

6-2021

## How Social Interaction Opportunities and Emotional Skills Instruction Affect Kindergarteners' Self-Efficacy and Mental Health within the Distance Learning Model of School

Sarah Taraba  
rs5421xk@go.minnstate.edu

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### Recommended Citation

Taraba, Sarah, "How Social Interaction Opportunities and Emotional Skills Instruction Affect Kindergarteners' Self-Efficacy and Mental Health within the Distance Learning Model of School" (2021). *Education Masters Papers*. 9.  
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How Social Interaction Opportunities and Emotional Skills Instruction Affect Kindergarteners'  
Self-Efficacy and Mental Health within the Distance Learning Model of School

Sarah Taraba

A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Master of Science Degree in Education at  
Winona State University

Spring 2021

Winona State University  
College of Education  
Rochester Education Department

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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CAPSTONE PROJECT

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How Social Interaction Opportunities and Emotional Skills Instruction Affect Kindergarteners'  
Self-Efficacy and Mental Health within the Distance Learning Model of School

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Sarah Taraba

Has been approved by the faculty advisor and REDG 618 – Action Research: Capstone Project

Course Instructor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in Education

Capstone Project Supervisor:



Approval Date: 7/15/2021

### **Abstract**

This study was designed to investigate how implementing social interaction opportunities and emotional skill instruction could improve the overall mental health and self-efficacy levels of students in a kindergarten distance learning classroom. Due to the worldwide pandemic, COVID-19, students were forced to participate in a distance learning format. This meant that students utilized a technological device to participate in schooling through online meetings with teachers and classmates. The research that was conducted focused on kindergarten students as the participants to see what could be done to improve their overall mental health; increasing levels of positive emotions such as happiness, and decreasing the levels of negative emotions such as stress, worry or sadness. After implementing emotional skill instruction and increased social interaction opportunities, some positive effects were seen in the kindergarteners' overall state of mental wellbeing. Significant increases in levels of happiness and decreases in feelings of stress were seen throughout the data collected throughout this study.

How Social Interaction Opportunities and Emotional Skills Instruction Affect Kindergarteners' Self-Efficacy and Mental Health within the Distance Learning Model of School

**Introduction**

Wellbeing is defined as “the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy” (Merriam). Therefore, when someone is uncomfortable, unhealthy or unhappy it could be considered then that they are not in a state of wellbeing. Many people worldwide have experienced being in a state of not having overall wellbeing in their lives within this past year. When a pandemic hit, COVID-19, many people experienced that very state of not having wellbeing. According to psychiatrist Marcella Rietschel, “The distress in the pandemic probably stems from people’s limited social interactions, tensions among families in lockdown together and fear of illness” (Abbott, 2021, p. 2). Scientists and researchers from all over the world have conducted studies and research to collect data of how the pandemic is affecting people and their overall state of wellbeing. Because of the fast spread of the deadly disease, many countries were forced into lockdown, staying within your home and not socializing with anyone but the people you live with. As people continued to study the effects of the pandemic, some concluded, “Studies and surveys conducted so far in the pandemic consistently show that young people, rather than older people, are most vulnerable to increased psychological distress, perhaps because their need for social interactions are stronger” (Abbott, 2021, p. 2). Social interaction is vital for all human beings, especially the younger generation. With COVID-19 and the required lockdown, students of all ages were told to participate in school through a distance learning platform. Distance learning did not take into account the lack of social interaction, and the emotions that people all

over the world were experiencing, young or old. People were anxious, worried, scared, angry and in a state that lacked overall wellbeing, including young kindergarten students.

### **Rationale of Study**

Due to the lack of social interaction, students had displayed anxious and stressed behaviors, along with the decreased level of self-efficacy. Many students would become frustrated with the learning model and almost “shut-down” in an emotional state and were then unable to move forward with their learning. Within distance learning, for young students, it was also observed that many kindergarteners were experiencing a variety of emotions and did not have the tools to effectively recognize and handle that emotion in an appropriate way. With this dramatic shift in the learning environment and setting for young students, it is important to take into account how the various social and emotional aspects that are typically found within a physical classroom, have been taken away during distance learning for the students, and have dramatically changed a students overall mental health and wellbeing. This study focuses on how to bring social and emotional opportunities into a distance learning classroom to effectively and positively increase the young students mental health and self-efficacy levels.

### **Purpose of Study and Limitations**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how implementing social interaction opportunities and emotional skill instruction could improve the overall mental health and self-efficacy levels of students in a kindergarten distance learning classroom. Due to the 2019 COVID Pandemic, students across the world were forced to participate and learn through an

online setting. Distance learning requires the majority of the learning experience to occur through a screen; where social interaction and “free-play” time, and the emotional skill instruction is essentially taken away from the young students. The individual home learning environments that the students are living and learning in is something that is completely out of the researchers control. The researcher was only online with students for short amount of periods throughout the day in order to accommodate for their shorter attention spans.

### **Research Questions and Definitions**

This study was focused around three main research questions: 1.) How does social interaction and emotional skills instruction impact the level of stress? 2.) How does social interaction and emotional skill instruction impact the level of happiness? 3.) How does social interaction and emotion skills instruction impact the level of self-efficacy? When specifically looking at and considering the term stress, within this research project, stress was defined as: the level of feeling overwhelmed by distance learning work at home. The researcher was specifically looking at behaviors that were observed at home and reported by the guardians, the behaviors that were observed during instructional time and how the students were able to self-report their daily feelings. The happiness level that was being measured and considered within this research was defined as: The level of feeling positive emotions; such as happy, excited, motivated and calm, while completing kindergarten through the distance learning model. The researcher was specifically looking at behaviors that were observed at home, reported by the guardians, behaviors that were observed during instructional time and how the students were able to self-report their daily feelings. Finally, the term, self-efficacy, was defined as: the level of feeling

confident in the ability to achieve difficult tasks at the kindergarten academic and social emotional level. The researcher was specifically looking at behaviors that are observed at home and reported by the guardians, the behaviors that were observed during instructional time and how the students were able to self-report their daily feelings, such as the levels of happiness and stress were measured and recorded.

### **Literature Review**

Distance learning has been an avenue of teaching and learning in the past for short periods of time. As previously researched, “there have been two approaches to distance learning: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous learning involves students learning together in live environments like lectures, which allows great engagement and sense of community...asynchronous learning allows students to learn materials on their own..” (Chen, Kaczmarek, & Ohyama, 2020, p. 1). A research was conducted within the Harvard School of Dental and it was found that the students “perceived their education worsening with the transition to virtual learning with increased burnout and decreased retention and engagement in course material” (Chen, Kaczmarek, & Ohyama, 2020, p. 1). Utilizing this information for the current study pertaining to distance learning in kindergarten, the researcher had to take into account that a kindergarteners’ attention span is anywhere between two-three minutes. If it has been researched that a college students/adults’ attention worsened and level of engagement declined when transitioning into virtual learning, the researcher needed to discover effective ways to positively engage the kindergarten students and maintain their attention in online learning. Therefore, the researcher had included various emotional skill instruction and social

interaction opportunities in hopes that it would motivate the students to continue learning with engagement, raising their overall mental health and self efficacy levels. Another study focused on how distance learning can prove to be a difficult course of learning for young students because of their short attention span and poor self-discipline. It was stated that, “Because the students are far away and out of the teacher’s control, teachers cannot effectively supervise students with poor self-discipline...some students, especially pupils, might not have strong learning motivation or high self-control when their parents are too busy to supervise them; therefore, the students might not learn effectively when they are logged into the system” (Hwang & Yang, 2009, p. 22). Within this current study, the participants are at the kindergarten level of age, around five-six years old. These students do not have the maturity to log into a distance learning session and complete course work on their own. Therefore, if the parents/guardians at home with the student are not supervising them and supporting their learning, distance learning will become a stressor in the students life, something that they are not excited to participate in and something they may even think they are poor at. Conducting this current study will research the possible positive effects of providing specific social interaction opportunities and emotional skills instruction; therefore, giving the young students a way to manage their emotions when they are feeling frustrated or inadequate with the level of difficulty that comes with distance learning for a kindergarten student.

When taking a deeper look into past research, it has been seen that for college-level students, the academic aspect of distance learning has been reported with higher levels of achievement; however, with lower student satisfaction levels as well (Wallace, 2009). Within her study, Wallace determined that because of the higher level of reported academic achievement;

distance learning could be a comparable experience for younger aged gifted students. This research connects with the current study of distance learning in kindergarten due to the fact that the researcher could potentially see some academic improvement and achievement. However, the main aspect of the current study is measuring the overall mental wellbeing of kindergarten students. It is because of the research that was conducted by Wallace, proving that even though there was academic achievement present, and the satisfaction levels were lower than the ones reported from the students who were in the classroom, that students are still in need of a type of social interaction and level of engagement that is met within the classroom and not necessarily within distance learning. This moved the current research and study forward by having the researcher implement interventions and opportunities for the kindergarten students to experience that social aspect of learning to improve the satisfaction level; which in turn, would then also improve the mental wellbeing of the students.

### **Social Interaction and Play**

Young children are constantly playing and interacting with those around them, no matter where they may be. As mentioned in the TIME magazine, “Left alone, young children will launch into imaginary play, inventing characters and stories. Put together with peers, children will almost instinctively organize games and activities.” (Walsh, 2017). TIME magazine goes on to explain how play is the most basic concept that young children understand and connect with, “Play is so basic to childhood that it is seen even among children in the most dire conditions, in prisons and concentration camps. It is so important to the wellbeing of children that the UNited Nations recognizes it as a fundamental human right...” (Walsh, 2017). Taking this information

from TIME it is important to take into account that play is a crucial part in a child's life and fundamental growth. Play is something that children connect with and resort to when all else seems to fail. Play is a way of making sense of the world around them, of expressing emotions, and of communicating with one another. When considering the aspect of social interaction and "play" within a classroom for young students, in their study, Lee and Lang stated that "Play is known as the core occupation of young children, laying a foundation for their early development and physical, emotional and social wellbeing...Through play, children develop multiple skills including those related to social interaction, communication, peer interaction, executive function, and problem-solving skills" (Lee et al., 2020, p.1). It was this background research knowledge, of play being such an important aspect of a young child's growth and development, that drove this research for a distance learning classroom. With social interaction being a major playing part in a young students' academic and social growth, this study was designed to investigate how to make distance learning a more effective learning environment that would support students' mental health and self efficacy levels by providing opportunities for students to experience social interaction and emotional skill instruction, that they would typically receive in a physical classroom setting. Not only did this research work to provide social, "play" opportunities, but it also focused on the emotional skills instruction for the students and how that would affect their overall mental wellbeing. According to Lee and Lang's study, implementing the "play" aspect within the classroom was not enough to support the students' well-being on its own. With that knowledge, Lee and Lang implemented mindfulness practices within the classroom along with the play time for the students. It was discovered that, "There was a change in happiness scores, which is likely to reflect the impact of mindfulness activities and play

opportunities in the intervention group (Lee et al., 2020, p.10). It was these conclusions and results pertaining to opportunities for play and mindfulness being implemented into a classroom, that motivated this action research to discover a way to provide similar opportunities for students in a distance learning environment for schooling.

### **Social Emotional Instruction**

Within another study, the researchers implemented a social emotional curriculum, Head Start, for the students to measure their negative behavior and attentiveness levels within the Tulsa Public Schools (TPS). According to Phillips and Newmark, “ The children in the TPS pre-K and Head Start programs failed to demonstrate the increases in aggressive and disobedient behavior seen in the child-care research literature, and those who attended TPS pre-K were portrayed by their kindergarten teachers as exhibiting less timidity, as well as higher levels of attentiveness” (Gormley , Phillips, Newmark, Welti, & Adelstein, 2011, p. 2103). These findings and results show that social emotional skill instruction within the classroom setting had a positive impact upon the students' behaviors by decreasing the levels of aggression and increasing the levels of attentiveness and participation. Based upon these findings pertaining to emotional skills implementation, similar emotional skill implementation opportunities were made available for students within the distance learning environment for the current study in kindergarten .

### **Stress and Wellbeing**

When considering the level of stress that is put on students participating in distance learning, as mentioned in a recent study, “A large amount of online teaching started in response to this crisis. This took so many formats and used many interfaces in an attempt to deliver content and a false expectation developed that students should take responsibility for their own learning (Ahmed et al., 2020, p. 2). It was initially expected that students would take a level of responsibility for their own learning while participating in distance learning. While this can ring true for older aged students, having kindergarten students at the age of five-six years old, take responsibility for their own learning, is unsound. Putting this expectation on young students caused stress and the feeling of being inadequate to participate in kindergarten. The students were feeling defeated, unmotivated, stressed and displayed low levels of self-efficacy. Ahmed and Hegazy continue to state in their research that, “..face-to-face learning demonstrates the interaction with learners, facilitating the convenience of cooperative learning and also the clarity of learning material” (Ahmed et al., 2020, p. 2). Within the current study with distance learning kindergarten students, the researcher implemented specific social interaction opportunities in hopes that this would raise their mental wellbeing and almost mimic the social interaction and play that students would receive and experience in a classroom within a school building.

When considering the emotional distress that distance learning kindergarten students may experience, it is important to understand why they are experiencing the distress and what they have lost is the distance learning mode of learning compared to the in-person classroom mode of learning. As mentioned in one study, “Students typically do not learn alone but rather in collaboration with their teachers, in the company of their peers, and with the encouragement of their families. Emotions can facilitate or impede children’s academic engagement, work ethic,

commitment, and ultimate school success. Because relationships and emotional processes affect how and what we learn, schools and families must effectively address these aspects of the educational process for the benefit of all students (Elias et al., 1997) (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Young students learn best through the social interactions that they have in the school classroom and through the relationships that are built between them and their peers/teacher. Placing kindergarten students in a distance learning environment takes away that social interaction piece of learning that is so vital in a young student's development, academically and socially. Within the study, the researchers utilised SEL (Social Emotional Learning) instruction to provide the students ways of recognizing their own emotions and how to effectively manage them. It was seen within their research that, "Compared to controls, SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance that reflected an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement" (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011, p. 405). This knowledge and research drove the current study of research on kindergarten students in a distance learning environment due to the fact that there was an increase and improvement in social and emotional skills within the previous study that was conducted within the classroom. If similar efforts and instructional strategies were utilized within the distance learning environment, the researcher would potentially see similar results with the kindergarten students online. Researcher Jones, Greenberg and Crowley also support social - emotional skill instruction; for in their research, they found that, "...statistically significant associations between measured social-emotional skills in kindergarten and key young adult outcomes across multiple domains of education, employment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health...A kindergarten

measure of social-emotional skills may be useful for assessing whether children are at risk for deficits in noncognitive skills later in life and, thus, help identify those in need of early intervention” (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015, p. 2283). This research proves that providing social and emotional skill instruction is not only beneficial for the current mental wellbeing for the students, but also for the future wellbeing for the students. Therefore, within the current research for kindergarten students in distance learning, various emotional skills will be taught and learned in hopes that it will not only increase the mental wellbeing of the students and increase their self-efficacy levels, but also improve the mental wellbeing for them in the future.

### **Involvement and Engagement**

In any type of format of learning for young students, involvement and engagement are vital in order for the student to learn the material effectively. In a research conducted by Koomen, Leeuwen, and Leij, “...children’s involvement is important for learning and that experiences of emotional insecurity may negatively affect task involvement, test performance and eventually school achievement” (Koomen, Van Leeuwen, & Van Der Leij, 2004). This research proves that students need to be involved within their own learning and feel safe emotionally within their classroom in order to have success. In order for the kindergarten students in the current study to feel emotionally safe and secure, the researcher has provided multiple opportunities for the students to practice identifying their own emotions and how to handle and manage them; therefore, giving the students to chance to feel safe and having the opportunity to improve their self-efficacy levels and access success.

There is strong evidence through various studies and literature that implementing the aspect of “play” and implementing a version of social emotional or mindfulness instruction within a classroom can positively affect a students behaviour and wellbeing. This current research took this background information and implemented similar ideas into a distance learning classroom to discover if there would be similar or differing results, due to the fact of the complete lack of social and emotional opportunities of play time within the distance learning model of schooling.

## **Method**

Within this study, social interaction opportunities were implemented within a small group setting for the students, while emotional skill instruction was implemented within a whole group setting. Due to the COVID 2019 Pandemic and distance learning, there were some unique characteristics/considerations to take notice of: how the at home learning environment impacted (negatively/positively) the emotional skill instruction and how the at home environment impacted (negatively/positively) the students levels of happiness and stress. This might impact the inquiry because this form of teaching is modified due to the current pandemic.

For this study, 20 kindergarten students and their guardians will be participating within this study. There will be nine kindergarten females and eleven kindergarten males participating within this study. The students participating within this study identified as followed: fourteen students who identified as White, one student who identified as Black, one student who identified as Hispanic, and four students who identified as Asian/Pacific. Fourteen students whose primary language was spoken was English and six students who spoke English and their

home language. Due to the fact that the students are five-six years of age, they will need some type of parental assistance to complete the data collection surveys and questionnaires that will be administered through email. Gathering the exact demographics of the guardians that are at home with each student is difficult because of the nature of distance learning - students are being moved from one place to the next every other day with a different guardian.

### **Site Information of Study**

The study has taken place in a K-5 elementary school located in Rochester, MN. This elementary school is a Title 1 school that serves between 600-700 students everyday. The students within this school are specifically grouped in classrooms pertaining to the Total School Cluster Grouping Model (TSCGM). The TSCGM is how the school implements cluster grouping combined with differentiation, while focusing on improving the needs for all students.

### **Data collection procedures**

For this research, the researcher came up with COVID accommodating and online versions of collecting data. Various sets of data were collected in order to gain an understanding of what effects, if any effects, occurred because of the emotional instruction and social-play time opportunities provided for the students. Surveys, daily - interactive check in's and observations were the tools that were utilized to collect the data. The surveys will be utilized in order to gather the pre and post or baseline information and the ending growth data. The daily and weekly check-ins and observations will be utilized to gather the incremental data throughout the study. The data tools that have been utilized were triangulated. By triangulating the data, the researcher

was able to closely monitor, interpret and analyze each strategy utilized to gather data and how it affected the students' overall mental health and self-efficacy levels. Investigation of the data and the implementation of the instruction had then taken place to see if there are any commonalities or correlations between sets of data gathered.

Pertaining to the first and second research question: "How does social interaction and emotion skills instruction impact the level of stress," "How does social interaction and emotion skill instruction impact the level of happiness," there were three data tools that were utilized. The first data tool that was used was the Pre and Post Survey that was sent to the guardians of the students. This Pre and Post Survey inquired about the levels of happiness, stress and self-efficacy that were being observed at home from the guardians. Because of the students participating in distance learning, this study is not being conducted in a controlled classroom setting; therefore, it is vital for this research that information is gathered about what is being observed at home.

The second data tool that was utilized was an interactive check in that the students participated in. This check-in gave the students the opportunity to share what they were feeling and what emotions they were experiencing at that time. The check in took place before the social lunch bunch began. The researcher took anecdotal notes and observed how the students interacted with one another during that specific time frame of social interaction and free-time.

The third data collection tool utilized was the Morning Meeting daily check in. This check gives the student the same opportunity to express what emotions they may be feeling right away in the morning as they start school. The researcher would be able to compare the check in data from the morning with the check in data from later in the day during lunch bunch to see if there are any commonalities or differences within emotions expressed.

Pertaining to the third research question: “How does social interaction and emotion skills instruction impact the level of self-efficacy,” there were also three data collection tools used. The first data collection tool is the Pre and Post Survey that was sent to the guardians of the students that was also utilized for research questions one and two. The second data collection tool was the pre individual instructional meeting check in. The students are met on a weekly basis for individual instructional time with their classroom teacher. The teacher would have the students participate in the typical individual learning session and inquire about how that particular student was feeling pertaining to self-efficacy, or participating in school. This data was only collected once a week per student. Being able to measure the self-efficacy levels of the students on a weekly basis is important for this research to see if the implementation of the social interaction opportunities and the emotional skill instruction had many effects on their self-efficacy levels. The third and final data collection tool utilized was the tally chart that tracked the amount of negative self talk from the students during learning and instructional time. The students prior to the interventions were displaying negative self talk revolving around academic instructional time. Keeping a tally chart and tracking the amount of negative self talk that is heard each day is important to collect in order to see if there was any main effect on the students view of academics and how their self-esteem/self efficacy.

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Data Tool A</b>	<b>Data Tool B</b>	<b>Data Tool C</b>
How does social interaction and emotion skills instruction impact the level of stress.	Parent pre and post survey	Lunch Bunch check in before  Anecdotal Notes and Observations	Morning Meeting interactive before check in
How does social interaction and emotion skill instruction impact the level of happiness.	Parent pre and post survey	Lunch Bunch check in before  Anecdotal Notes and Observations	Morning Meeting interactive before check in
How does social interaction and emotion skills instruction impact the level of self-efficacy.	Parent pre and post survey	Post individual meeting check in on self-efficacy (weekly)	Track/tally chart of negative self-talk daily

### **Instruction**

The multiple activities that were implemented within this research took place within an online distance learning environment throughout each academic day. The social interaction, free-time opportunities were implemented three times throughout the week within whole group settings. The teacher sent out a Google Meet link that all students would have received on their

Seesaw school account on their iPads. Once all students were logged onto the Google Meet session, the teacher would begin by greeting each individual student by name. The students would then be given the direction and opportunity to share how they were feeling and what emotions they were experiencing at that time. The participants would share this information by holding up a half paper plate “Emotion Face.” The students are provided with five main emotions that are presented on their Emotion Face paper plate. The emotions happy, sad, and worried/stressed are the three emotions the students would be able to choose to identify with. If the student wasn’t experiencing any of those particular three main emotions, the student was invited to hold up a blank paper plate Emotion Face and share what they were feeling comfortable in sharing that information. The teacher would take note of the emotions shared, validate the students emotions and then continue on in having a lunch bunch, free-time Google Meet Session. During this 30 minute Google Meet, the students were invited to share anything that they wanted to talk about; something exciting at home, something they were wondering about, or even sharing some of their favorite objects at home. The teacher would provide some fun, Would You Rather, questions for the students to talk about to get the conversation started. The emotional skill instruction will be implemented within whole group and individual instructional settings. I will have the participants input their data before and after each session of social interaction and emotional skill instruction. The pre and post surveys will take place before the study is implemented in order to get the baseline data required. And the post survey will take place after the study has been implemented in order to compare to the baseline data.

For the emotional skill instruction implementation, the students had been given the opportunity to not only share their emotions and feelings, but also learn more about different

emotions Monday-Thursday each week. The students would enter into a Google Meeting starting at 9am until 9:30am for a Morning Meeting. Once all students were logged onto the Google Meeting, the teacher would ask the students to identify the emotion that they are experiencing by holding up their Emotion Face paper plate. The teacher would take note, validate the students emotions and then move into the emotional instruction and daily Morning Meeting activities. The teacher would begin with the daily calendar activities, and question of the day activities. Each week, a new emotion would be introduced to the students. The emotions that were taught were: happiness/calm, sadness, anxiety/stressed, anger, and love. The students would learn more about each emotion, each week by listening to particular emotion videos/short clips and participating in class discussions and drawings. Once the main emotional skill is taught during morning meetings, the students would then participate in a mindfulness calming activity; giving the students the opportunity to calm their bodies and reflect upon what emotion was just learned about and how they may have experienced that emotion themselves.

## **Results**

Data was collected to determine how implementing social interaction opportunities and emotional skill instruction could improve the overall mental health and self-efficacy levels of students in a kindergarten distance learning classroom. Several data collection tools were used to assess students' levels of happiness, stress and self-efficacy. The tools used to collect data on these areas were: Parent pre and post survey, emotional daily/weekly check-in's, tally charts and observations. The results section answers the three sub-questions posed by this study: 1.) How does social interaction and emotional skills instruction impact the level of stress? 2.) How does

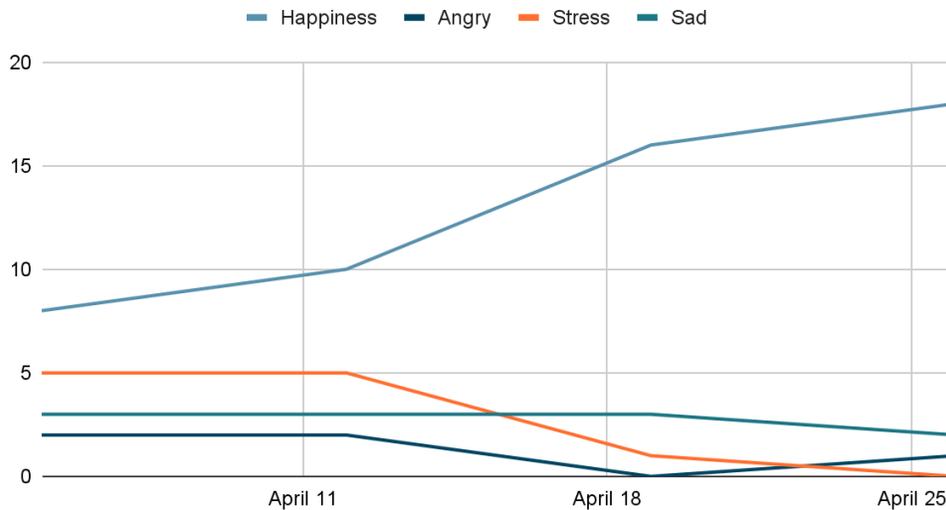
social interaction and emotional skill instruction impact the level of happiness? 3.) How does social interaction and emotion skills instruction impact the level of self-efficacy?

**How does social interaction and emotional skills instruction impact the level of happiness:**

***Morning Meeting Check-In:***

Within this intervention, the students were asked to log in to the daily Morning Meeting on Google Meets. When all students were present, the researcher would ask the students to display the emotion that they were feeling about school. The students would do this by holding up emotion face paper plates that they had created with the researcher. The emotion face paper plates displayed the emotions: happy, sad, angry, and stress. The students would choose the emotion face paper plate that represented their emotion that day for school and would hold it up over their face for the researcher to see. The researcher was then able to identify how many students were feeling happy, sad, angry or stressed about school.

### Morning Meeting Check In



As seen in the graph above, the overall happiness level went from having seven students report out of being happy to a level where all twenty students were able to report out about being happy at the beginning of the school day; thus displaying that the level of happiness increased overall. Along with the level of happiness increasing, the level of the emotions of stress and anger decreased.

#### ***Parent Pre and Post Survey:***

Due to the fact of the world-wide pandemic, COVID-19, the researcher was not able to instruct the students everyday all day, and have a first hand knowledge of what they were feeling and experiencing, as one would typically in a normal classroom experience; many external factors being out of the researcher's control. In order to gather the baseline data of the emotions felt by the students, the research had to involve the guardians at home with the students. The

researcher sent home a survey (pre-survey - before research intervention began) asking the guardians questions pertaining to the child's level of happiness, stress and self-efficacy. The level of happiness report is displayed below in the graph. Because of the nature of distance learning and COVID-19, the researcher didn't get many responses back. There are five responses out of twenty total possible responses displayed in the graph. The researcher received zero responses back for the post-survey; therefore, the researcher was not able to compare data to see if there was significant growth or not in this aspect.

Level of happiness for your kindergarten student when completing school work or participating in school.

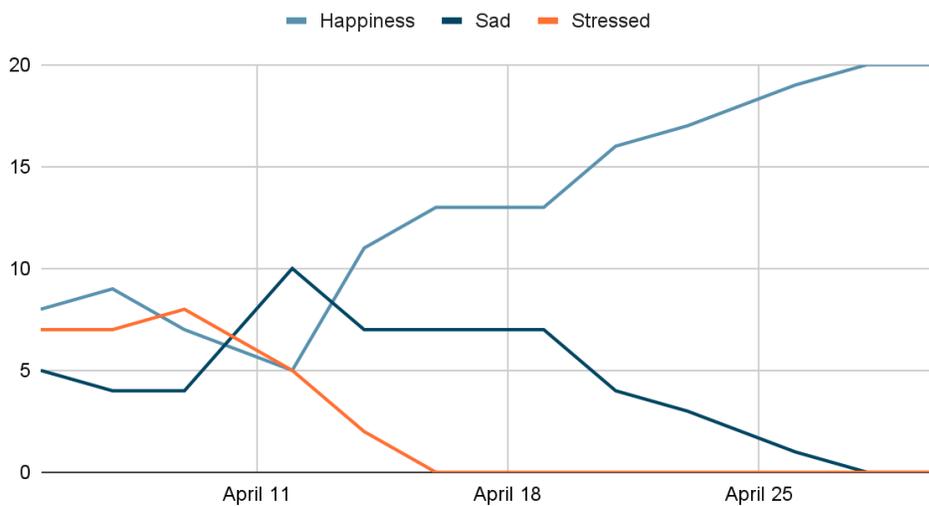


As seen in the pre-graph above presented by the parents, 40% of responses showed that students were somewhat happy, 40% of responses showed that students were happy, and 20% of responses showed that students were very happy. Based on the data in the pre-graph, the four out of the five students' parents reported that their child was happy or somewhat happy; therefore, that information told that researcher that there could be room for emotional improvement for those few students within the intervention.

***Lunch Bunch Check-In:***

Within this part of the research intervention, the students were given the opportunity to have a sense of a social time during distance learning called Lunch Bunch. This was a time for students to log on to Google meets for about 20-30 minutes to eat lunch with the researcher and classmates. This was a time where the students had the chance to share new and exciting things that were happening at home, new toys, and fun projects that they might have been working on. During this social time, the researcher also taught the students how to play a variety of games while online. After about 20-30 minutes all students waved goodbye to each other and logged off the Google Meet. Below you will see a graph that displays how the students reported feeling as they entered into the Lunch Bunch Google Meet at the beginning.

Lunch Bunch Check In



Near the beginning of this intervention, the students reported the emotions, happiness, sadness and stress. As the weeks continued on, the graph displays how the students' emotions of sadness and stress declined as the emotion happiness increased to the point where all students, near the

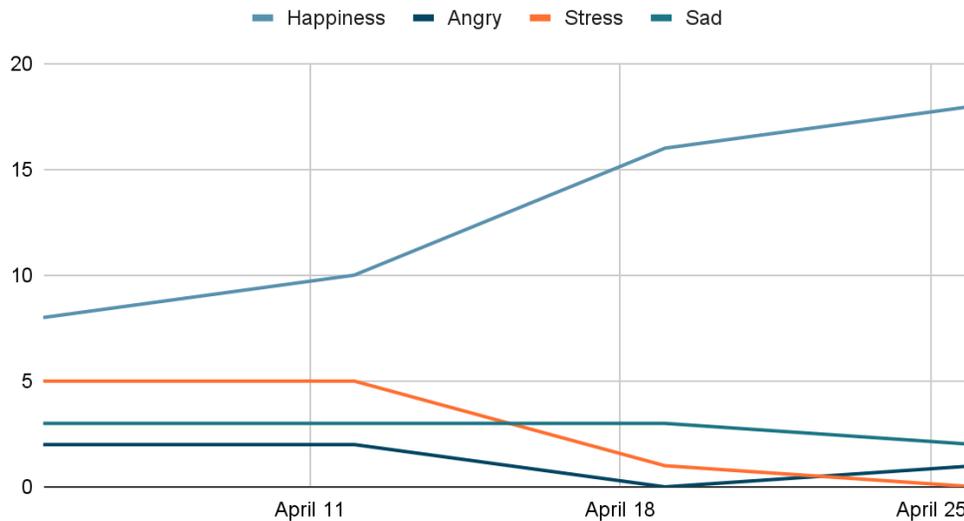
end of the intervention, reported being happy at the beginning of the last Lunch Bunch Google Meet.

**How does social interaction and emotional skills instruction impact the level of stress:**

***Morning Meeting Check-In:***

This part of the research intervention remains the same as the Morning Meeting measuring the level of happiness among the students, except for the fact that this graph and set of data focuses of the level of stress among the students. the students were asked to log in to the daily Morning Meeting on Google Meets. When all students were present, the researcher would ask the students to display the emotion that they were feeling about school. The students would do this by holding up emotion face paper plates that they had created with the researcher. The emotion face paper plates displayed the emotions: happy, sad, angry, and stress. The students would choose the emotion face paper plate that represented their emotion that day for school and would hold it up over their face for the researcher to see. The researcher was then able to identify how many students were feeling happy, sad, angry or stressed about school.

### Morning Meeting Check In



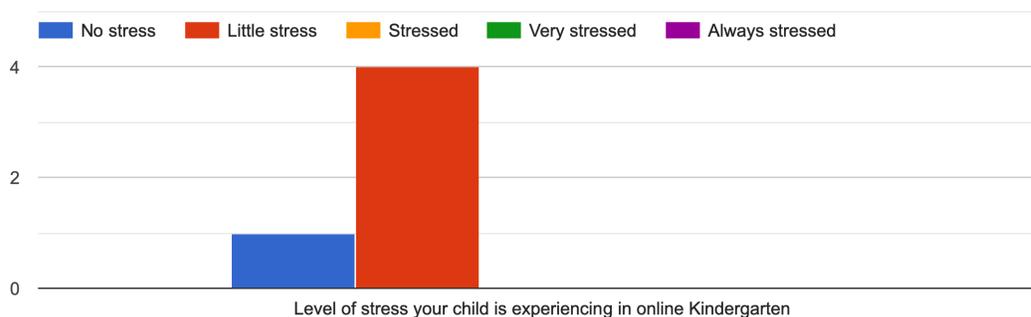
Within this graph of the pre-survey sent to parents pertaining to the level of stress their child was experiencing during distance learning kindergarten, four respondents reported having their child have little stress and one responded with their child having no stress. 80% of the responses state that there was a level of stress being experienced at home; proving that there was a need for some change within the classroom in order to help solve the feeling of stress among students.

#### ***Parent Pre and Post Survey:***

This set of data came from the same pre-survey that the research had sent to the students' parents asking to report on the emotions that were being observed within their home environment; happiness, stress, and self-efficacy. Due to the fact of COVID-19 and the nature of distance learning, the researcher depended on the parents of the students to report back on what emotions were being displayed at home. Same as the pre-survey report on the level of happiness, only five parents had responded to the level of stress that was being displayed at home by their

kindergarten child. No responses were reported back to the researcher for the post-survey; therefore, the researcher had nothing to compare the data to and was unable to make a conclusion and comparison of the levels of emotions (stress) for the students.

Level of stress for your kindergarten student when completing school work or participating in school.



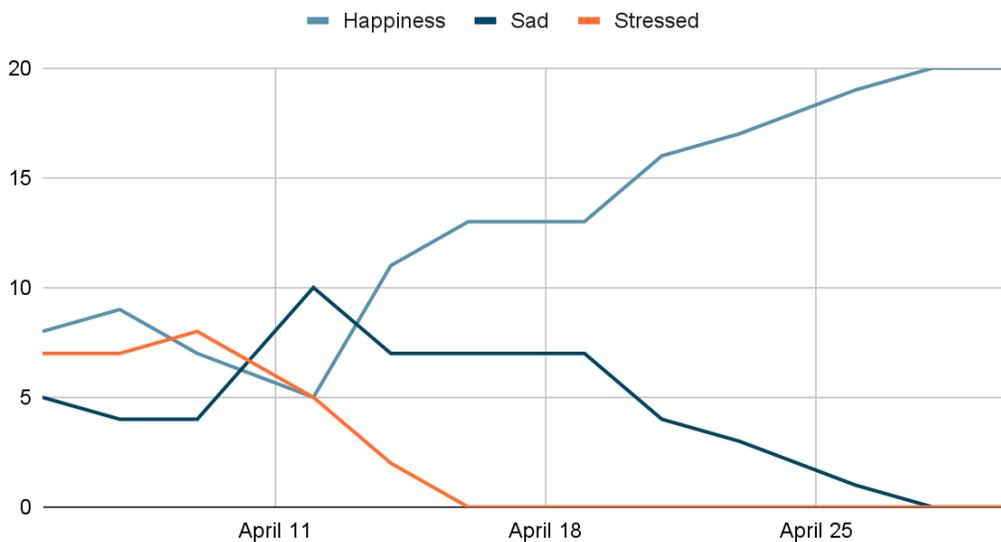
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### ***Lunch Bunch Check-In:***

This part of the research intervention was the same as the Lunch Bunch check in for happiness; except focusing on the data levels of happiness, this graph reports on the levels of stress that were given by the students. Again, the process of Lunch Bunch that occurred was; the

students were given the opportunity to have a sense of a social time during distance learning called Lunch Bunch. This was a time for students to log on to Google meets for about 20-30 minutes to eat lunch with the researcher and classmates. This was a time where the students had the chance to share new and exciting things that were happening at home, new toys, and fun projects that they might have been working on. During this social time, the researcher also taught the students how to play a variety of games while online. After about 20-30 minutes all students waved goodbye to each other and logged off the Google Meet. Below you will see a graph that displays how the students reported feeling as they entered into the Lunch Bunch Google Meet at the beginning.

Lunch Bunch Check In



When looking at the graph, focusing on the level reported on the emotion stress, the graph displays that some students, seven students, near the very beginning of the research

intervention were reporting that they had strong feelings of stress and worry. Throughout the weeks of the research intervention, the graph displays that the amount of stress and worry reported by students quickly decreased within the second week of intervention.

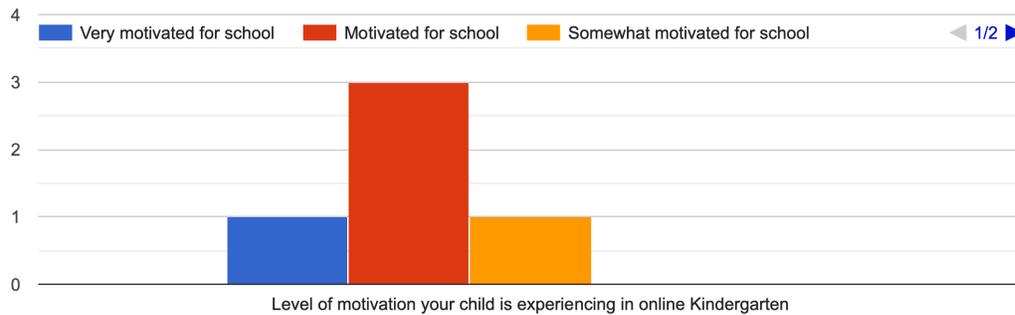
**How does social interaction and emotional skills instruction impact the level of self-efficacy:**

***Parent Pre and Post Survey:***

This data was part of the same pre-survey that asked questions pertaining to their child's level of happiness and stress that was sent to students' parents by the researcher, except this set of data pertained to the level of self-efficacy that was being experienced at home from the kindergarteners. Again, due to COVID-19, the researcher had to depend on the parents' feedback in order to gather a baseline of data to see how the students were feeling. The parents had the opportunity to choose between the following categories for self-efficacy:

- 1.) Very Motivated for School
- 2.) Motivated for School
- 3.) Somewhat Motivated for School
- 4.) Little Motivation for School
- 5.) Not Motivated for School

Level of Self Efficacy for your kindergarten student when completing school work or participating in school.- "I know I can do this even when it is hard mindset"



Based on the self-efficacy data of the pre-survey, the graph displays that three of five parents reported their child being motivated for school, one out of five parents reported having their child somewhat motivated for school and lastly, one out of five parents reported having their child be very motivated for school. 60% of students were feeling motivated for school, and 20% of responses were feeling somewhat motivated for school, but neither weren't very motivated for school. This told the researcher that 80% of the responses that came back had potential of improving throughout the research intervention.

### ***Tally Chart of Negative Self Talk:***

Throughout the research intervention, the researcher was keeping track of how many negative comments/self-talk was being stated by the students throughout each day. Through observations and notes, the researcher was hearing comments such as; "I can't do this," "This is too hard and I am not smart enough to do it," "I am dumb" that came from the students. The researcher kept track of the amount of negative comments and self-talk that was being said

throughout the entire research intervention. The researcher would typically hear the negative self-talk during the individual one-on-one instructional Google Meet sessions that the researcher would have with each of the students. Below is a graph displaying the amount of negative self-talk comments that were heard by the researcher.

Negative Self Talk

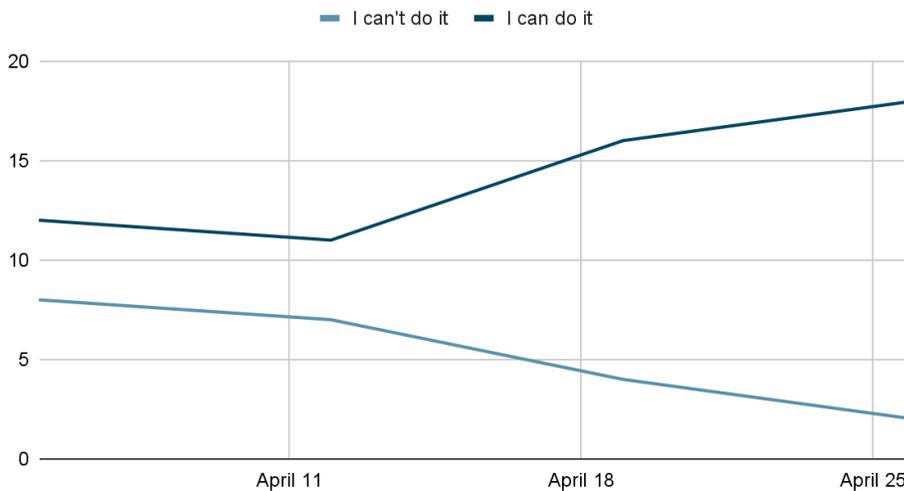


Based on the graph above, the researcher was able to see that there was a significant amount of negative self-talk near the beginning of the research intervention; however, the amount of negative comments that came from the students quickly declined during the first and second week. In the graph, there are multiple times of sudden increases of negative self-talk comments; however, near the end of the intervention, there were no negative comments recorded by the researcher.

***Weekly Individual Meeting Check-In:***

Within this research intervention, the researcher scheduled individual one-on-one Google Meeting times with each student throughout each week. During this time, the researcher and the student would conduct various academic activities and lessons with one another for about 20-30 minutes at a time. It was during these meetings that the researcher would ask the students how they were feeling about school before the lessons and activities began. The researcher would give the options, “I can’t do it,” or “I can do it” for the students. The students would circle one option on the screen to report back to the researcher. Sometimes the researcher would discuss with the students why they were feeling the way that they reported. The graph below displays how many students had strong self-efficacy or poor self-efficacy.

Individual Weekly Check In



As noticed within the graph, twelve students out of twenty students were reporting, “I can do it,” stating that they had strong self-efficacy near the beginning of the research intervention. However, the graph had also displayed that eight students were reporting, “I can’t do it,” stating that they had weaker self-efficacy near the beginning of the research intervention. As the weeks

continued on, the strong self-efficacy levels increased as the weaker self-efficacy levels decreased.

The results of the intervention have been compiled into three sections in order to address each of the three sub-questions: How does social interaction and emotional skills instruction impact the level of happiness? How does social interaction and emotional skills instruction impact the level of stress? How does social interaction and emotional skills instruction impact the level of self-efficacy? In each section of the findings, the data has been presented to include not only various student perspectives but also parent perspectives. Overall, the results showed student levels of happiness, student levels of stress, and student self-efficacy increased as a result of social interaction and emotional skill instruction.

## **Discussion**

This research had many positive results, along with unknown outcomes due to some limitations within the research that, if eliminated, could potentially change the results. This research was conducted in order to discover how social interaction and emotional skill instruction could benefit the students and their overall mental wellbeing. Within the classroom, I had noticed that many of my students were displaying some serious emotions; lack of motivation, anger, sadness, stress, and loneliness, etc.. When thinking back upon my own schooling, and previous teaching experiences, I tried to think about what the students had in the classroom and what my students, in distance learning, were missing. I came to the realization that due to the nature of distance learning, students aren't being given the same social interaction

opportunities as students typically are given within the classroom. This past school year 2020-2021 was a very stressful year for many, causing anxiety for many people. I noticed that the emotions with my students online were running high. With the abundance of emotions that I was witnessing with my students, I knew I needed to provide my students with the skills and tools to be able to change and manage their behaviors and emotions.

### ***Emotions and Social Interaction***

Within this research I, as the researcher, was able to teach my students important tools in order to recognize and manage their own emotions. We first began by learning some mindfulness practice and learning how to focus on our breathing to calm our bodies down. For each week, the students and I focused on one-two emotions. We learned what the emotion is, what it looks like, what happens when we experience it, and what we can do to help manage it. As the weeks of the intervention went on, I was able to notice that my students were beginning to recognize their own emotions more easily and immediately began to breathe when needing to calm their bodies and minds. Within the data that was collected within the Morning Meeting check-ins and the Lunch Bunch check-ins, the graphs display an overall increase in the happiness levels of my students and an overall decrease in the stressful emotions. When looking at the data again, it can also be seen that there was a dramatic decrease in the amount of negative self-talk comments coming from my students. The increase of happiness, and decrease of stress and negative self-talk comments could have resulted from the emotional skill instruction given to the students within the research. However, the overall increase in the levels of happiness could have also come from the increased opportunities of social interaction for my distance learning students.

The social interaction opportunities of Lunch Bunch, gave my students the ability to simply be children and display their excitement to others and form friendships with classmates. The graphs pertaining to Lunch Bunch, displayed an overall increase of happiness. The students could've been excited to interact, non-academically, with their peers, which in turn would make them feel the emotion of happiness.

### ***Limitations***

There were some limitations within this research that I had very little control. The increase level of happiness was a positive result to see; however, due to the fact of the way that this research was conducted, there is no absolute positive way to tell if the increase of the level of happiness was due to the fact of the emotional skill instruction, the increased level of social interaction, or both. If I were to do this research again, I would break my students into various groups; a control group, a group receiving emotional skill instruction, a group receiving social interaction and a group receiving both. The data for all groups could then be collected, analysed and compared with one another to see which group had the greatest positive results. Another major limitation that occurred within this research was the fact that I only received five out of twenty pre-surveys back from parents in order for me, as the researcher, to collect the baseline data. Due to the fact that I only received five pre-surveys back, I only knew the baseline emotional stance of five of my students. I had very little knowledge of how my students were feeling and what emotions were being expressed in their home environments throughout each school day online. Therefore, without accurate baseline data, my results could be viewed as not accurate. The final limitation was due to the fact that I never received any post-survey responses

back from parents; therefore, now knowing if there was a positive increase of emotions and behaviors at home. Receiving zero data back from parents for the post-survey, left me with very little to compare and analyze with that set of data.

## **Conclusion**

This research addressed a very important aspect of teaching. Students should be taught the knowledge, skills and tools in order to handle everyday life, along with the standards that teachers are required to teach. Yes, the standards were being taught within my class and my students were learning amazing things; learning how to read their first books, learning about animal habitats, how to compare and contrast various concepts, learning about scientists and how to observe and conduct experiments, how to add and subtract, etc.,. But even with all that engagement of learning, my students were still struggling with the most basic human aspect: emotion. Thinking ahead, emotional skill instruction and increased social interaction time with classmates are concepts of teaching that all teachers should consider making a priority in their own classrooms. My research displayed positive results within the simple few weeks of the intervention. With increased time and stronger implementation, students could learn to thrive in the classroom academically, socially and emotionally; therefore, setting them up for a stronger future ahead and an overall healthier mental wellbeing.

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