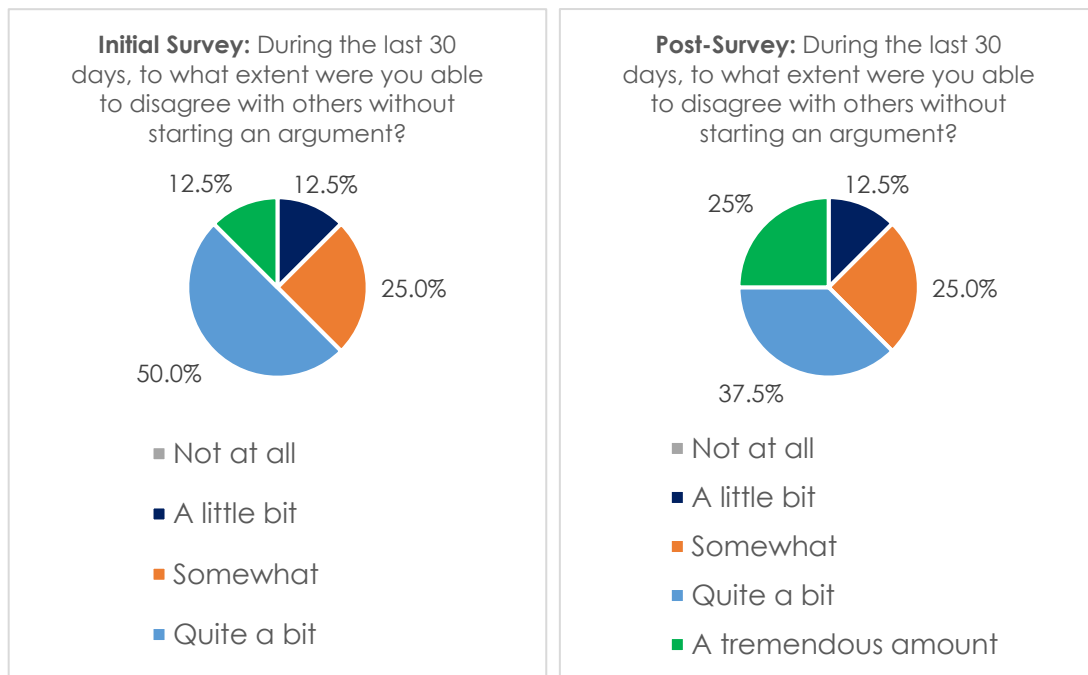
Final Social Awareness Survey Results

At the conclusion of the research study, students repeated the social awareness student survey (Figure 3). This time, when students were asked to what extent they were able to disagree with others without starting an argument, 62.5% of students responded a tremendous amount or quite a bit while 37.5% responded somewhat or a little bit. When broken down further, it appears that while 62.5% of students responded a tremendous

amount or quite a bit for both the pre and post survey, there was actually an increase in the number of students who selected a tremendous amount which could indicate that there was some improvement in students' ability to disagree with others without arguing. When students once again responded to the question asking to what extent they were able to stand up for themselves without putting others down, 75% responded a tremendous amount or quite a bit while 25% responded with somewhat or not at all. This shows an increase in some students' abilities in this area, but it also shows that one student reports a decrease in their ability during the 30 days in discussion.

Figure 3

Self-Awareness Results for Initial Survey and Post-Survey



Responsible Decision Making

Responsible decision making was not included in the initial student survey; however, it has always had a significant place in the classroom. Students have always had sets of rules and related consequences in school and in the classroom. For this study, we built on what students already knew about responsible decision making to get them to begin thinking about how their choices and actions affect not only themselves, but their classmates, friends, family, community, and the world around them.

In a culturally responsive classroom, responsible decision making takes into account the ways that decisions affect all stakeholders and takes into account varying points of view. To practice considering the impact that choices have on others, students took part in an activity called *Stuck in a Jam*. During this activity, students were presented with different scenarios and asked to share what they would do or say in each situation. Before students could respond, they had to consider all of the people that would be impacted by a scenario and how it would affect them. The first scenario that we completed together asked students to imagine that they found a wallet on the ground with \$100 in it. First, we discussed some possible actions: turn the wallet in to the police, return the wallet to the owner, leave the wallet where it was found, or keep the wallet. Then, we made a list of who would be affected by each action. Students said that if they gave the wallet to the police or returned it to the owner, they would be helping the owner and they would feel happy or relieved. They also said that if they decided to keep the wallet, they may feel happy because they have a lot of money, but the owner will be upset about losing their money. Some students said that while it would be nice to have the money, they would start to feel guilty about keeping the money. Finally, after

thinking about how each choice could affect the people involved, students voted on how to handle the situation. In this scenario, students voted to turn in the wallet to the police because they felt that was the safest and most responsible decision.

In another scenario, students were asked what they would do or say if they saw their friend stealing candy from a store. After discussing who would be affected by the action (themselves, their friend, the store, the workers) students were asked to share how they would react in the chat. Captured in a chat transcript, students shared their responses.

00:21:40.425,00:21:43.425

██████████: I would tell them to put it back

00:21:44.751,00:21:47.751

██████████: I would tell them pay for that

00:21:47.638,00:21:50.638

██████████: Stop being friends with her or tell her not to do that.

00:21:55.584,00:21:58.584

██████████: I would tell them to stop, and if they didn't, then I would tell the person that is working there

00:22:10.975,00:22:13.975

██████████: remind them that it's bad to steal, and they could get caught

00:22:43.790,00:22:46.790

██████████: I would say to pay for it or I will tell the worker. If they dont listen, I would tell the cashier and not talk to them again.

All of the student responses involved intervening by telling their friend to pay or put the item back or by involving the store employee. This indicates that the students understand that their friend was not engaging in responsible decision making. Students continued to work through various difficult scenarios to determine what the most responsible decisions would be.

Relationship Skills

Initial Relationship Skills Survey Results

In the initial survey, students were asked three questions regarding supportive relationships. First, they were asked if they have a teacher or other adult from school that they can count on to help them, no matter what. Initially, 75% of students said yes and the other 25% said no. Next, students were asked if they have a family member or other adult outside of school that they can count on to help them, no matter what. This time, 87.5% of students (7 out of 8 students) said yes while one student said no. Finally, students were asked if they have a friend from school that they can count on to help them, no matter what. This time 62.5% of students said yes while 37.5% said no.

Establishing and Maintaining Healthy Relationships

A culturally responsive teacher knows each one of their students well. Because I worked with each of my students last year (and many of them even the year before that as well), I have had ample time and opportunities to get to know them and to form relationships with them and with their families. There are also many other practices in place in the classroom to help me continue to grow and strengthen my relationships with my students. At the beginning of each school year, students complete interest surveys to share information about themselves, their hobbies, and their interests. They also complete learning style inventories so that I can gain insight into how they learn. Throughout the year, I incorporate students' interests in our work and frequently talk about their interests with them. I also spend time attending activities in my students' community and attending soccer games, dance competitions, and church events when students invite me. Each of these activities helps develop relationships with my students

and their families and help strengthen the sense of community within our classroom. This gives students a sense of confidence to take chances in the classroom because they know that they will be supported.

Based on the students' responses to the survey, it was determined that they would benefit from skills to help them establish and maintain friendships with their peers, particularly at school. For this reason, mini-lessons focused on the importance of friendship, making new friends, and the qualities that students look for when making friends.

The relationship skills mini-lesson began with a discussion about the importance of friendship. The discussion began with how having good friends makes life more interesting and enjoyable and how friends can help you get through difficult times. Each student shared why having friends is important to them (Figure 4). Student responses include:

Figure 4

Student Responses about the Importance of Friendship

Friends help me get through hard times, and they can also make me laugh. When I am lonely, they know how to make me feel better, and they always have my back.
When I have friends, I have people to have conversations with as I am an only child. I have someone to play with because I don't have a brother or sister to do that. Finally, I have someone to care about me.
Friends can help me become the best version of myself. They can bring out my fun side and help me be calm and happy.
Friends are important because they give you someone to share your feeling with.

Have friends important to me because they make me feel good when I am sad, and just are kind and make jokes and care about me.

Have friends is important to me because without them I would be wired all day, and sad and lonely all day. That is why having friends is important to me.

Having friends is important to me because they help me through hard times. They also make me happy and expressive.

Next, we talked about why it may be difficult for some students to make friends. Students shared that sometimes people may feel nervous or shy or they may be new to school or to an activity. Together, students brainstormed a list of tips for making new friends. Student tips included to just be themselves and do whatever interests them, to not be afraid to stand out, to approach others and say hello, to be nice and welcoming towards new people, to be kind and helpful, to ask other people about their interests, and to try to get to know people.

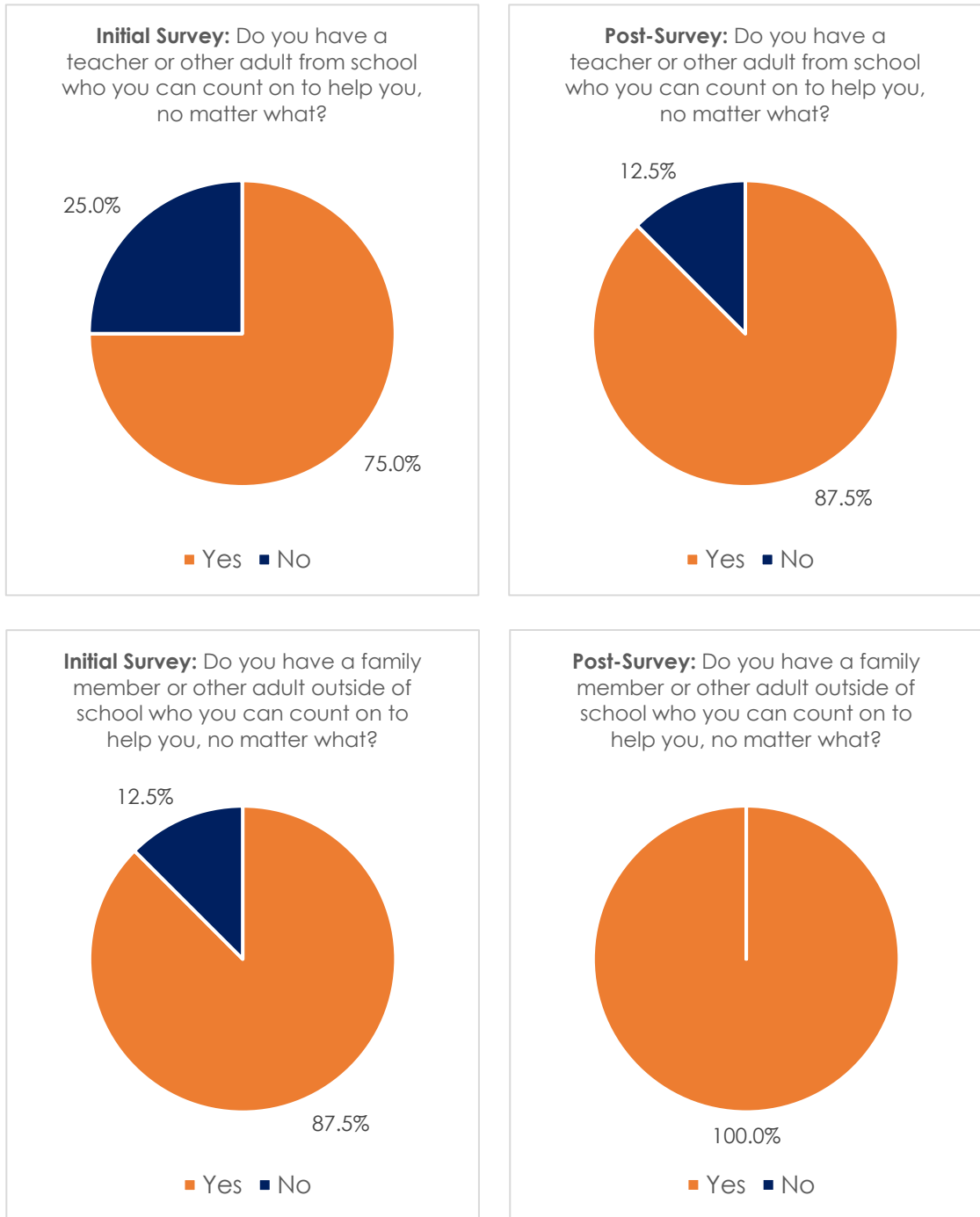
Finally, students were asked to think about the qualities they valued in a friend. After discussing various qualities and what they meant and what they might look like in a friendship, students were given a list of common qualities and asked to select which qualities they look for in a friend. The two most selected qualities were kind/thoughtful and funny/likes to have fun which were both selected by seven students. The next most selected qualities were good listener, honest, and trustworthy which were each selected by six students. The least selected qualities were quiet, talkative, artistic, adventurous, enjoys reading, and plays sports. These results seem to show that the students seem to care more about the quality of their friendships and the character of their friends than shared interests.

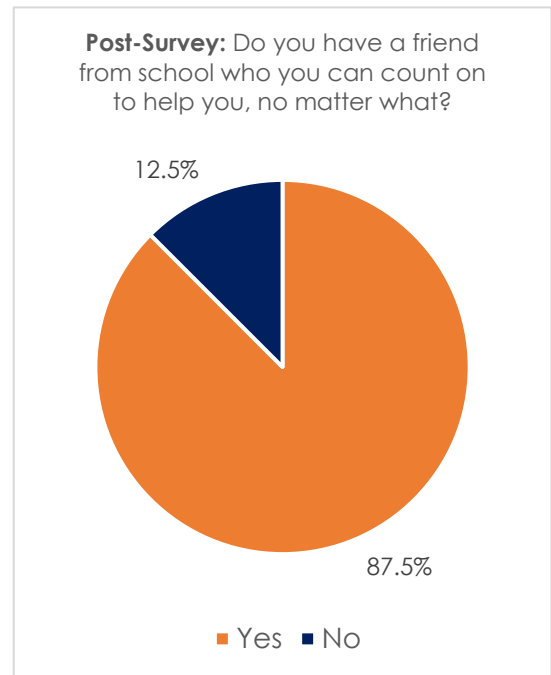
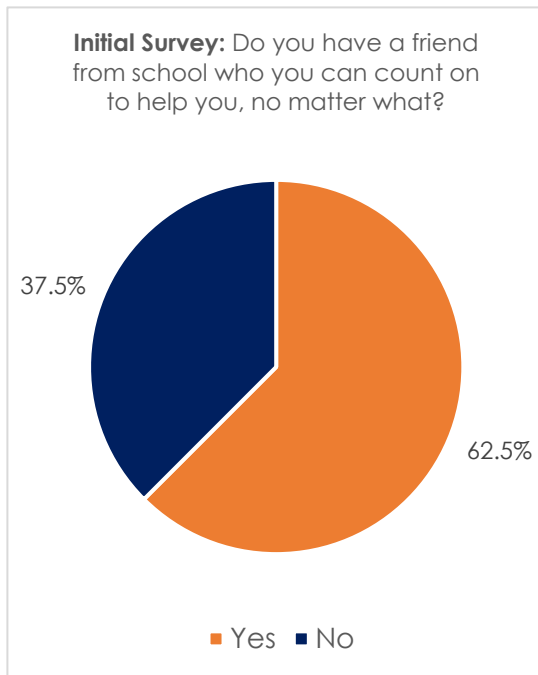
Final Relationship Survey Results

At the conclusion of the research study, students repeated the supportive relationships survey (Figure 5). Once again, students were asked three questions about what types of supportive relationships they have. This time, when asked if they have a teacher or other adult from school that they can count on to help them, no matter what, 87.5% of students (7 students) replied yes while only one student said no. When asked if they have a family member or other adult outside of school that they can count on to help them, no matter what, this time 100% of students said yes. Finally, when asked if they have a friend from school that they can count on to help them, no matter what, 87.5% of students (7 out of the 8 students) responded yes and one responded no. Student responses show an increase in the number of students reporting having each type of supportive relationship. This may indicate that students have begun to develop an ability to establish and/or maintain relationships with others.

Figure 5

Supportive Relationship Results for Initial Survey and Post-Survey





Conclusion

The findings suggest that when social and emotional learning and culturally responsive pedagogy are simultaneously integrated in a gifted and talented classroom, students' perceptions about themselves and their abilities are positively impacted. Continuation of the simultaneous use of both will help other researchers learn more about how SEL and CRP affect students' perceptions about themselves and their abilities. The following chapter outlines conclusions and implications from the study. Suggestions for further research are also discussed.

Chapter V

Conclusions

“Oh! This one looks hard! Can we start?” Parker asks excitedly as the digital escape room game pops up on the screen of our virtual classroom. As I take in the bright smiles on my students' faces and listen to their excited chatter, I can't help but think about how much has changed over the past few months. I see evidence of the confidence and new skills my students have worked so hard to develop. I am so proud of how far they've come and can't wait to see where they go from here. (Research Journal April 1, 2021)

This final chapter reviews the findings of the study as well as conclusions that can be drawn based on the research findings. Additionally, implications and suggestions for future researchers are also discussed. The chapter concludes with final thoughts.

Summary of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to uncover what happens to students' perceptions about themselves and their abilities when SEL and culturally responsive pedagogy are simultaneously integrated in a gifted and talented classroom. To conduct the research, fourth and fifth grade students in the gifted education program of a suburban school district in southern New Jersey were observed in a naturally occurring virtual classroom setting. A teacher's research journal, student surveys, student journals, and audio/video recordings of each lesson were used to collect data during virtual class sessions. The findings suggest simultaneously integrating social and emotional learning and culturally responsive pedagogy had an overall positive effect on student's perceptions about themselves and their abilities. The findings also suggest, through student reporting, that

students have begun to develop a growth mindset, have started to more accurately describe their emotions, have improved their ability to disagree with others without starting an argument, and have begun to develop an increased number of supportive relationships.

Conclusions of the Study

The main goal of the study was to understand what happens to students' perceptions about themselves and their abilities when social and emotional learning and culturally responsive pedagogy were simultaneously integrated into my gifted and talented classroom. I wanted to know if SEL and CRP would help my students become more confident in their abilities so that they would be more inclined to take academic risks and become less concerned with perfectionism. Additionally, I wanted to know more about how SEL and CRP could help my students further develop their social skills in order to successfully engage with their peers both inside and outside of the classroom. Finally, I wanted to see if simultaneously integrating SEL and CRP would provide students with the social and emotional skills needed to navigate the unique needs that may arise as a result of their advanced intellectual talents.

Based on the research, it can be concluded that SEL and CRP can help positively impact students' perceptions about their control over their abilities. Prior to implementation, the majority of the participants believed that it was only somewhat or a little possible to change being talented at something. Learning about growth mindset and brain science and engaging in opportunities to practice using a growth mindset helped students start to reframe how they view their abilities. While working in class, instances of students saying things were too challenging seemed to decrease. Most students began

to accept challenges more readily and were more willing to work through difficult tasks rather than saying that things were too difficult. In class discussions, students frequently referenced growth mindset when talking about things that were challenging. Instead of saying they couldn't do something, some students would say that they were still working towards learning how to do something or that they couldn't do something *yet*. Although students initially underestimated their abilities, opportunities to increase their confidence in their abilities were embedded in the curriculum. Developing this confidence is a key component of culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay (2018) stated "Students have to believe they can succeed in learning tasks and be willing to pursue success relentlessly until mastery is obtained" and "teachers must show students that they expect them to succeed and commit themselves to making success happen" (p. 40). As Gay asserted, it is essential that my students believe they are capable of succeeding at the tasks asked of them in the classroom. Utilizing a growth mindset reminds students that they need to keep working towards their goals in order to be successful. As the teacher, it is my role to continue to show my students that I believe they are capable of success and expect them to continue to work towards that success.

It can also be concluded that SEL and CRP can help gifted students develop the social and emotional skills required to navigate the unique needs that they may have as a result of their advanced intellectual gifts. According to Reuven Bar-On (2007), the ability to regulate emotions has a significant impact on cognitive intelligence. In order to regulate emotions, students must be able to identify and describe them. Prior to implementation, only 12.5% of students reported being able to describe their feelings quite clearly or extremely clearly. At the end of the study, 37.5% of students reported

being able to express their feelings quite clearly or extremely clearly. This indicates that two additional students moved into the most confident categories for clearly describing their feelings. Additionally, students were asked questions regarding their ability to regulate emotions. The study showed an increase in the number of students who were able to disagree with others without arguing as well as an increase in students who reported an ability to stand up for themselves without putting others down.

Past research has shown that SEL can have a positive impact on academic achievement. In their meta-analysis of 214 school-based SEL programs, Durlak, et al. (2011) found that students participating in SEL programs had an 11-percentile point gain in academic achievement. Similar results cannot be confirmed with this study. Students' grades stayed fairly consistent from the onset of the study through to completion. One theory for this is that the participants are all already high achieving students so there is less room to see significant academic improvement in terms of test scores or report card grades.

Implications

Because this study demonstrated positive effects on students' perceptions about themselves and their abilities, it can offer valuable information in terms of how teachers can support their students in these areas. Through the use of social and emotional learning and culturally responsive pedagogy, students' perceptions about themselves and their abilities have been positively impacted. Even though the benefits of using SEL and CRP can have a positive impact on students' perceptions of themselves and their abilities, oftentimes educators are not taking advantage of this resource.

There are many reasons why social and emotional learning and culturally responsive pedagogy are not being used by more educators. One such reason is a lack of knowledge. Teachers may want to use the most effective instructional strategies for their students, but they may not know what those strategies actually are. Teachers that have not been in college in recent years may not know much about SEL or CRP. Educational research is always evolving and it can be difficult to keep up with. Even though teachers are required to complete ongoing professional development, this is often directed by the school district who may not opt to offer information on these topics.

Other teachers may argue that time plays a factor in their decision not to incorporate these SEL or CRP into their teaching practices. However, incorporating these strategies and ideologies may actually save teachers time in the long run. As Elias (1997) explains, attending to students' SEL needs can help improve academic performance and decrease problem behaviors. Increasing academic performance could mean spending less time remediating materials and decreasing problem behaviors means less disrupted lesson time dealing with disciplinary issues.

Some teachers may argue that SEL would be best done by someone with more specialized training, such as the school guidance counselor. However, Durlak, et al. (2011) found that classroom teachers can effectively conduct SEL programs themselves, regardless of grade level. Ashdown and Bernard (2011) also found that SEL programs, even when taught by classroom teachers, had significant positive effects. Teachers that don't feel as comfortable implementing SEL in the classroom may benefit from using a more formal curriculum to build their own knowledge and comfort in this domain.

Some teachers may even say that there is no place for SEL and CRP in their predominantly white classrooms. As this study has shown, there is a place for CRP in all classrooms, especially those that are working towards incorporating SEL. CRP is meant to be validating and affirming by acknowledging students' own knowledge, skills, and lived experiences and by capitalizing on their strengths and utilizing a variety of instructional strategies to improve academic achievement. SEL helps students identify these skills as they develop self-awareness. CRP is also meant to be comprehensive and inclusive by developing a learning community where students work together and function as family (collaborating, sharing resources, helping one another, and developing caring relationships) in order to achieve success. These skills are further developed through SEL as students work on their social awareness skills. Finally, CRP is meant to be empowering. CRP promotes self-confidence and relentless pursuit of goals or knowledge. SEL also works side by side with CRP to help students develop these skills by strengthening students' self-management skills. Experts actually caution that SEL requires a culturally responsive approach. Snyder and Cook (2018) assert that "the intersection of culture and SEL is an important one, since school settings are often meeting grounds for learners and educators from a rich and diverse range of cultures, languages, and behavioral norms" (para. 7). When you look closely enough, you will find that elements of CRP are easily woven throughout SEL and are useful in all classrooms.

Implementing a full range of CRT and CSP demands a look at the iniquities that exist to prevent more students of color from participating in gifted and talented programs. In my school district, student population data shows that white and Asian

students are both overrepresented in our gifted education program while black students are underrepresented by 33% and Hispanic students are underrepresented by 78.2%. Donna Y. Ford and Robert A. King, Jr. (2014) explain that the underrepresentation is the result of social inequalities, such as prejudice and discrimination as well as too much emphasis being placed on IQ testing and achievement tests as a means for identifying gifted students. Ford and King (2005) advocate for nonverbal assessments in place of IQ testing because they “provide a more equitable evaluation of children from culturally and linguistically diverse populations” (p. 30). They conclude that “using a general measure of ability that is not laden with verbal and quantitative knowledge in an appropriate way—perhaps the most appropriate way—to measure general ability and level the playing field for children who come to school with limited language or educational skills, as well as with economic limitations” (p. 35). Had such inequities not existed, I may have had more participants which would have enabled me to carry out the research study in the manner originally intended.

Limitations

During the course of this study, there were some limitations that may have impacted the results of the study. Although all of my fourth and fifth grade students at Tall Trees Elementary School had the opportunity to participate in the study, I was unable to obtain consent from all students. As a result, the study did not represent a diverse group of students. All participants identified as white and English speaking. Therefore, results of the study are limited to the backgrounds of the participants.

Another limitation of the study was time. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the amount of time that I had with my students was significantly less than

anticipated when planning the study. Students participated in one thirty-minute class session per week as opposed to two forty-minute sessions that would have occurred under normal circumstances.

Another limitation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was that all classes were conducted remotely via a virtual classroom. Participation in classroom discussions and activities may not represent what would happen in a traditional classroom setting. Students were participating on camera and in their own homes which may have altered their typical participation behaviors.

A third limitation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was that students were living and learning under uniquely stressful and uncertain circumstances. Such circumstances may have had unusual or unforeseen impacts on students' social and emotional health that may have altered the results of the study.

A final limitation is that all participants are members of the district's gifted and talented program. As a result, students of varying academic ability levels were not represented.

Suggestions for Future Research

Further research in the area of SEL and CRP will continue to be beneficial to educators. Social and emotional learning has been a trending topic resulting in bountiful research in recent years, but not as much research has been done in connection with culturally responsive pedagogy. I suggest that researchers conduct this research with students from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Including participants from different cultural backgrounds may yield different results and/or provide new insights to researchers regarding the social and emotional skills of gifted students. Another

suggestion for future research is to encourage researchers to increase the amount of time dedicated to the research study. Increasing both the amount of time spent explicitly teaching and modeling SEL skills and the time for practice as well as the duration of time of doing so throughout the school year may yield additional or new information. Finally, I suggest conducting this research in a more typical school year when students are learning in a normal classroom setting as opposed to learning virtually.

Final Thoughts

In closing, simultaneously integrating social and emotional learning and culturally responsive pedagogy can have positive effects on students' perception about themselves and their abilities. Previous research suggests that one of the most effective ways to improve social and emotional skills, academic achievement, attitudes, and behaviors is through the incorporation of SEL and/or culturally responsive pedagogy. This research experience has had a positive impact on not only my teaching practices, but also on the way I view and interact with others by considering their social and emotional needs. Integrating social and emotional learning and culturally responsive pedagogy in my classroom will help my students develop skills that will make a lasting impact on their lives. It is my hope that through this research other educators will be willing to try these practices to help improve their students' perceptions about themselves and their abilities. Simultaneously integrating SEL and culturally responsive pedagogy can support this effort.

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