Impacts of Social-Emotional Learning Via a Daily Writing Reflection in the Secondary Classroom

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Impacts of Social-Emotional Learning Via a Daily Writing Reflection in the Secondary Classroom

A Qualitative Research Methods Proposal
A Project Presented to the Graduate Faculty of Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine a time effective and subject area friendly way to address students’ social-emotional needs as a means to alleviate stress, communicate with teachers, and improve their overall wellbeing. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been many unforeseen or unaddressed repercussions that educators will continue to be dealing with as schools return to traditional formats or as they adjust to new ones. What impact can the use of daily journal writing have for high school students as an immediate and potentially long-term social-emotional learning or competency technique?

This study was conducted using a qualitative method design for a period of four weeks. The qualitative data was collected through student journals and field notes, as well as surveys at the beginning and end of the study. The sophomore class was specifically chosen by the researcher. Since the study focused particularly on adolescence, sophomores best fit the peak range of adolescent age (15-17 years of age). This group of students also had the experiences of starting high school in the traditional classroom setting as seventh graders, the abrupt transition to school in the home and distance learning as eighth graders, experience with the hybrid method of classroom delivery as ninth graders, and back to traditional in-person learning five days a week as sophomores, all during adolescence.

Results determined that although initially met with hesitation, daily journaling became an enjoyable daily activity, allowing students to express themselves and relieve stress in a different way than they had while quarantining or isolating. Student attitudes toward writing, understanding of emotional regulation, and communication between teacher and student also improved.

Keywords: Emotional regulation, social-emotional learning, journaling, secondary education
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In mid-March of 2020, entire school districts across the United States shut down completely in response to the spread of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has only started demonstrating its gripping after-effects on today’s youth. Elementary and secondary students struggled with internet connectivity, distance learning, and only being able to see their friends through a computer or phone screen, leading to prolonged feelings of isolation. At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, schools had to choose whether to host classes in an in-person, hybrid, or distance learning setting. Schools in areas of lower COVID-19 cases were more likely to have students back in the building than in larger metro areas where case numbers may have been higher.

As students came or will continue to come back to in-person instruction, new social and emotional stressors may surface as a result of such a drastic and sudden change with home and social situations. More specifically, teachers within the secondary classroom setting who have students in the classroom have already been starting to see an increase in anxiety as a result of distance learning and isolation or needing to quarantine due to close contact with a COVID-19 positive individual (Lan et al., 2020). According to Nidhi Sharma (2020), who is a Dean of Academic Affairs in a K-12 STEM institution, “These stressors are bound to trigger new symptoms and aggravate underlying neurological conditions” (p. 86). Students will need to develop healthy self-regulatory habits as a way to cope with new or unsettling emotions and social situations as they transition back into an uncertain school routine. Many students look to their teachers for guidance and “pastoral care” (Vance et al., 2015, p. 198) especially since the teachers may be the only familiar part of their school day. Helping students feel safe and supported has always been a top priority to educators. Daily journal entries with writing prompts geared towards social and emotional behaviors may be one healthy way for students to begin the process of dealing with the pandemic’s emotional aftermath.
Brief Literature Review

The idea of a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum is not a novel one. However, most of the curricula developed for social-emotional learning has taken place within the context of the primary classroom setting and not the secondary classroom since studies have shown that SEL tends to have the greatest impact on students at a young age as a preventive way to keep the social-emotional competency gap narrow as they get older (Low et al., 2015). Even so, the fact that students have had an incredible, sudden disruption to their lives will undoubtedly increase the need for educators of all subject areas, abilities, and ages to find a way to address or review social-emotional competency measures in order to keep students feeling safe and secure upon returning to school.

One interesting topic discovered during preliminary research was the promotion of a dialogue journal. In a dialogue journal, students and teachers can share comments, stories, words of encouragement, or experiences to help develop self and social skills in a more private setting, away from the judgment or social pressures of their peers or other environmental influences. According to Konishi & Park (2017), “It allows the student to express his or her feelings and thereby, explore emotions with the teacher during the learning process which is crucial to the well-being of the child” (p. 247). Not only would a dialogue journal promote social-emotional development, but allowing students the opportunity to sort through and organize their thoughts or ask any pressing but perhaps private questions at the beginning of the class period may enable them to focus more on classroom content for the remainder of the class period since they have dealt with any emotional burdens that may have been causing a prior loss of focus.

A major roadblock in preliminary research about conducting a social-emotional learning strategy in the secondary setting was the amount of teachers who felt that this would add more stress to their career and subsequently decrease their rate of job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012). In some regards, this reflects very negatively on educational professionals; an educator’s job is not just grades and standardized tests. Many studies have shown the correlation between social-emotional competence and student achievement (Bierman et al., 2010; Collie et al., 2012; Green et al., 2018; Low et al., 2015; Low et al.,
2019; McClelland & Cameron, 2011). It became clear that a study was needed that could demonstrate to other educators that social-emotional learning is paramount to student mental health and classroom achievement, and that a simple task such as journal writing could easily be added to any curriculum without inducing higher levels of stress for students or teachers.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is an increasing need for educators of all abilities, content areas, and ages to be aware of and respond to student mental health concerns as students transition back into classrooms after months of involuntarily being away from friends, family, and traditional social settings. These feelings of isolation, uncertainty, anxiousness, depression, and confusion may surface through disruptive or uncooperative classroom behavior. The researcher’s own classroom has seen a decrease in student participation in classroom discussions, higher numbers of missing assignments, and an increase in off-task behavior such as playing games or watching Netflix on their school-issued student devices instead of working on schoolwork during and after regular school hours. These behaviors are all ways for students to avoid on-task behavior. This research study explored the use of daily journaling through SEL-driven prompts as an effective coping strategy to address or lower students’ feelings of isolation, anxiety, or other forms of stress as they transition back to in-person classes.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine a time effective and subject area friendly way to address students’ social-emotional needs as a means to alleviate stress, communicate with teachers, and improve their overall wellbeing. Since this is the first time that most, if not all, staff and students will have gone through a pandemic that has shut down school systems across the entire country, there have been many unforeseen or unaddressed repercussions that educators will continue to be dealing with as school settings return to traditional formats or as they adjust to new ones.

Adolescence can be a very confusing time on its own; combined with a pandemic that has caused prolonged periods of isolation during adolescence and the results, so far, have been profound. And until the education system, or students’ home environments, come up with ways to effectively manage these
underlying or newfound stressors, it may be up to individual educators to find and utilize their own ways of helping students be in control of their own social-emotional competency and regulation.

**Research Question**

What impact can the use of daily journal writing have for high school students as an immediate and potentially long-term social-emotional learning or competency technique?

**Definition of Variables**

Independent Variable: Social-emotional learning journal prompts. Each week focused on a different emotion or socially-related topic for students to reflect upon in their journals.

Dependent Variable: Efficacy in journaling as a method to address and meet students’ social-emotional needs, decrease stress, and/or increase communication with the classroom teacher.

**Significance of the Study**

With mental health illness on the rise, it is of the utmost importance that healthy and meaningful ways to detect and manage social-emotional behaviors are easy for teachers and students to implement into their own daily lives or curricula. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2018, “65 million adolescents lost their lives to self-infringing injuries or suicide” (Parra, 2020, p. 225). Coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, which for many includes prolonged periods of isolation or quarantine away from friends and family, and depression rates are bound to go up. For teenagers, adolescence is a time period marked as a transition away from parents or caretakers and closer to friends or classmates. Due to the pandemic, the opposite has happened: the majority of teens have spent more time with parents and even less time with friends, negatively impacting their emotional development (Thomas & Rogers, 2020, p. 89).

Because of this abrupt halt in emotional development, a return to school has meant a return to emotional development, which may be on overdrive to make up for time lost due to the pandemic. Still unknown is how acutely and how differently the pandemic will affect the classroom setting; however, the prolonged disruption of in-person classes will have a greater effect on children with greater sensitivities (Parra, 2020, p. 229). Educators may see this in the form of negative classroom behaviors for all children,
but some more than others. In order to reach the most students about emotional competency and remain
germane to their subject area, educators may need to address both at the same time. A dialogue journal
not only fosters mutual trust and respect (Konishi & Park, 2017), but allows students a way to release
their emotions upon paper and not upon people, cluing their educators in on the root or reason for other,
typically negative, behaviors presented in the classroom. If a dialogue journal can address or help identify
emotional regulation issues, it can also help prevent negative classroom behaviors such as outbursts
(usually due to frustration or anger). Like a domino effect, preventing negative classroom behaviors may
also help to promote positive classroom behaviors by practicing self-regulation at the beginning of the
class period. Lastly, a dialogue journal may also be used as a way to seek out students who may be in
more need for greater social-emotional help which hopefully will lead to fewer suicides.

As teenagers transition from high school to college, a career, or other great life change, journaling
could provide a consistent and effective way to help ease transitions. A journal is very portable for young
children and adults, whether paper or electronic. If journaling as a form of self-regulation has a positive
impact on teenagers, it can easily become a healthy life-long practice.

Research Ethics

Permission and IRB Approval

In order to conduct this study, the researcher received MSUM’s Institutional Review Board (IRB)
approval to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects (Fraenkel et al., 2019).
Likewise, authorization to conduct this study was approved from the school district where the research
project took place (see Appendix E and Appendix F).

Informed Consent

Protection of human subjects participating in research was assured. Participant minors were
informed of the purpose of the study via the Method of Assent (see Appendix D) that the researcher read
to participants before the beginning of the study. Participants were aware that this study was conducted as
part of the researcher’s Master Degree Program and that it will benefit her teaching practice. Informed
consent means that the parents of participants have been fully informed of the purpose and procedures of
the study for which consent is sought and that parents understand and agree, in writing, to their child participating in the study (Rothstein & Johnson, 2021). Confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., Student 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time was outlined, both verbally and in writing.

**Limitations**

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic caused a few different limitations within the study. The first was the amount of participants needing to quarantine after a positive COVID-19 test or as the result of being named a close contact to that of a confirmed case. Some participants had to quarantine a second time within the duration of the study, greatly impacting their participation in the number of daily journal entries as well as the amount of practice with emotional-regulation, and this in turn could have impacted their overall response to the study as indicated within their Post-Study Survey.

One other limitation that impacted this study was the number of anticipated participants versus actual participants. Due to the immediate quarantine of half of one section of the sophomore class on the first day of the study, along with another round of quarantine with half of the students from the other section of the sophomore class, many students verbally or electronically indicated their desire to be a participant of the study; however, only 23 of the possible 35 students actually submitted their Informed Consent form before the closure of the study. It should also be noted that the Pre-Study Survey was distributed to all students because of the unexpected quarantine as well as the amount of anticipated participants at the time the study began.

Another limitation of this study was entirely dependent upon each participants’ daily choice of writing prompt. Participants had the option to not write about prompts that may cause them emotional distress, which in turn could have affected the results. However, a decrease in the number of participants writing during certain prompts could also signify another area of importance for educators to begin investigating.
This research study did not factor or focus at all on implications or associations with homeschooling as the main source of education for any students for any length of time. Distance learning and hybrid learning are not associated with homeschooling in this study.

**Conclusions**

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused and will continue to cause an increase in mental health conditions, especially within teenagers, disruptive to their emotional development. As schools transition back to traditional, face-to-face classes, educators may see the gap in emotional development surface through classroom behaviors. One way to reduce unwanted behaviors such as outbursts of anger or frustration while increasing productive classroom behaviors is through the use of a dialogue journal. Dialogue journals can be used in the elementary, secondary, post-secondary, and post-graduate settings, making it a healthy and effective way for anyone to practice self-regulation.

The next chapter will review literature pertaining to this study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Adolescent mental health awareness and training has increasingly been pushed onto the plates of educators around the United States in recent years; a topic that not all teachers are confident or qualified to incorporate into their already-demanding curriculum. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and now into the 2021 school year, educators have seen and will continue to see an even greater increase of mental health issues arise, and, if left untreated, will have irrevocable and detrimental outcomes. According to a study done on the effects of the SARS epidemic, results of having to quarantine can include depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other psychological disorders (Hawryluck et al., 2004). School psychologists and social workers, while more properly trained to handle severe cases of childhood trauma and common mental disorders such as depression and anxiety, are limited in their capacity to handle this increase in students with underlying or aggravated mental health needs.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs are available as a universal guide, but not all teachers are confident in their ability to implement such programs, thus driving down its efficacy (Collie et al., 2012; Vance et al., 2015). Many SEL programs are integrated into the elementary classroom setting, and those skills become forgotten as early as over the summer and even more so as students get older (Low et al., 2015). However, the need is now. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and especially after, teachers need to be alert to the transition of students coming back into the classrooms and the emotional baggage that may be undetected at first. One way that secondary English/Language Arts educators can help identify or provide an outlet for students with mental health needs is through daily journaling. Daily journaling not only provides a nonverbal outlet for any hesitant or internally overwhelmed students, but can also foster positive student-teacher relationships, improve student achievement, and lead to fewer disruptive behaviors in the classroom (Bierman et al., 2010; Konishi & Park, 2017; Low et al., 2019).
Body of the Review

Context
A plethora of studies have continuously shown the correlation between SEL engagement and higher amounts of student achievement along with reduced amounts of disruptive classroom behavior (Bierman et al., 2010; Collie et al., 2012; Green et al., 2018; Low et al., 2015; Low et al., 2019; McClelland & Cameron, 2011). In general, the younger a child is introduced to social-emotional learning agents, the greater the impact it can have on curbing negative behaviors, with young boys experiencing the greatest measured growth (Bierman et al., 2010; Low et al., 2015).

SEL Definition
Social-emotional learning promotes the ability to address and respond to a variety of social themes such as conflict resolution, problem solving, and character education, as well as emotional awareness and self-regulation. A host of learning skills are also taught to help encourage positive ways to respond to aggressive behavior as well as simple classroom skills such as listening, asking for help, and developing cognitive function and attention, and more (Low et al., 2015).

Limitations
Although the data for SEL curricula consistently show improvements and overall positive results, the vast majority of these studies are done within the elementary setting only, are only taught over the course of one academic school year, and some only within a single class period. There has been and will continue to be a drastic need for recurrent social-emotional learning at the middle school and high school levels, especially upon recommencement of more traditional learning settings (in-person learning). Undoubtedly, there will also be a dire need for social-emotional learning for students continuing their education online; however, this study was focused on in-person learning only.

Elementary versus Secondary Need for SEL
Studies have shown that children as young as four years old can reap a multitude of benefits associated with early exposure to social-emotional learning programs such as Second Step® (Low et al., 2015; Low et al., 2019). A portion of these findings may be in part due to a young child’s developmental
A critical factor in the early development of antisocial behavior is that they attend schools that have a high density of high-risk children like themselves; thus, they present the classroom teacher with substantial educational and social challenges, including managing classroom order. (p. 157)

A very prominent recurring theme within the Limitations sections of these studies was the lack of research on social-emotional learning programs within the secondary education setting. Most studies noted that this could not be done in large part due to funding costs and the amount of time needed to track the same participants over several years; however, that should not mean that similar studies could not still be conducted to demonstrate the same positive effects that SEL programs could have on adolescents. In fact, adolescence would be a prime opportunity to revisit or even to initially integrate SEL agents into school curriculum. According to Lerner et al. (2018), adolescence is the most troublesome period in one’s life, physically, socially, and emotionally. Combined with some of the horrific statistics of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as increases in rates of child abuse and sexual abuse (Sharma, 2020) and any educator can see why mental health is and will be a top concern as students transition back into the traditional classroom. This issue cannot go unattended.

Teacher/Student Resiliency

One important variable to keep in mind is not the student of the SEL program, but the teacher. The success of the program lies not on the shoulders of those receiving the instruction, but on those who are delivering it. Furthermore, the relationship between the teacher and the students drives that variable even deeper. According to Vance et al. (2015), student-teacher relationships are extremely significant, and the support and care received by students will in turn affect a student’s ability to be resilient, especially in the secondary setting where students tend to perceive teacher focus to be on academic outcome and not on fostering intrinsic care. The teacher’s perceptions of the social-emotional learning program and of his or her ability in understanding and delivering the social-emotional learning program will also affect how that program is implemented to students. Within the studies, there were many teachers who were not
interested in partaking in a social-emotional learning program due to added stress and a decrease in job satisfaction (Collie et al. 2012), leaving students more marginalized in the secondary setting than in the elementary setting.

One Size Does Not Fit All

Many of the studies acknowledged that there is no “one size fits all” approach to a social-emotional learning program, due to variables such as socioeconomic status, teacher efficacy, and even conceptions such as Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (not every student learns the same way). Green et al. (2018) recommended adapting the desired SEL program to fit the needs of the students and the educational setting to certify the best results through collaboration with administration and staff members. However, a universal program may be easier to train educators in its use, and may be easier to implement to a larger number of students, but a universal program may not meet the unique needs of many students, whereas a custom-made program may be very limited in its ability to train educators in its use and may not be as easy to implement across a large student population, but could have the capacity to reach the students struggling the greatest. In a high school setting, where students move from room to room and may see the same teacher only once a day, SEL programs may be difficult to commit to for most subject areas and their teachers, unlike the elementary classroom setting where the same students are in the same classroom with the same teacher the vast majority of the day.

Journaling as an SEL Practice

It may be unrealistic for teachers of all subject areas and of all levels of education to become part of a district-wide (or larger) social-emotional learning program; however, one perhaps small yet potentially effective way to engage students in a more customized SEL program that can have added benefits for each subject area could be through daily journaling. Not only would differing subject area teachers, who tend to work more with adolescents, be able to see what their students are learning or what is being missed (i.e. exit ticket approach), but they would also have the unique opportunity to connect their own subject area with students on an SEL level. For example: If students in biology class are asked to journal about how seeds are able to sprout without sunlight and then compare to the rate of growth once...
the plant is placed in the windowsill with access to sunlight (teacher can check for understanding of the lesson here), the biology teacher could also ask students to reflect on this process in terms of human life - people can survive on minimal nourishment, but thrive when in an environment with an abundance of sustenance. Even if none of the students have experienced this kind of treatment first-hand, they are being exposed to and reflectively thinking upon such scenarios, developing their sense of empathy.

According to studies done by Konishi & Park (2017), journaling not only allows students to explore their feelings and emotions, but can also develop trust and mutual understanding between teacher and student. The ability to explore and express emotions, though not done with traditional (albeit elementary) SEL program activities such as puppets and role play (Green et al. 2018), the opportunity to engage in the exploration of emotions in itself is a form of self-regulation, which may also allow a person the necessary time to reflect on his or her own thoughts or emotions before acting on a behavior, thus reducing the amount of potential outbursts or other negative behaviors. According to participant journal entries from a study performed by Costello & Lawler (2014), those involved “felt that becoming familiar with their thoughts and feelings enriched their understanding of themselves” and gave them the “abilities to pause and be more reflective about how they react in certain stressful situations” (p. 33).

Journaling can be done electronically or by hand, making it a life skill that can be utilized throughout a person’s lifetime. Since every person experiences or perceives situations differently and goes through developmental stages at different rates, journaling as an SEL skill has the potential to become a key source of self-regulation that can be carried throughout a person’s entire life and not just within the school setting (McClelland & Cameron, 2011).

**Theoretical Framework**

The metatheory of Relational-Developmental Systems (RDS) has been utilized to interpret the management of emotions through fewer classroom disruptions and higher levels of student achievement through the use of daily journal writing using SEL-based writing prompts. Student achievement has been defined as active listening and attention during instruction, relevant and on-task behavior during work time, and an increase in coursework completion in relation to the four-week time period before the study.
Disruptive classroom behavior and academic achievement has been measured using a daily record of verbal redirection or office referrals, as well as a detailed written account of daily observations by Angie Peterson as the classroom teacher. RDS is not a theory on its own, but rather is a metatheory that focuses on adolescent development in healthy and positive ways (Lerner et al., 2018). According to McClelland & Cameron (2011), “This perspective characterizes development as a process that proceeds within a context” and in the case of this study, the process was journaling and the context was social-emotional learning as they relate to the time period of adolescence rather than across an entire lifespan, although the hope for this study is that the participants will utilize the skills gained from the study for the duration of their lives (p. 30).

**Research Question**

What impact can the use of daily journal writing have for high school students as an immediate and potentially long-term social-emotional learning or competency technique?

**Conclusion**

The need for continued self-regulation practices is not just limited to the elementary classrooms. Adolescence is a time of great transformation and multiple transitions which can lead to more complex emotional structures. Journaling can provide a way for secondary students to sort through these transitional times, as well as foster trust and care between student and teacher. Oftentimes, the more a student trusts a teacher, the less often that student will act out in class, promoting student achievement. Without techniques such as journaling that students can carry with them into adulthood and beyond, emotional instability can permeate other areas of a student’s life, often very negatively.

The next chapter discusses methods used for this study, including the setting, participants, demographics, sample journal prompts, measurement technique for students achievement and classroom disruption, data collection, and analysis.
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide a healthy and hopefully lifelong coping mechanism for students as they adjust back into traditional classroom settings, and potentially during other transitional events in life as a means to a well-developed sense of emotional regulation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, students had been forced to adapt to different, and often unconventional methods of learning in the form of hybrid or distance learning, sometimes switching back and forth with very little notice. Such a rapid shift in learning delivery also meant a very rapid shift in expected learning styles, expectations from home and school, settings (in the home or at school), and student emotions. Extended feelings of isolation due to quarantine or distance learning has led to an increase in mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety, especially among high school students (Lan et al., 2020; Sharma, N. 2020). In order for students to be able to focus on learning and for teachers to be able to focus on teaching once traditional school settings were reestablished (where this research study was conducted), daily journaling was implemented in the sophomore English/Language Arts classroom as an attempt to correlate dialogue journal writing as a healthy, long-term coping mechanism as well as a way to keep students actively engaged in the lesson at hand.

Research Question

What impact can the use of daily journal writing have for high school students as an immediate and potentially long-term social-emotional learning or competency technique?

Research Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative method design for a period of four weeks. The qualitative data was collected through student journals and field notes, as well as a survey at the beginning of the study, and a different survey at the end of the study. Data analysis also examined how
effective SEL journaling was to students on an intrinsic level and whether they may utilize it as a healthy long-term coping mechanism.

Setting

The area in which this study took place was located in the upper northwest corner of the state of Minnesota in a town with a population of under 500 residents; however, it was an open-enrollment school and received students from three other area counties. Although this small rural town was not necessarily known for a particular business or famous landmark, it does host an annual town celebration every September. The town also consisted of a bank, two gas stations, a coffee and sandwich shop, a grocery store, a hardware store, an insurance agency, a community center, a fire station and ambulance hall, a post office, seven churches, and a bar/casual dining restaurant. The district itself was made up of three different buildings. One early elementary building was located in a small town sixteen miles away from the school in which the study took place; the early elementary building contained students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through second grade for a total of 123 students. A separate upper elementary school building was located in the town of the research study and contained students in grades three through six and totaled 133 students. Across the street from the upper elementary building was where the separate high school building was located that housed students in grades seven through twelve and accounted for 200 students. According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2021), within this high school student population the Free/Reduced Lunch percentage was 33.33%, gender percentages were 52% female and 48% male, students with disabilities equaled 11.8%, and ethnicity of students was: 94.1% White, 2.9% Latino/Hispanic, 2.0% 2+ races, 0.5% Native American, and 0.5% Black/African American. According to Erik White, Regional Analyst for northwest Minnesota of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (2020), county records from 2018 indicated that at least 10% of the student-age population had no internet access (p. 23).

In a neighboring town, approximately eighteen miles away, lie two large manufacturing companies at which many of the parents work. Farming, medical services (LPN, CNA, RN), and construction laborers also make up the majority of other parent employment. According to public county
records from 2018, the median household income was $58,723; the average household income was $70,095; the median family income was $74,038; and the average family income was $83,191 (White, 2020, p. 11-12). The high school is considered to be a “neither high- nor low- poverty school” by the Minnesota Department of Education (2021). Public county records from 2018 indicated a higher rate of unemployment compared to the state average. Lastly, the percentage of age groups within the county population from 2018 showed the highest percentage of people were between the ages of 45 and 64. Population trends have declined consistently over the past five years (White, 2020, p. 6; 3).

Participants

Potential participants in the study consisted of 35 sophomores in the English/Language Arts classroom. The students were split into two sections; one section was composed of 18 students and the other with 17 students. The section with 17 students was the advanced (Honors) section of the sophomore class, while the section with 18 students was the mainstream section. Students in the Honors or advanced section had to earn a “B” or higher in their freshman English course and also had to request being placed into the Honors course. Only two students among the participants were students with special needs (both in the mainstream section). Among the 35 potential participants were 23 females and 12 males. Of the 35 potential participants, 24 came from two-parent households while 11 came from single-parent households. Not all of the two-parent families contained both biological parents, and all of the single-parent families were the result of divorce - no single-parent families were due to the death of a parent. Ethnically, only 1 student identified as Latino/Hispanic, 1 identified as (part) Native American, and the other 33 students identified as White.

Actual participants included 23 of the 35 sophomores; 10 from the mainstream section and 13 from the Honors section. Of the 10 mainstream students, 4 were male and 6 were female; of the 13 Honors students, 3 were male and 10 were female. All 23 participants identified as “White” or “Caucasian” and no participants were on an IEP or 504 Plan.
Sampling

Sampling for this study was selected via convenience sampling. According to Ilker et. al (2016), “members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study” (p. 2). Participation in this study was solely voluntary and students could choose to discontinue participation at any time. An informative letter was sent home for families to review and sign, designating whether the student was or was not going to participate at the beginning of the study.

The sophomore class was chosen based on the classes taught by the researcher and the age range of the sophomore class specifically. Since the study focused particularly on adolescence, sophomores best fit the peak range of adolescent age (15-17 years of age). This group of students also had the experiences of starting high school in the traditional classroom setting as seventh graders, the abrupt transition to school in the home and distance learning as eighth graders, experience with the hybrid method of classroom delivery as ninth graders, and back to traditional in-person learning five days a week as sophomores, all during adolescence.

Instrumentation

At the beginning of the study, participants were asked to fill out a brief survey in regards to emotional regulation, social-emotional competency, and their own experiences with stress or anxiety due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Appendix A). Qualitative data from this study was also collected using a series of social-emotional language writing prompts in which each week focused on a different social-emotional situation or skill or strategy (see Appendix B). At the conclusion of the four-week study, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire about the effectiveness of the journal writing on their social-emotional development and as a potential long-term coping mechanism (see Appendix C). The questionnaire was given as a Google Form to protect participant confidentiality; no names, email addresses, or other identifying information was collected as part of the survey or questionnaire.

Validity of results was dependent on willingness of participants to be honest with themselves in responding to each daily prompt given, which must be taken at each participant’s word by the researcher.
Factoring into validity were also: the time of the class periods (the mainstream section had class right before lunch, indicating that hunger may have affected participant’s ability to focus, and the Honors section had class as the last period of the day, indicating that participants may have been focused on after school plans or activities, or that they may have been mentally tired from the rest of the day’s classes); whether participants responded to the given daily prompt or the “What’s on your mind?” alternate prompt since the daily prompt was more direct while the alternate prompt was more vague; and culture could also have affected the validity of results since the rural, mainly conservative, mostly Scandinavian heritage of the students tends to encourage internal storage of emotions, especially in males. Journaling was the best approach for this study to measure qualitative results since personal information and emotional release was done in a nonverbal setting, keeping all components of the study private which may have made the participants more comfortable and confident to practice the SEL exercises as they were intended.

Reliability was based on growth in understanding and application of terms such as emotional regulation, social-emotional competency, and honesty of participant responses.

**Data Collection**

Data was collected using individual participant journals, field notes, as well as pre- and post-study surveys (see Appendices A, B, and C). Journals were distributed to participants at the start of the class hour and journal prompts were indicated on the SmartBoard located at the front of the classroom. After the time allotment for journal entries expired, journals were collected and locked in the teacher’s file cabinet to ensure privacy and confidentiality. After each school day, the researcher read and responded to any dialogue journaling as indicated by the participants.

A Pre-Study Survey was given on the first day of the study (see Appendix A). From then on, journal prompts were given at the beginning of each class period, every school day, for a period of four weeks (see Appendix B). On the last day of the study, participants were asked to complete an exit survey (see Appendix C) qualitatively measuring the effectiveness that SEL journal writing had on their emotional regulation. The surveys asked participants to rate their experience with emotional regulation, social-emotional competency, along with their experience in journal writing (post-survey only) on a scale
of 1-10 with 1 being low or no effect and 10 being a life-changing experience for most questions. The surveys also contained an optional comment box for each question for further elaboration.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative results from the Pre- and Post-Study Surveys (see Appendices A and C) at the end of the four-week study were put into bar graph charts. Participant comments were also used to demonstrate how effective or ineffective journal writing was as a healthy and potentially long-term coping strategy.

**Research Question and System Alignment**

**Table 3.1.**

**Research Question Alignment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Validity &amp; Reliability</th>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ:</strong> What impact can the use of daily journal writing have for high school students as an immediate and potentially long-term social-emotional learning or competency technique?</td>
<td><strong>IV:</strong> SEL journal prompts. <strong>DV:</strong> Growth and understanding of social and emotional regulation.</td>
<td>Qualitative methods design</td>
<td>Field notes, t journals, pre- and post-study surveys</td>
<td>Validity was dependent on culture of participants, time of class periods, and honesty of participants. Reliability was based on evidence of growth and application of terms such as emotional regulation and social-emotional competency.</td>
<td>Observation, field notes, and surveys</td>
<td>English 10 Sample size: 35 potential participants; 23 actual participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedures

On the first day of the study, participants were asked to complete the Pre-Study Survey (see Appendix A). From that day forward, at the very beginning of the class period, the researcher handed participants their journals and turned on the overhead projector. Projected onto the SmartBoard in the classroom was the daily prompt (see Appendix B). Participants always had the choice to write about the daily prompt, or a more general “What’s on your mind?” or “How are you feeling?” prompt. Both prompts were read aloud to the participants each day and they had the next ten to fifteen minutes to respond in their journals. At the conclusion of the daily journaling, the researcher picked up the journals in order to maintain confidentiality of information from participant to participant.

Per COVID-19 guidelines, the researcher had to remain at the front of the classroom with the exception of distributing and gathering participant journals in order to avoid quarantine in the event of testing positive for COVID-19 or being a close contact with an infected individual. Participants were seated in traditional rows to allow for a minimum of three feet between pupils, per COVID-19 guidelines.

Ethical Considerations

There was no foreseen physical harm to the participants during this study. The researcher distributed and collected journals promptly before and after the SEL exercise each day to ensure confidentiality of participant information. Since the focus of the study revolved around social and emotional reflections, there was always an unforeseen chance that a given daily prompt could bring about an uncomfortable emotional or psychological state of a participant, and to avoid that, a more general prompt was always an option for participants to respond to instead of the more specific daily prompt. Daily writing prompts never encouraged participants to divulge names of other peers or family members. Participants were reminded that the researcher was also a mandated reporter and that the journal entries were not an exception to the rules of mandated reporting.

Conclusions

Since teenage emotions tend to be fickle, an accurate and reliable methodology can be difficult to come by. Journaling may not be the best SEL technique for each participant in the long-term; however, if
it was effective during the period of this study and while participants were struggling with emotional development during the COVID-19 pandemic, the adjustment back into the classroom or other great life transition in their future will have been beneficial on a personal and professional level. While many variables could affect the results of the study, including participant culture and honest effort on the participant’s behalf, a qualitative approach was the best fit for measuring the result of this study, which are discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and regulation has always been a topic of discussion and research for educators, but since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the topic has been gaining a sense of urgency and demand for implementation at all educational levels as a way to help students cope with anxiety or isolation due to the pandemic as they begin their transition back to the traditional classroom setting. Most SEL practices take place within the elementary setting as a way to narrow any gap in recognizing and addressing regulatory behaviors as young children move throughout their primary education years; however, adolescence is a time of significant physical, social, and emotional transformation. The abrupt halt on this time of transformation due to the pandemic has led to a need for help in reconnecting or reprocessing these areas of transformation for high school students. Daily journaling through a series of social-emotional learning prompts for a period of four weeks, along with the optional use of a dialogue journal as a way to more effectively communicate with their teacher, was studied to determine its efficacy and potential future use.

Data Collection

Data was collected through a Pre-Study Survey, Post-Study Survey, dialogue journal (which was optional to all participants), and field notes. Informed Consent forms were distributed the week before the study took place; however, on the very first day of the study, half of the mainstream section of participants were called out of the classroom and sent home to quarantine due to a positive case and close contact tracing and on the fifth day of the study, half of the Honors section was also sent home to quarantine. Because of this, not all Informed Consent forms were able to be gathered at the beginning of the study. Many students, even when quarantined, indicated their desire via email to still be part of the study and to turn in their signed Informed Consent form upon return from quarantine, so in doing so, the initial Pre-Study Survey was sent to all anticipated participants via Google Forms. This skewed the Pre-Study Survey data since 31 sophomores completed the Pre-Study Survey and only 23 produced a signed Informed Consent form before the duration of the study. The Post-Study Survey (via Google Forms) was
only sent to those who turned in a signed Informed Consent form; however, only 19 of the 23 completed the Post-Study Survey.

During the second week of the study, I was confirmed COVID-19 positive and had to isolate for 10 days. I was conflicted with how to proceed with my study: I could either risk a breach in confidentiality by having my substitute teachers distribute and collect journals and continue the study without me, or I could maintain and perhaps build their trust by not risking a breach in confidentiality but at the risk of loss of efficacy in the results by pausing the daily writing routine in the middle of the study. The students’ trust was most important to me as it extends beyond the bounds of this study, so I chose to pause the daily journaling until my isolation had ended. While this reduced the amount of SEL prompts and amount of days journaled, building or maintaining student confidence was the best option for me as an educator and for the clarity in delivery of this study.

Results

Participant Demographics.

Of the possible 35 participants within the sophomore class, only 23 completed and returned the Informed Consent form. Of those 23 participants, 7 were male and 16 were female. Of the 23 participants, 10 were from the mainstream section of sophomores, and 13 were from the Honors section. All 23 participants indicated “White” or “Caucasian” as their ethnicity, and no students with special needs participated. Within the mainstream section, 90% of participants also partook in a dialogue journal, while only 61.5% of the Honors section participants indicated consent to a dialogue journal. Of the 23 participants, 21.3% qualified for Free/Reduced Lunch, and almost three-quarters of the participants lived in a two-parent household. Exactly half of the mainstream section participants were involved in extracurricular activities, while 85% of the Honors section participants were actively involved in extracurricular activities.

RQ 1: What impact can the use of daily journal writing have for high school students as an immediate and potentially long-term social-emotional learning or competency technique?
**Growth.** Within the Pre-Study Survey and the Post-Study Survey, questions 1-3 were the same as a way to determine efficacy of the study; however, this efficacy is unreliable due to the imbalance of anticipated versus actual participants who completed the Post-Study Survey. Figure 1 demonstrates the Pre-Study Survey results to Question 1 (see Appendices A & C) according to anticipated participants while Figure 2 presents findings of an increase in understanding of emotional regulation based on actual participant data.

**Figure 1**

*Anticipated Participant Initial Understanding of Emotional Regulation*

![Bar Chart](Note. 31 anticipated participants responded as follows to the question: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “I don’t know” and 10 being “I understand,” how would you rate your understanding of “emotional regulation”?  

**Figure 2**

*Actual Participant Post-Study Understanding of Emotional Regulation*

![Bar Chart](Note. 31 anticipated participants responded as follows to the question: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “I don’t know” and 10 being “I understand,” how would you rate your understanding of “emotional regulation”?  

![Bar Chart]
Note. 19 actual participants responded as follows to the question: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “I don’t know” and 10 being “I completely understand,” how would you now rate your understanding of “emotional regulation”?

Question 2 (see Appendices A & C) sought to gauge a change, if any, in participants’ ability to handle stress before and after the study using writing as the medium. Figure 3 shows a range of responses, with the majority selecting a 5 out of 10 likert-scale representation, indicating neither a very poor nor a very strong level of ability by those who anticipated participating in the study. Figure 4, however, portrays a different range of responses. The most promising piece of Figure 4 is that the majority of actual participants answered their ability to handle stress after the study was conducted with a 6 or 7 on a 10-point likert-scale, and just behind that was an 8 at the next most common response, indicating that the study did help in the area of stress management.

Figure 3

Anticipated Participant Initial Confidence Level in Ability to Manage Stress

Note. 31 anticipated participants responded as follows to the question: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest/least confident and 10 being the highest/most confident, how would you rate your ability to handle stress?
Note. 19 actual participants responded as follows to the question: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest/least confident and 10 being the highest/most confident, how would you now rate your ability to handle stress?

Another strong shift in responses occurred to Question 3 of the Pre- and Post-Study Surveys (see Appendices A & C). Figure 5 clearly exhibits an attitude of dislike by the anticipated participants towards writing as a popular or favorite form of stress relief before the study was conducted. Although a 10 on the likert-scale was never procured, the majority of responses began (Pre-Study Survey) within the 1-4 range, and ended (Post-Study Survey) within the 5-9 likert-scale range as demonstrated in Figure 6. This response was especially surprising as the study faced an unexpected interruption in daily writing by both the participants and the researcher.
Note. 19 actual participants responded as follows to the question: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “I hate it” and 10 being “I love it,” where would you rate “writing” as your favorite way to relieve stress?

**Figure 6**

*Actual Participant Post-Study Response to Writing as Stress Relief Technique*

![Bar chart showing participant responses to writing as stress relief.]

Note. 19 actual participants responded as follows to the question: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “I hate it” and 10 being “I love it,” where would you now rate “writing” as your favorite way to relieve stress?

**One Size Does Not Fit All.** Figure 7 coincides with the acknowledgement of factors that can influence the effectiveness of any SEL program such as socioeconomic status of participants or the district, teacher efficacy, or even personal factors such as student preference/personality. When asked how participants would rank journaling as the best fit for them to manage their own emotions, responses varied throughout the 10-point likert-scale; however, no participant ever responded with either a 1 or a 10. This demonstrates that while SEL writing may help some high school students with emotional regulation, it may not be the best fit for all, or even the majority, of students; it is simply one of the many “tools” teachers may be able to utilize when the opportunity arises.

**Figure 7**

*Actual Participant Reflection of Journaling as Effective Emotional Regulation Technique*
Note. 19 actual participants responded as follows to the question: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “does not fit” and 10 being “the best fit,” how would you rate journaling as the best fit for your ability to regulate your emotions?

Data Analysis

Due to the outstanding disruption of participation within the timeframe of this study, the results are promising, but not definitive. On the very first day of the study, half of one section of students was sent home to quarantine due to a positive COVID-19 student case and contact tracing. On the fifth day of the study, half of the Honors section of students was also sent home due to a positive COVID-19 student case and contact tracing. Mid-week of the second week of the study, I myself tested positive for COVID-19 and was unable to conduct the study for seven consecutive school days. Four participants from the Honors section and one participant from the mainstream section had to quarantine a second time within the duration of the study, heavily influencing the efficacy of the study to those particular study participants since they were only able to practice the social-emotional learning techniques and prompts a few times, and at times with many days between entries.

The most surprising results came within Questions 3 and 4 of the Post-Study Survey (see Appendix C). While the majority (52.7%) of participants rated writing as a 5 or lower on a likert-scale as a favorite way to relieve stress (see Figure 6), when asked on a scale of 1 to 10 how much they enjoyed daily journal writing, no participant responded under a 5, as displayed in Figure 8.
Figure 8

Actual Participant Post-Study Reaction to Daily Writing

Note. 19 actual participants responded as follows to the question: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “I hated it” and 10 being “I loved it,” how much did you enjoy daily journal writing?

Why is there such a disconnect? Do students view writing as laborious and unenjoyable within a school context? Was it because the daily journal writing was not graded, did not have to be formatted a certain way, or because students had more creative freedom in what they wrote or how they responded that produced this overwhelmingly positive feedback? Student interviews may have been able to provide some clarification to these questions; however, the Pre-Study Survey and Post-Study Survey submissions were anonymous, indicating that further research may prove effective in seeking a clearer sense of what is “missing” between these responses.

An important area of exploration within the study results was Post-Study Survey question 5. The focus was on the correlation between journaling and emotional regulation. As seen in Figure 9, the responses given were promising; however, a prolonged study period may yield more accurate results.

Figure 9

Actual Participant Response to Correlation of Journaling to Emotional Regulation Ability
Note. 19 actual participants responded as follows to the question: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “did not help” and 10 being “it helped greatly,” how well do you feel that daily journal writing helped you with emotional regulation?

The other main component to the research question was focused on high school students continuing to use journal writing as a long-term form of emotional regulation, resulting in a broad range of responses. The validity of the results for Figure 10, however, vary greatly as it truly remains unknown whether these participants will or will not form a long-term bond with journaling as a coping mechanism for times of great transition, stress, or anxiety, such as they are experiencing now. Figure 10 displays a range from two participants responding with a 1, or, “Not likely,” and two participants responding with a 3 or 4 on the likert-scale, respectively. The number of participants who responded with a 5 (meaning they were indifferent) was surprising. Based on the overwhelmingly negative attitudes of the participants towards writing at the start of the study, this number was expected to be lower. However, since this held the greatest number of responses, perhaps there is more to be explored within the shift in attitudes toward writing, as mentioned in the discussion of Figure 8.

Figure 10

Likeliness of Actual Participants Continuing to Journal in the Future
Note. 19 actual participants responded as follows to the question: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not going to” and 10 being “very likely,” how likely are you to continue using journal writing (with prewritten prompts or as a free write) as a form of emotional regulation?

In terms of a dialogue journal, the results were not surprising. The mainstream section of participants, who not only had more male participants than the Honors section, since males tend to see more measurable growth from SEL programs (Bierman et al., 2010; Low et al., 2015), also had a higher percentage of dialogue journal participants. The demographics of the mainstream section included more participants from split or single-parent homes, more participants who qualified for Free/Reduced Lunch, and more participants who are not involved in extracurricular activities. Academically, there is an obvious difference: the Honors section must have a 3.0 GPA or higher while the mainstream does not require a GPA minimum for placement in English 10. Studies continue to show the correlation between stronger emotional self-regulation and academic success (Bierman et al., 2010; Collie et al., 2012; Green et al., 2018; Low et al., 2015; Low et al., 2019; McClelland & Cameron, 2011), meaning, the higher the student’s GPA the lower the perceived need for help managing emotions, which may also equate to a lower desire for the utilization of a dialogue journal. Among the mainstream participants, 90% consented to a dialogue journal, while only 61.5% of the Honors participants consented to a dialogue journal.

When asked whether the participants were glad to be part of the study or not, all participants responded “Yes.” Given that the survey responses were completely anonymous, the resounding “Yes” to being glad of their participation in the study corroborated the benefit of journaling as an emotional-regulation technique outweighing any potential discomfort within the content of the writing.
prompts, further exhibiting the efficacy of journal writing on each participants’ overall sense of wellbeing.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of this qualitative study are relative to the school district in which it was conducted, the participants of this study, and the limitations of the study due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under different circumstances, this study may have been conducted differently. The most evident limitation was the timeframe in which this study was conducted. While four weeks may have been sufficient to notice a genuine difference, a longer time for the study to be conducted would unequivocally have resulted in more prominent features. With the addition of a longer time period, more opportunities for entries could be utilized (especially with COVID-19 limitations and student/faculty quarantines), a stronger bond of trust could be formed through the use of a dialogue journal for those who opted to participate, and a Mid-Study Survey could also be conducted to gauge a truer sense of participant growth, participant struggle, or efficacy of the journaling process itself.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that high school students are having a difficult time sorting their emotions out, not only due to adolescence, but also because of new, abrupt, and uncertain changes occurring in other facets of their life due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While journaling may be an effective approach to some students (and teachers), it is not the right fit for others. As educators, finding a few constructive methods that allow students to reduce their levels of stress and anxiety as they transition back into the traditional classroom setting may promote healthy and compassionate learning that extends beyond the classroom.

Through the use of journaling in the sophomore English/Language Arts class, evidence of student enjoyment of writing, stress relief, and fostering positive relationships between student and teacher surfaced as positive impacts of this study. With more time given to the study, more positive impacts could possibly be discovered. In the future, journal writing would not have to be limited to just social-emotional learning; SEL prompts could begin the journal writing process, then integrate into critical thinking scenarios, poetry or lyrical analysis, and more. The possibilities are endless.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine any impacts daily journal writing through a series of social-emotional learning prompts might have on high school sophomores. While there was an initial resistance to the study because of a negative association to writing, the study concluded that the time spent writing was very enjoyable and that daily journal writing did in fact have a positive impact on student stress levels as well as strengthen communication between students and their teacher.

Action Plan

Within two weeks of beginning distance learning in the spring of March 2020, it was apparent that this drastic shift in school and home climate, expectations, and anxiety levels was going to have serious implications upon returning to the traditional classroom environment. Although this study was met with some hesitation by potential participants, mainly due to having to write as a requirement for participation, the study concluded with students asking to continue journaling even after the study was done. This, as well as the overwhelming positive response as shown in Figure 8 to the enjoyment of daily journaling by the students, confirms that I need to continue to implement journaling within my classroom, whether as a social-emotional learning tool, or as a way to connect to my more reserved students, or to utilize a journal for other Language Arts classroom skills. One student commented that journaling was a way for him or her to vent, and another student opened up to me about a friend that was contemplating suicide. Knowing that this journaling experience has helped students with emotional regulation, strengthened trust and communication between them and their teacher, and perhaps saved a life manifests the positive impacts a few minutes of time each day can have on improving a student’s overall well-being, which may also transpire across other areas of the student’s life.

Building relationships has been a focal point for educators over the last decade not only to promote a safe and healthy learning environment, but also because emotional regulation has such strong ties to academic achievement. The severity of the need for continued SEL practice has been shown through this study. Other area content teachers can easily incorporate their own subject area as well as an
SEL component as a way to build the relationship while simultaneously engaging students within the academic lesson for the day or week.

Throughout this process, I believe that giving students a chance to bring up topics of importance to them and provide the opportunity to write without peer pressure or fear of judgment may be yet another way to build relationships, potentially strengthen writing skills, and spark ideas for classroom use. Students may become more invested in what is being taught when they have a say in portions of what happens in the classroom. Hearing that students wanted to continue journaling after the completion of the study clearly expresses to me the need from the student side to have a non-verbal outlet, a way or place to sort through their emotional experiences, whether to reduce stress and anxiety levels or to strengthen the bond between student and teacher.

**Plan for Sharing**

I would first like to formally share the results of my study with my administration and faculty. The literature behind the study, the results of the study, and the reaction of the students to the study may inspire adaptations of the journaling technique within their own classrooms or office referrals (to reflect on behavior, for example) that will allow students to connect with them other than just passing them in the hallway or noticing that a certain student is very quiet in class. If available, I would like to present the results of my study to educators as an in-service presentation. If the response was overwhelmingly positive for me, it could also help other students and teachers elsewhere. Informally, I will share and discuss the results of the study with the sophomore class even though not all students were consenting participants. The information brought about by the results of the study may show them that many of their peers felt the benefits of the study as well. Discussion may also promote the continuation of journaling with some slight changes in material/prompts, usage (analytical versus reflective, etc.) as well as the amount of informal writing developed by the students with the increase of time (over the course of the entire school year, for example). Moving forward, I plan to include journaling in every class beginning in the 2022-2023 school year with hopes to have as much, if not more, success as I did with this study.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

PRE-STUDY SURVEY

This document was made into a Google Form for participants to complete anonymously. Each question also contained an optional comment box for any further information to be shared with the researcher.

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how would you rate your understanding of “emotional regulation”? (Definition: Emotion regulation is the ability to exert control over one’s own emotional state. It may involve behaviors such as rethinking a challenging situation to reduce anger or anxiety, hiding visible signs of sadness or fear, or focusing on reasons to feel happy or calm.)

Comments (optional):

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest/least confident and 10 being the highest/most confident, how would you rate your ability to handle stress?

Comments (optional):

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, where would you rate “writing” as your favorite way to relieve stress?

Comments (optional):

4. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how happy are you to be back to a traditional school setting?

Comments (optional):

5. Short answer response: Please briefly describe some ways you relieved stress or anxiety due to the pandemic over the past year and a half:

6. Overall, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how healthy would you rate the methods of stress relief mentioned in Question #5:

Comments (optional):

7. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how well would you say your teachers understand when you are stressed, confused, or anxious?

Comments (optional):
APPENDIX B

FOUR-WEEK SEL DAILY JOURNAL WRITING PROMPTS

Journal prompts were displayed on the SmartBoard at the front of the classroom each day. Participants were asked to write for ten to fifteen minutes about one of the following each day:

Option 1: The given prompt that correlates with the week and day of the study
Option 2: “What’s on your mind?”

**Week 1 SEL focus: Calmness/Techniques**

**Day 1:** What makes you feel calm? Why is this?

**Day 2:** What strategies or techniques have you tried to calm you down when you are feeling upset, anxious, sad, or otherwise distracted? What worked? What didn’t work?

**Day 3:** If you could pick anywhere in the world to travel to, where would you pick and why?

**Day 4:** Have you ever tried to or had to calm another person down (family member, friend, classmate, coworker)? What was that experience like?

**Day 5:** Which sensory experience (taste, touch, smell, sight, hear) works best for you as a calming technique? For example, would a soft blanket (touch) be better for you or would the smell of freshly washed clothes help to calm you more/better? You could pick from other sensory experiences as well. Give an example and explain how it helps you best.

**Week 2 SEL focus: Frustration/Peer tension**

**Day 1:** What are some things that really frustrate you? Why do you think this is?

**Day 2:** How do you usually respond (internally or externally) when you are frustrated? Walk me through your process.

**Day 3:** How well would you say you get along with your peers? Please don’t name any names, but your response can be about your class overall, the peers you are currently in class with, or if there are particular groups of peers that you do or don’t get along well with.

**Day 4:** When you and a friend/, or family member, are fighting/not getting along, how do you straighten things out again? Do you think this is a healthy method of reconciliation? Why or why not?

**Day 5:** What are some of your stress relievers? Do you favor one more than others? Go through your list - which of these are healthy stress relievers, and which are not (label each). Has anything or anyone influenced how you handle stress?
**Week 3 SEL focus: Regret/Hindsight**

**Day 1:** Have you ever done anything that you have regretted? You do not have to give specific details if you do not want to, but try to channel that experience and focus on why you regretted that certain decision or experience (peer pressure, compromised your morals/values, etc).

**Day 2:** Think about what you wrote yesterday. Now that you have had some time to reflect on that experience, if you could go back in time and change anything about that experience, what would it be and why?

**Day 3:** Are you naturally a reflective person or are you more of a “it happened, move on” type of person? Why do you think this is? What might be some pros and cons of each?

**Day 4:** What do you think people (not necessarily you, but people in general) regret more, something that was said or something that was done? Why do you think so?

**Day 5:** What are some ways you or others express feelings of regret? Do you think they are effective? Why or why not?

**Week 4 SEL focus: Acceptance**

**Day 1:** On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being ‘not at all’ and 10 being ‘completely,’ how would you rate your self-acceptance? Definition: The act or state of accepting oneself; the act or state of understanding and recognizing one’s own abilities and limitations (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

**Day 2:** After you leave high school, what do you want people to remember about you?

**Day 3:** What are some things you are grateful for or that have happened to you? What makes these things, events, or people special or significant?

**Day 4:** What do you like most about yourself?

**Day 5:** What goals are you working towards? These can be personal goals, career goals, academic or athletic goals - anything. What do you think these goals say about you?
APPENDIX C

POST-STUDY SURVEY

This document was made into a Google Form for participants to complete anonymously. Each question also contained an optional comment box for any further information to be shared with the researcher.

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how would you now rate your understanding of “emotional regulation”? (Definition: Emotion regulation is the ability to exert control over one’s own emotional state. It may involve behaviors such as rethinking a challenging situation to reduce anger or anxiety, hiding visible signs of sadness or fear, or focusing on reasons to feel happy or calm.)

   Comments (optional):

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest/least confident and 10 being the highest/most confident, how would you now rate your ability to handle stress?

   Comments (optional):

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, where would you now rate “writing” as your favorite way to relieve stress?

   Comments (optional):

4. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how much did you enjoy daily journal writing?

   Comments (optional):

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how well do you feel that daily journal writing helped you with emotional regulation?

   Comments (optional):

6. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how likely are you to continue using journal writing (with prewritten prompts or as a free write) as a form of emotional regulation?

   Comments (optional):

7. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, how would you rate journaling as the best fit for your ability to regulate your emotions?

   Comments (optional):
8. Yes or No: Are you glad you decided to be part of this study?

Comments (optional):

Thank you for your time in completing this exit survey, and for your participation in this study.
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent

Title of Research: Impacts of Social-Emotional Learning As Daily Writing Reflection in the Secondary Classroom

Principal Investigator: Dr. Tiffany Bockelmann
Co-Investigator: Angie Peterson

Institutional Contact: Minnesota State University Moorhead
1104 7th Ave S
Moorhead, MN, 56563
Telephone: 218-477-2161

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Study
As a result of isolation and the sudden drastic disruption to students’ home and school settings/routines caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, schools are seeing increasing numbers of social-emotional needs arise within the classroom setting.

2. Description of the Research
For the first ten to fifteen minutes of each class period, you will be asked to write in a daily journal only seen by me, reflecting on one of the given prompts for the day. There will be no minimum or maximum number of sentences to write or any formal style of writing; merely respond to one of the given prompts as you see fit.

3. Subject Participation
Subject participation is based on enrollment in English 10 at Marshall County Central High School, the physical ability to hand write in either print or cursive, and that writing is taking place each day in attendance. You will not have to make up any entries from days not in class.

4. Potential Risks and Discomforts
There are no known risks associated with this study; if a participant does not wish to respond to the daily writing prompt given, he or she will always have the option to answer a more general prompt instead.

5. Potential Benefits
Students who participate in this study may develop a better sense of self-regulation (managing of emotions), increase focus on school work, and establish positive relationships with the teacher or fellow peers based on voluntary sharing of experiences inside or outside of the classroom/study environment.

6. Confidentiality
All information taken from this study will be coded to protect each subject’s name. No names or other identifying information will be used when discussing or reporting data. Mrs. Peterson will safely keep all files and data collected in a secured location. Once the data has been fully analyzed, it will be destroyed.
7. Voluntary Participation and Authorization
Your participation in this research study is voluntary; if you decide not to participate, it will not affect your grade or treatment from Mrs. Peterson.

8. Withdrawal from the Study and/or Withdrawal of Authorization
If you decide to participate in this study, you may withdraw from your participation at any time without penalty. To indicate this, please provide a written statement in your journal declaring your withdrawal from the research study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study (check one):

☐ Yes
☐ No

I understand that I will be given a copy of this signed Consent Form.

Name of Participant (Print): ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________

Name of Parent/Guardian (Print): ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________
DATE: September 30, 2021

TO: Tiffany Bockelmann, Ed.D
    Angie Peterson

FROM: Lisa Karch, Chair
      Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB

ACTION: APPROVED

PROJECT TITLE: [1807853-1] Impacts of Social-Emotional Learning as a Daily Writing Reflection in the Secondary Classroom

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

APPROVAL DATE: September 30, 2021

EXPIRATION DATE: September 30, 2022

REVIEW TYPE: Exempt Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Exempt Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB.
9/10/2021

To: MSUM Contacts Dr. Tiffany Bockemann; Dr. Lisa I. Karch
From: Jeffrey Lund, Superintendent
Subject: Research Survey, Angie Peterson

Our high school principal Brian Longerbone and I have reviewed pre-survey, post survey, and four week journal project activity submitted by Angie Peterson in her work to survey 10th grade students at our school. I also reviewed the informed consent form she provided.

Mrs. Peterson and I reviewed school district policy and MSUM’s consent form follows our policy in terms of requiring student/parent permission.

This project meets survey criteria we have established and she has our authorization to conduct the survey for her university research project.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Lund
Superintendent of Schools