Social-Emotional Learning: A Comparative Study of Two Preschool Curriculums

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Abstract

There has been minimal comparative work exploring the impact of different forms of Social-Emotional Learning instruction at the preschool level. The following mixed methods study investigates whether a connection can be made between Social-Emotional Learning instruction and student behavior outcomes by using a triangulation design convergence model (Creswell, 2008) to compare two preschools in the Amherst, Massachusetts area. I analyzed data from the schools’ explicit curriculums, teacher interviews, observations of teacher instruction and student behavior in order to discern the impact of curriculum and instruction on subsequent student social-emotional outcomes. When the explicit curriculum, teacher beliefs, and teacher instruction are aligned, there are clear improvements in student outcomes relative to the competencies addressed in a given classroom. In addition, the best student outcomes are present when teachers use a wide range of instructional methods. Further research should be conducted to explore the impact of demographics on Social-Emotional Learning and should include multiple schools following similar pedagogies to allow for validation of research methods and verify the relationship between pedagogy and impacts.
Introduction

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) involves the learning of social and emotional skills – both critical to fully participating in the social world. The combination of social and emotional skill sets into one category results in a mountain of skills that must be acquired and strengthened throughout the entirety of one’s lifespan. The Collaborative for Advancing Social Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2023), the creator of the leading national framework on Social-Emotional Learning, breaks SEL down into five separate competencies: 1) self-management, 2) self-awareness, 3) relationship skills, 4) social awareness and 5) responsible decision-making. Focus on these competencies helps predict future success (CASEL, 2023). Students who participated in school-wide SEL programs reported decreased levels of emotional distress (Durlak, 2022). Additionally, students with stronger social-emotional skills have increased likelihood to graduate high school and college, and land a stable full time job (Greenberg, 2023).

Setting students up for this success should begin as early as preschool, as social-emotional skills act as a predictor of kindergarten readiness (Amarasingham et al., 2019). Preschool provides the perfect opportunity for instruction around social-emotional skills as this setting creates challenging social situations for children to negotiate for one of the first times.

Preschools can adopt very different curricular approaches and these approaches vary significantly in the way they prioritize the development of social-emotional competencies. For example, some preschools follow the Reggio Emilia approach, which utilizes child-led collaborative learning and places a lot of attention on the development of relationship skills as shown through how they value participation and their concept of the 100 languages of the child (Edwards, 1993). Alternatively, some preschools follow The Creative Curriculum, which takes a more individual approach to documenting the learning of the child and promotes the
development of independence, i.e., self-management. These two approaches to preschool learning prioritize different competencies showing how preschool curriculums have significant implications for student social-emotional skill development. Implementation of any approach depends on the beliefs and actions of the teachers in the classroom.

There are research findings on the importance of Social-Emotional Learning and its long-term impacts on student success (Greenburg, 2023) and wellbeing (Durlak, 2022; Sorgenfrei, 2021; Taylor, 2017), however there has been minimal comparative work exploring different forms of social-emotional instruction at the preschool level as guided by the preschool curriculum. My research begins to fill this gap by comparing the type of social-emotional instruction students receive in two preschools that employ different curricular approaches and the children’s use of social-emotional skills in their interactions with teachers and peers. If preschool is an important space for students to develop social-emotional skills and many different preschools exist, then there should be exploration of how different preschools support the development of social-emotional outcomes so as to help schools, teachers, and families make informed decisions. In particular, I aim to answer the following research questions: a) how does the social-emotional instruction differ between the two schools as exemplified in the written curriculum and in teacher instruction? and b) how does student social-emotional behavior differ between the two schools? In this mixed methods field study, I attempt to make a connection between social-emotional instructional approaches and student learning outcomes. Before presenting my research I first explore curriculum and Social-Emotional Learning within the preschool context which I bring together to provide the base for my analysis.
Preschool Curriculum

Curriculum is complex, it includes everything from how the teacher sets up the classroom and what activities they provide, to what work and thought receives value. For preschools, states do not regulate curriculum. Preschools receive some state regulation, however in Massachusetts this regulation replicates Daycare regulations (i.e. health, safety, and facility capacity). With minimal regulations, students attend schools with a wide range of curriculums. Despite the variety of forms curriculum takes as a result, the desired outcome for students remains fairly consistent across preschools.

Curriculum Definition

Curriculum constitutes any kind of structured learning that has the purpose of helping students find meaning in subjects, meaning in themselves, and meaning in the world. Made up of multiple factors - family beliefs, teacher’s beliefs, student preexisting knowledge, each student's individual perception - it is fluid, complex, and goes far beyond written plans. Sinclair and Ghory (1979) explain that the different aspects of curriculum can be categorized by the expressed dimension, implied dimension, and emergent dimension. These dimensions constantly interact. Expressed learning objectives articulate the value the teacher or school gives to specific knowledge and constitutes the expressed dimension. Who teaches the class, how they teach, what the teachers give value to, and all the unstated but represented pieces of the classroom comprises the implied dimension. For example, the artwork the teacher decides to hang on the wall shows what art has value. How the teacher decides to move forward as the course inevitably has some shortfalls or students present opposing ideas encompasses the emergent curriculum.

Given that curriculum constitutes not merely the materials, but also entails every aspect of the classroom environment, I argue the teacher constitutes the most important piece of
curriculum. Saluja (2001) highlights why the teacher plays such a significant role in the curriculum:

But even a good curriculum cannot replace experienced teachers who have an in-depth understanding of early childhood development and education, and are more likely than other teachers to make the most effective use of the chosen curriculum. (p. 20).

No curriculum can account for the complexity of human life, let alone a growing child continuously impacted by outside forces. This highlights the importance of the emergent dimension in Sinclair and Ghory’s explanation of curriculum. Emergent curriculum acts as a way to adjust along the way and cater to the needs of the class and individual students. With multiple different students in a space all bouncing off of each other and a changing dynamic year to year because of new students, any teacher and curriculum team will need to be flexible and prepared to adjust with the changing tides of a preschool classroom. Therefore, to accurately understand curriculum in a school, attention must be paid to teacher actions and interactions around the expressed, implied, and emergent dimensions of the curriculum, as guided by their beliefs.

Neither of these pieces exist in solitude. Curriculum includes the teacher and the student, and the teacher and the student embody the curriculum.

**Common Preschool Curriculums**

Many schools follow explicit curriculums designed for preschoolers, and either purposefully or passively engage with the subsequent implied and emergent curriculum. Alternatively, other schools rely on approaches to learning to guide their subsequent curriculum. While there may not be an explicit written lesson plan the school follows, the explicit pedagogical approach results in implied and emergent curriculum by detailing values about how to work with children. A variety of schools using explicit curricula, explicit pedagogies, and/or a
mixture of both can be found within a simple five mile radius of Amherst Massachusetts, let alone the entirety of the United States.

Some popular explicit curriculums include The Creative Curriculum, used by multiple preschools in the country (Teaching Strategies, 2023). The Creative Curriculum provides forms to prompt teachers to think about the individual needs of their students, and includes specific lesson plans for the teachers to follow on a planned schedule to achieve the recommended preschool standards as set by the state government. Within the units, called “investigations,” the teacher helps the children explore different topics and provides space for emergent lessons based on the children’s own curiosity. Structured and detailed daily plans guide the teacher through the explicit curriculum while providing space for emergent ideas. The implied dimension in this curricular model constitutes the implied lesson that teachers know what students should learn as seen through them providing structured units for the class to follow.

Another common preschool approach which guides curriculum is based on the Reggio Emilia approach. This play-based, child-led, collaborative learning approach strongly engages with emergent curriculum (Edwards, 1993) and takes place in an environment which teachers cultivate to act as a form of educator through purposeful placement of a wide range of materials that support development all meant for the children to discover on their own. By being more child-led, Reggio schools tend to have minimal to no explicit lesson plans and rely heavily on the teacher's creation of the classroom to guide the active and engaged learner to reach expected milestones. Therefore, this pedagogical model implies lessons about children's capability to guide their own learning.

Other common preschool approaches include the Waldorf approach - which, among other components, emphasize the arts in all aspects of learning (Association of Waldorf Schools of
North America, n.d.), and Montessori schools - which prioritize the self-paced child (Montessori Foundation, n.d.). Despite the specific approach utilized, different schools following similar philosophies may result in a wide variety of learning environments and learning outcomes, as emphasized by the multiple factors impacting curriculum outlined in the previous section.

However, with these curriculums and pedagogies acting as guides, different emphases are placed on specific types of learning which I argue impacts what happens in the classroom daily.

**What is Expected of Preschoolers?**

All of these different preschool approaches and pedagogies work towards preparing students for school. Within the western context, “school” and being prepared for it beginning (i.e. kindergarten), generally means knowing how to use the bathroom, knowing how to communicate, maybe even knowing your ABCs or how to begin to count, etc. Each curriculum and school may have its individual view on what preschool should be for, however they all exist within their cultural context. In Massachusetts, the government dictates this through multiple expressed state standards for preschoolers along the lines of Social-Emotional Learning (understanding and expressing their emotions), English Language Arts (foundational reading and writing skills), Mathematics (numbers, shapes, and counting), Science (foundational earth and ecosystem knowledge), Comprehensive Health (physical ability), the Arts (dance, music, visual), and History (of their community and geographical location) (Massachusetts Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019).

Preschools may choose to have these standards exemplified explicitly in their expressed curriculum. However, emergent curriculum can also play a big role in preschool spaces through providing opportunities for learning (Jones, 1977). With adequate direction from teachers, these emergent moments can act as substantial contributions to achieving the standards listed above.
For example, moments when the child experiences upset and anger create opportunities to teach tools for processing difficult emotions. Desired student outcomes remain fairly constant across preschool approaches. So, how do schools choose to address Social-Emotional Learning? Do these multiple forms of preschool curriculums and pedagogies each adequately help students develop their Social-Emotional skills, the one of seven state standard categories?

**Social-Emotional Learning**

What is Social-Emotional Learning?

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education lists seven subject areas: Social-Emotional Learning, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Comprehensive Health, the Arts, and History (2019) which all need attention during the preschool years to help students reach expected achievements. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), specifically, is a term commonly heard when talking about preschool curriculum today. SEL constitutes the learning of social skills and emotional skills, both of which play off of each other when existing in a social world. Or, to look at it a little more complexly, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (2023). In order to healthily interact with friends, children must constantly work to understand emotions. To understand and navigate emotions, children need to connect their own reactions and their friends’ reactions to stimuli. The relationship between emotions and social situations leads social learning and emotional learning to be grouped together into SEL. This is inherently anti-colonial work. By grouping the learning about ourselves with the learning
about others and how we interact with them, SEL works against centuries of self-prioritization within western culture. Teaching SEL means actively working to develop empathetic humans who fight for the rights of each other and reflect on the impacts of their own actions.

The idea of Social-Emotional Learning is fairly new. However, learning how to function within social settings has been a never-ending pursuit which can be traced far back in time. With the publication of “Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ” by Daniel Goleman in 1995 conversations about Social-Emotional Learning became popularized (Goleman, 2020). CASEL has played a huge role within the movement since its birth in 1994 at Yale University by bringing Social-Emotional Learning into all conversations about curriculum and development, both on local and national levels (Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2011, 2011). Because of the work of both CASEL and Coleman, Social-Emotional Learning is a term commonly heard within educational settings today. In fact, all 50 states have some level of Social-Emotional Learning standards mentioned within their state standards (National Conference of State Legislatures, n.d.).

As a piece of curriculum, Social-Emotional Learning takes place not just in classrooms and schools, but also in families and communities. While an individual observes how their family interacts with each other and with the world, they learn lessons about how they should function in society. In some cases, lessons from home about how to behave may not line up with lessons students learn in school. Yet, the government, families, and communities place a lot of pressure on preschools to push SEL as many positive outcomes are associated with the early acquisition of social-emotional skills (CASEL, 2023). These outcomes include positive youth development (Taylor, 2017), decreased emotional distress (Durlak, 2022), and increased milestone attainment like graduating college (Greenberg, 2023). Highlighted here is the need for
culturally responsive social-emotional instruction so as to connect with and recognize the existence of different social-emotional lessons taking place at home and increase access to these positive outcomes. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2023) defines culturally responsible and sustaining social-emotional instruction as “educators building upon culturally proficient practices by affirming and supporting cultural identities, and intentionally learning about and integrating knowledge of students’ culture and identities into SEL instructional practice to build students’ SEL skills” (pg. 7). Without continuous conversation between the school and home, teachers may imply lessons about the value of the child’s home.

Failing to provide culturally responsible and sustaining social-emotional instruction can be exemplified by lessons about “appropriate” behavior. Certain behaviors are defined as appropriate or inappropriate within the classroom. These are known as “display rules” - what emotions or actions are allowed to be shown and when (Goleman, 2020). For example, a child standing while eating a snack may be deemed inappropriate, or a child using their body to physically express their anger toward another student may be defined as inappropriate. In many cases, teachers have defined SEL as the work against this “inappropriate” behavior, i.e. teaching students when they can act in specific ways. However, hidden within the “appropriate” language lies lessons taught to children about whether their home culture receives value or not. Instead, a movement towards “optimal,” while only slightly more radical, helps to push against the undervaluing of other ways of being and instead moves towards culturally responsive and sustaining SEL. By focusing on “optimal” behavior within the school, as well as valuing the lessons students learn at home, teachers can hold onto the anti-colonial nature of SEL and do the teaching research shows as important in this age range. This can come to fruition through
conversations between teachers and students, where teachers prompt students to consider the different ways things can be done at school compared to home, thereby redirecting non-optimal behavior instead of shutting it down as inappropriate.

In order to better understand what SEL constitutes and how students learn social-emotional skills, CASEL (2023) breaks SEL down into five separate competencies - self-management, self-awareness, relationship skills, social awareness and responsible decision-making. By doing this, CASEL makes it easier for observers and teachers to see what actually takes place in the classroom and zero in on the learning which needs to be enhanced. All of these competencies intertwine through sometimes being called on simultaneously in social situations and hold weight in the development of a healthy human being. Each competency includes skills attained and then practiced throughout the entirety of one's lifespan within every interaction. Therefore, work within the competencies should teach children more than execution, and instead focus on the knowledge which leads to execution so as to create a base that can be applied to different situations.

**Self-Management**

*It is time to go to the bathroom. Every day, when you wake up from your nap, you are tasked with finding your way to the bathroom. This is hard for you, for whatever reason, and makes you feel very uncomfortable, sometimes emotional. How do you deal with that emotion? Do you remember this step after your nap? If so, how do you find your way through the task?*

The first of the five SEL competencies as defined by CASEL is self-management. Self-management has to do with kids knowing what the space expects of them and conducting those activities by themselves while managing their own emotions, similar to the scenario described above. This is just one example of the many ways teachers and the environment task
preschool students with managing themselves. According to de Haas-Warner (1991), on-task / attention is an important indicator of success in Kindergarten. This necessitates instruction along the line of self-management to prepare children to manage themselves and stay on task. The instruction can unfold in many different ways. However, implied values placed on different cultural norms inherently exist in these lessons, therefore the rules about how a child conducts themselves within the space can and should be taught according to both the level of competency the child has when entering the classroom as well as in conjunction with their home environment.

In order to create an inclusive environment and bridge the potential disconnect between self-management skills expected of the child at home compared to those expected at school, teachers should have conversations with students, families, and caregivers to understand what guidance around self-management looks like at home. Is the child used to going to the bathroom when their body tells them? Do they have tools they use to process big emotions when feeling concerned about using the bathroom? By gaining this knowledge, teachers can connect what they do in the class to what the child learns at home and build on what the child already knows instead of starting from scratch. Teachers can learn from and allow for emergent lessons on new forms of self-management based on what they learn from families and caregivers so as to expand the tools provided to children. Any form of self-management which has some level of work to understand emotions (and not just deal with them) in a way which does not cause harm to other people has value and should be uplifted in the classroom. By bridging the lessons happening at home with the lessons happening at school, the teacher increases the capacity for the child to gain skills along the line of self-management.
Teachers can develop a system to target the development of self-management skills by identifying the child’s current skills and areas for improvement (Mooij, 2014). Teachers' personal beliefs and the school curriculum impact the way the teacher proceeds with this targeting. Hemmeter (n.d.) details one way teachers may help students develop self-management skills, where the teacher displays the order of activities so the child can keep track of what the teacher expects them to do and check off the activities as they complete them. Using the example above, the child waking up from nap may be expected to 1) put on their shoes, 2) put their stuffy away, 3) go to the bathroom, and 4) find a quiet activity to do. For a child struggling with these steps it can be useful to provide a checklist, as detailed by Hemmeter, and provide less and less support over time as the child develops their skills to complete the tasks by themselves. Different levels of support from the teacher can look like 1) sitting with the child and looking at the pictures with them, asking leading questions and providing praise along the way 2) going over the checklist with the child after they finish the activities 3) checking in with the child about their progress at different points during their work through the checklist 4) providing fun activities upon completion of the checklist 5) simply providing the pictures and allowing the child to execute the activities themselves. These levels of support may be planned by explicit curriculum, but should be adjusted based on emergent problems and take into consideration the implied lessons based on home expectations. Different children will require different levels of support therefore teachers should be aware of the skills a child has when entering their classroom.

The same process of instruction described above can be applied to the processing of emotions within self-management. When a child manages their emotions so that they communicate their needs / feelings / wants, then they practice personal agency and a level of competency around self-management. Increased capacity to process emotions and communicate
with peers helps children develop more complex relationships which do not rely on the guidance of adults, as well as increases the capacity for a classroom to run smoothly given the decreased need for direct instruction. Teachers can help a child develop their ability to process their emotions and manage their relationships in multiple ways. One early instructional method is direct instruction on emotion management techniques. This can come up emergently as needed or can be a structured and planned conversation, for example during story time. Another instructional technique is demonstration. Demonstration can take place within a make-believe game or within the real world. An important addition to demonstration and direct instruction involves the teacher providing the child with guidance practicing the techniques they have been taught. Offering options - going to the one person space or spending some time reading with a teacher - in moments of distress reminds the child of the tools they have learned about and already know how to use and have seen in action. One last important piece within developing self-management of emotions involves giving the child agency to manage their emotions on their own. This can look like asking the child what they want, or giving them space to choose a technique on their own without instruction. These instructional techniques may be done in this order, however the learning process may require the teacher to go backwards or out of order based on the child’s needs. Even so, each piece of the learning process is important to the child’s development of self-management skills.

Another piece in self-management is practicing communication with their peers in which students set personal and collective goals through using skills and tools taught to them by their teachers (Ramsook, 2020). This takes their self-management to the next level as they not only deal with their emotions themselves, but also communicate them and find solutions which work for the group at large. Teachers can support the development of this skill by using direct
instruction, modeling, and helping kids practice techniques with direction and challenging them to use them without instruction. The more the child develops the tools and ability to execute self-management without direction, the closer they get to achieving skills which will support them throughout their life.

**Responsible Decision-Making**

*You just came to class and another student has a toy you were planning on playing with.*

*It makes you really sad that you don’t have this toy, you know it will help you regulate your emotions during the transition to school. Do you take the toy from the other child? Do you ask them to share? Do you find another activity?*

The second of the five SEL competencies is responsible decision-making. In the scenario above, the responsible decision requires the child to consider not just their wants and needs, but also the wants and needs of another child and the rules of the space (CASEL, 2023). Preschool challenges students daily to be aware of their impact, take responsibility for their own actions, and practice openness to alternative ideas presented to them by teachers and peers. Perhaps they want a one minute timer for the toy but the other child wants a five minute timer. Having awareness of their role within their community and how their actions impact those around them allows the child to be able to consider this counter-offer.

Learning how to make responsible decisions comes with experience. Children at this age explore many outcomes including the cause and effect of splattering paint on the floor, not going to the bathroom when their body tells them to, or biting their friend. Practice experiencing effects of behaviors as well as consistent guidance from adults helps to instill the ability to anticipate the results of considered actions. Preschool acts as a new environment where the child learns to be a responsible member of a community and experiences daily opportunities to practice making
decisions which impact themselves and others. Therefore, preschools have the responsibility to instill simple responsible decision-making tools through whatever form of curriculum the school uses so kids can grow up and draw conclusions for themselves about how their actions impact themselves and others.

Teachers help support children in their development of responsible decision-making skills in many ways. Whatever skills they address, they must check in with the child’s home life to see how families uplift responsible decision-making so as to best support the child’s skill acquisition and consider potential implied lessons. Once the teachers make a connection between home and school lessons, they can start providing instruction. This can look like creating the guise of the child making their own decision by offering two options both of which include ideal behavior and then slowly moving on to prompting the child to think through the problem and identify solutions (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.). These lessons can take place in emergent situations or through the use of planned activities which prompt the child. However, teachers should also help the child bridge between whatever activities the teacher uses to teach responsible decision-making by calling back to the activity during a real world situation where they task the child with making a responsible decision.

Teachers also support children in their development of this competency by exhibiting the skills themselves (Michigan Virtual, 2022). For example, the teacher may say out loud “I am going to put my hat on because it is cold outside!” or point to older children in the class who may be sharing toys. In the case where a negative outcome happened, a teacher can call back to what may have been a possible cause - if a child didn’t eat their lunch and gets very upset - then offering the child the opportunity to eat and point out how they might notice their body feelings changing after they ate some food. This can then be followed up by calling back to this instance
when the child has a hard time eating in the future. By providing explicit instruction to the child when pointing out the connection between food and body, then modeling implementing this by reminding the child of the lesson and how to act on it, this sets up the child to practice making this responsible decision themselves. The teacher can support the child with their decision making by prompting them “did you check in with your body to see if you were full enough?” then slowly easing up, observing the child making their own choices about food and checking in with them later. This follow up all the way throughout the learning process helps set the base for the child to make responsible decisions in new scenarios in the future.

Responsible decision-making covers a wide range of lessons students learn at the preschool age, from making optimal decisions for themselves and their own bodies, making responsible decisions which benefit their community, all the way to being curious about learning new ways to solve conflicts. All of these require self-reflective skills (Donovan, 2023) which must be prompted and built up by adults and teachers interacting with the child. Many adults struggle with being aware of the impacts of their own actions and choosing to act in a way which supports their own well being and the well being of others. By supporting children’s development of responsible decision-making, teachers set the base for students to have the ability to take care of themselves both physically and mentally so as to take care of their peers and community physically and mentally. Supporting the development of well rounded individuals means instilling simple responsible decision-making tools at a young age in whatever form of curriculum the school uses so kids can grow up and draw conclusions for themselves about how their actions impact themselves and others.
Relationship Skills

*A new kid wants to join your game with your best friend. You have always played this game the same way and already have assigned roles. How do you explain the game to this third member? Do you allow them to join? Can you work together to find a third role?*

The third SEL competency is relationship skills. These skills go beyond simply developing friendships to include the skills within that friendship and how that friendship exists in the space, i.e. communicating with their friends their personal wants/needs/plans, working with their peers towards a common goal, and awareness of how that relationship exists (CASEL, 2023). In a preschool classroom, children may demonstrate their relationship skills by being able to join in with different groups of students and follow the rules specific to the activity or contribute and communicate their own ideas effectively. They may also effectively include a new student, or recognize when a certain game starts to get out of hand and step away from the activity. Clearly, preschool challenges children in multiple ways to learn and put into practice relationship skills.

Part of relationship skills involves knowing tools to use within the relationship. In preschool this can look like timers or turn-taking. It can also look like knowing when to take space from a friend, or being capable of developing close relationships with multiple different students instead of getting stuck in one close pair. Tasks for children also include knowing their responsibility in relationships to look out for the best interest of each other, even when it might require them to sacrifice something they want. For a preschool student, this can look like choosing to include the third friend into the game in the example above even though they really didn’t want to. It can be difficult to change plans to include a friend at this preschool age. The constant interaction between peers in preschool creates multiple opportunities for instruction and
guidance which help support students in their relationship skill development (Taylor, 2023). Preschool teachers have the responsibility to find ways to teach and support relationship skills in whatever way they deem appropriate to their preschool culture.

Teachers can help cultivate the relationship skills of their students through explicit curriculum or through emergent opportunities, depending on their curriculum. For example, they can choose to sit kids strategically to help them develop new friendships or to strengthen relationships which may be blossoming (Poole, 2019). Teachers can cultivate the classroom to support the development of relationship skills through purposeful activity set up, partner or small group pairings, and seat assignments. Important in the teacher's role is keeping track of social circles developing in the classroom and how they affect all students. Opportunities for communication between teacher and student provides spaces where teachers can gauge children's development of relationship skills (Trawick-Smith, 2010).

Ideally, the teacher waits to understand the opportunities for growth present in the classroom, and then they begin to include direct lessons in their daily routine which support relationship skill development. Tools teachers introduce to use for communication within a relationship can be general, but most effectively support students when designed to specifically target potential issues or already present issues/areas for improvement within the classroom (Taylor, 2023). For example, if teachers notice students having difficulty developing deeper relationships with peers, or with considering the personhood of their peers, teachers can spend meeting time asking students to share pieces about themselves so as to practice not just communication but also listening to peers. This, along with other conversations, can be opportunities for teachers to provide guidance on how to communicate to their peers by providing specific words or phrases. Teachers can also provide tools to support relationship skills
- teaching them to ask for a timer, to have a turn next, or asking to play with someone.

Instructors can also demonstrate relationship skills by showing kids how they might ask for multiple opinions before working towards a solution.

In addition to providing specific instruction, teachers can help children call on tools, with direct supervision and over time by themselves. This can look like the teacher asking the children if they have used one of the tools they learned and prompting them to use it or asking how it went. Teachers can go with children to support them in their direct communication with peers during moments of conflict but this ideally can grow to the point that students have the ability to communicate with each other without direct support. With thoughtful instruction, students can have a host of tools in their toolbelt to call on in moments of conflict and can put them to use without adult intervention.

Teachers can also use behavior specific praise if students need any additional support in their development of relationship skills. Behavior specific praise can look like teachers calling out and naming positive moments students communicate with each other, including each other, or resolving conflicts constructively (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, n.d.). By calling out and naming the specific behavior the teacher wants to see in a positive manner, the child can receive positive praise and encouragement so as to incentivize continuing the behavior. Classrooms can have reward systems set up to acknowledge when children collaborate well together. But a complex system may not be necessary, as acknowledging positive use of relationship skills emergently can teach children that they get responses and attention from adults when they behave in a positive way with their peers.
Social Awareness

Another child on the playground wanted the swing you just took and is now crying, what do you do? Do you notice that they are crying? Do you make the connection between your actions and their reaction? Do you talk to them? Check in with their feelings? Consider how their reality might have been different from yours? Maybe you’re the fastest one on the playground, so you made it to the swing from double the distance! Wow what an accomplishment! But how did that make your peer feel who really thought they were gonna get that swing. Can you recognize their worthiness to get the swing even if you were faster? Maybe they are better at counting than you are, do you work together to teach each other how to run fast and count more accurately?

These would all be huge tasks for a preschooler. However, the ability to contemplate these questions and realities constitutes social awareness — the fourth social-emotional competency. Social awareness has to do with being aware of the existence of feelings, thoughts and emotions within everyone around you. Caring for and seeking understanding about the feelings of others constitutes an important step in a child's social-emotional development as it helps them to function more effectively and empathetically in the world. Making it to the point of connecting that you took the swing and that acted as a catalyst for your peer to cry requires time and guidance. In reality, multiple smaller skills within social awareness must be improved to develop a well-rounded individual who can exist healthily in and contribute to social spaces.

In the preschool context, students show their awareness of the existence of others in many ways. For example, social awareness can be seen in the classroom through children simply asking questions about another child when they see they appear sad or express any unexpected emotion. Or pointing out the emotions seen in faces in a book (Garces-Bacsal, 2022). It can also
be noticed when children ask any question about the actions of another child, especially when they see peers exhibit actions out of the ordinary. This indicates they recognize the existence of another person and question why that person acts that way. Social awareness can also be asking a friend or peer if they are all right when they cry, or asking another student for help building a tower because they know that student is especially good at building towers, or adjusting the tower-building plan because someone else thinks this plan will be unstable. All of these actions in the classroom constitute forms of social awareness. With adequate instruction, practice, and guidance, preschool students can be set up to empathize with others throughout the rest of their lives.

Similar to other competencies, teachers should pay attention to lessons children learn at home and how to expand on them to best support the individual child. With this base, instruction can include practicing recognizing different emotions on faces in an activity, prompting students to think about the emotions they see when reading a book, or directly walking a child through thinking about the feelings of another child in a moment of conflict (Transforming Education, 2020). These are all forms of direct teacher instruction, which should be used based on their analysis of student current social awareness and locations of potential improvement which exist within the student's zone of proximal development (Sanders & Farago, 2018). This can look like the teacher noticing students having difficulty acknowledging another child’s emotions. To address the lack of empathy, teachers can use direct instruction which connects a child’s experience of similar emotions to the emotions they observe to support the development of empathy. Curating a social awareness lesson specific to the current skills held by their students and their next steps in development increases the likelihood that the lessons will stick. To follow up, teachers must support their students in applying this lesson in the real world by calling back
to it when applicable. Teachers can slowly ease up the amount of supervision they provide to the student around their exhibition of empathy over time as they notice improvements until the child can execute this skill by themselves, as just one example of how teachers can use their position in the classroom to support the development of social awareness. In addition, similar to other competencies, teachers should exemplify social awareness in their actions through showing empathy, understanding, and compassion for students. Speaking out loud their internal processes which lead to their actions supports this connection development for the children.

**Self-Awareness**

*When you come into the classroom in the morning you are presented with multiple possible choices of activities. You could paint on the easel, you could use a magnifying glass to look at bugs, you could read books with a teacher, you could work on building a spaceship with blocks, or you could go outside and play on the climber. What do you choose? What do you want to do the most? Where do your interests lie?*

The fifth competency is self-awareness. According to CASEL (2023), self-awareness constitutes “the abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts” (Figure 1). This includes awareness of emotions expressed by the self as well as awareness of the interests and purpose held by the self. Preschool children learn to understand emotions and understand their identity within their community. Awareness of emotions and awareness of personal values and interests may appear to be quite different. However, identifying our values and interests requires being tapped into what emotions we feel when we act certain ways. A child learning to name that they get upset when their shirt gets wet while washing their hands, or that it makes them feel happy to have time on the swings, both exemplify a child’s awareness of how their emotions change and how their feelings relate to the
world around them. Children can practice this connection both experientially by adults naming the emotion they observe the child exhibit in different situations so as to provide words with real world connection (Guran, 2020), as well as through purposeful direction and emotion conversations when reading books and bridging to personal contexts (Garces-Bacsal, 2022). Developing this ability to identify their own emotions empowers the child and provides them with the conversational tools to advocate for themselves. Teachers can unknowingly suppress this skill development by tasking children with self-regulation to keep them functioning in the classroom setting to the point of missing emotion identification. Therefore, teachers in preschools should create space for children to feel, express, and name all of their emotions so as to push back against this historic suppression of emotion which in many cases, lies along the line of gender.

Individuality can be supported by having a variety of activities for the children to participate in and try, or investing in moments where the child begins to show interest. Teachers can have conversations with the child about their interests one-on-one and can begin to bring their newfound knowledge and interest into the community. As the child becomes aware of their own interests, they are tasked with practicing agency through bringing their identity into their social interactions by showing their interests and preferences in play. This can look like a child knowing they enjoy animals so they work with friends to create a game where they pretend to be animals on the playground together, or it can look like a child preferring to play a certain character in a family game and advocating for their ability to play that role.

Teachers can help support children in their development of self-awareness in many ways, some of which are noted above. Also noted earlier, the emotion recognition activity used to help with social awareness can be applied here, however there must be additional bridging work done
to help the child think about how the emotion cards relate to themselves. Overall, classroom support must follow a similar structure to that which has been detailed for other competencies - skill identification, direct instruction specific to child zones of proximal development, supporting the child in their execution of skills taught during instruction, and slowly stepping back and watching the child implement the tools by themselves. Working with this process, teachers should model self-awareness by speaking out loud and naming their emotions / trying to connect their emotions to something that happened if they can. Normalizing the experience of emotions, the reality of their complexity, and the development of personal interests, helps children develop comfort around their personal emotion identification and interest development.

**Preschool Curriculum and Social-Emotional Learning**

**Forms of Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum**

Social-Emotional Learning takes place in the classroom whether the teacher acknowledges it or not. The “display rules” of a classroom, i.e. the spoken and unspoken rules indicating when and how people can express their emotions, are not lost on the children. These rules impart lessons about how they should and will think about their own emotions and their importance (Goleman, 2020) thereby encompassing the implied dimension of curriculum. Students in the classroom may be expected to be happy about sharing, sit quietly when their body tells them not to, or keep their sadness about missing their parents inside. Therefore, SEL curriculum must be considered explicitly and implicitly in the classroom as even the smallest of lessons get soaked up by very impressionable children at this age.

Investment in Social-Emotional Learning is important to child development. The competency breakdown above includes ways teachers can address specific skill development while taking into consideration the child's home life. However, those examples involve
individual opportunities to address specific competencies and do not touch on a complete SEL curriculum and its implementation within the classroom. An SEL curriculum as a whole is much more complex than individual opportunities for learning, as teachers must consider how their curriculum caters to the needs of a wide range of developmental capabilities. The average preschool classroom has kids from age three to five, and a single month can elicit great strides in development that require different forms of instruction.

Denham (2018) emphasizes that SEL frameworks must be connected to a developmental perspective as without this addition the lessons may be out of touch with how and where the child is growing. Simultaneously, development is individual, and dependent on multiple factors both in and out of the classroom which may lead to a linear, or nonlinear, development of skills (Sanders & Farago, 2018). Keeping a developmental perspective in mind requires a teacher to keep track of specific developmental achievements across students and introduce social-emotional instruction which builds upon that individual's development.

If schools expect teachers to track the growth of their students, then school curriculum and practices should push the teachers to observe all types of students. Students with internalized behaviors get less attention than those with externalized behaviors (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2023). Therefore, a social-emotional curriculum can turn into intervention for students who show non-ideal responses to social situations externally to help keep the classroom functioning. Under this form of social-emotional curriculum implementation, students fall through the cracks and miss out on important lessons about how to process their emotions. Effective SEL curriculum should allow the teacher to cater to the individual developmentally appropriate needs of each and every child.
Preschool classrooms may function in a variety of ways as noted in the “Common Preschool Curriculum” section above. In preschool classrooms focused on creating a child led/emergent environment, the child’s independent learning takes place in an adult curated space. In this context, SEL curriculum would provide students with opportunities for interaction with each other, may include purposeful placement of activities and books which discuss developmentally appropriate skills associated with the competencies, or allow the child to have agency around their body and its placement / provide purposeful spaces which incentivize self-regulation and can be independently accessed by the child (Ljubetic, 2020). Alternatively, in preschool classrooms focused on active currantion of lessons, the school, family, and students expect the teacher to hold more control over the child and their actions. For SEL in this case, the students may be directed by the teacher to work with specific students to help them develop their relationship skills, or may be expected to complete certain activities with the teacher daily which the teacher and/or the curriculum design to address and analyze their competency development (Corso, 2007). These are two extremes of child led or teacher led environments.

In many cases, preschool classrooms may pull from different pedagogies, curriculums, and models for learning as the teachers deem appropriate and most helpful to the individual developmental needs of the students in the classroom. For example, students who have more outgoing behaviors may benefit the most from a child-led / emergent version of SEL curriculum, and similarly children who struggle with their feelings of personal agency may benefit from the same model as it provides them with the opportunity to develop their feeling of agency. However, similar students may also benefit from a teacher-led model of SEL curriculum if their outgoingness keeps them from receiving specific imperative lessons, or their lack of agency would benefit from direct support for development. Different teachers have diverging ideas about
how to address the needs of their students and it requires in-depth understanding of the child to know what form of curriculum will best suit them. However, some schools use a one-size-fits-all set up where they do not adjust their approach to meet the needs of the child. This can and does result in some students missing important opportunities for development.

Social-Emotional Learning takes place in many different ways in the classroom. Teachers should effectively and intentionally design the space to cater to the needs of the children they have that year. This must be a cyclical process which goes on throughout the entirety of the year as the children grow and change making them more susceptible to different forms of instruction. Taking into account the needs of so many different students, the way they learn best, and their developmental trajectory all while simultaneously taking care of their bodily functions and daily ups and downs is a tall order for any teaching team. It is impossible to create the perfect and ideal learning environment which can cater to every child which walks through. However, teachers have the responsibility to continue to strive towards this ideal as these skills will set the child on the best trajectory toward achievement.

Social-Emotional Learning Within Academic Curriculum

Whichever way a school decides to implement their social-emotional curriculum, it must exist in tandem with their academic curriculum. Children constantly learn lessons both social and emotional, and this does not pause when teachers switch to teaching academic lessons. Preschools expect students to reach academic milestones as identified in the “What is Expected of Preschoolers” section which, similar to SEL, prepare them for reaching academic milestones like graduating college. However, western education expects students to sit quietly for hours on end once they progress to elementary school, middle school, high school, and college. In this lies implicit lessons about the importance of their social and emotional learning. Excessive
prioritization of academic achievement spills into the early years of preschool, and teachers should intentionally push back against the ranking of academic importance above the child’s social-emotional well-being and learning. This has extensive importance today as standardized testing in elementary school has pushed academic literacy expectations earlier and earlier (Kamenetz, 2015).

Ignoring SEL does not mean Social-Emotional Learning does not take place, it simply means that children learn their academic success holds more importance than learning their bodily signals and how to work with their peers, thereby teaching them to suppress their personal social and emotional needs. Effective SEL does not work towards proficiency at dealing with emotions, but instead towards proficiency at understanding emotions (Evans, 2017). Understanding emotions and social situations does not hinder a child and their academic learning, but instead supports them in their ability to be fully present and ready to learn in all forms (Liu, 2021). Within academic lessons, this means prioritizing the child’s well being and their emotional stance first to prepare them for the lesson. Inherently within a teacher telling a student to sit still when their body does not want to exist lessons about self-regulation and the prioritization of academic learning over their emotional well-being. Inherently within a teacher telling a student not to talk to their peers or separating them from a blossoming relationship exist lessons about academic importance over their social well-being. To push back against this, teachers must continue to consider the child and the social-emotional lessons taking place during all forms of instruction and activity in the classroom.

Social-Emotional Learning can be viewed within academic instruction and supports the development of academic skills through purposeful intertwining in activity design. This can look like using activities designed specifically for SEL, like learning emotions through flash cards or
books (Garces-Bacsal, 2022). Or it can look like designing activities meant to support the learning of the alphabet to support peer to peer interaction through cooperative learning or even connecting alphabet letters to emotions. Academic instruction and skill learning create wonderful opportunities to draw on what some students know to help the students who don’t yet understand. With adequate guidance, children have the opportunity to ask for help from their peers and can develop a feeling of value and purpose, while the child learning can see the value of their peers and their different knowledge. Teachers can support this connection by directing children with academic questions towards their peers who may have already grasped a higher understanding of the topic, or by structuring heterogeneous groups where students can learn from each other. Social-Emotional Learning takes place simultaneously with their academic lessons and uplifts and supports the learning taking place (Dyson, 2020). Teaching each other and learning together are skills which can be used into the future to support their academic learning as their connections further their understanding and thereby support the development of multiple skills within each social-emotional competency.

The inclusion and consideration of Social-Emotional Learning within the academic curriculum should be explicitly outlined in the written academic curriculum which exists for the classroom. Without the prioritization of SEL in this way, teachers may attempt to follow whatever written curriculum exists and ignore the opportunities for SEL presenting during academic lessons. In the preschool years, western education highly prioritizes learning how to count, the alphabet, how to make patterns, and the development of gross motor skills. However, these cannot take place separate from SEL. Specifically, learning milestones for the preschool ages as outlined by The Massachusetts Department of Education (2019) include (but are far from limited to) predicting what might happen next in stories, recall orders of events from stories or
their personal life, recognize rhyming words, recognize the 1-10 numbers, count objects to answer “how many”, apply concepts of length and size and shape, and consider different attributes of their environment. These lessons take place within a social-emotional context. For example, developing language skills takes place within social exchanges, reinforcing the need for a teacher to understand a child’s Social-Emotional Learning to support their reading and writing development (Amarasingham et al., 2019). To be able to retell the sequence of events in a story, a child might require a certain level of competency around relationship skills to communicate with their teacher or around self-awareness to feel their interpretation has value. If SEL exists in every moment in the classroom, and children constantly learn, schools and teachers absolutely should consider it when writing out academic curriculum. How the curriculum considers or fails to consider Social-Emotional Learning, I argue, can have important implications for the social-emotional skills students gain during preschool.

Methods

Study Design

To understand the extent to which the two school’s pedagogical approaches support the development of Social-Emotional skills in their students, I conducted a mixed methods study. The study follows a triangulation design convergence model (Creswell, 2008) through concurrent data collection on teacher instruction in the classroom and student behavior in the classroom. As Saluja (2001) points out, the teacher is the centerpoint for classroom curriculum, so any school curriculum impact analysis needs to include an analysis of teacher actions, alongside the analysis of explicit curriculum. Following the data collection and analysis, I merge qualitative data from teacher behavior and expressed curriculum and quantitative data from student behavior for analysis. By tracking teacher actions and student behaviors, I attempt to
make a connection between school curriculum and student social-emotional outcomes. This happens during the final stage of analysis - comparing and contrasting the results across the two schools as represented in the study design pictured in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Study Design

I use a combination of observations and interviews to understand teacher instruction. Interviews allow connections to be made across teacher actions, their personal philosophy of education, and the expressed curriculum of the school. Teachers working in a school with a specified philosophy may not practice the same philosophy in their own classroom. I use interviews to provide teachers the opportunity to share their interpretation and use of the explicit
curriculum. Observations of the teacher's instructional practices in the classroom represents how the teacher's educational philosophy plays out in the real world setting. By using interviews and observations, I can see both the actions of the teachers and the thought behind the actions through the lens of the explicit curriculum.

I also use my observations to understand student social-emotional skills. I chose this over student self-reports or teacher ratings, both of which are most commonly found in social-emotional skill instruments (Cox, 2019). Based on student age and lack of ability to self-reflect at three, four, and five years of age, I decided to keep away from self-reports. The inconsistencies between the two schools also ruled out the use of teacher ratings. If teacher ratings had been used, their individual biases and perceptions of social-emotional skills would have influenced their ratings of students. Therefore, I recorded and coded child behavior in the classroom at both settings to help standardize interpretations of student actions.

**Sampling**

I selected schools based on prior relationships I had with the schools. My limitations on time and resources guided this decision. The use of only two schools limits the generalizability of the study results, but relationships between school pedagogy and student outcomes can be identified and provide insight into these two school systems. I selected these schools based on their differences in educational approaches, as highlighted in the “Review of School Pedagogy and Curriculum” section below, so as to provide data on two different approaches to teaching SEL. Site A has multiple different “preschool” rooms with similar ages to those of Site B, both with 3-5 year olds. I selected one classroom at Site A given my prior relationship with teaching staff. I selected the only preschool classroom at Site B.
Each observation site has multiple teachers, and one observation site has additional support staff who come to class inconsistently throughout the day. Given the unpredictability of their presence and the lack of influence they have on classroom activities and decisions, I did not track these support staff in the instruction they provide to the students. Substitute teachers occasionally led the classes. I did not include data from these instances as they do not represent the regular instruction the students receive.

**Data Collection**

I observed the school classrooms throughout the month of February from Monday to Thursday, 9:00am-1:00pm. I spent Monday and Tuesday at Site A and spent Wednesday and Thursday at Site B. These days were chosen based on how many students attend preschool only a few days out of the week, typically split up by Monday / Wednesday / Friday, or Tuesday / Thursday. By attending the observation sites on these days I increased the likelihood of observing how the classroom functions during all forms of presence and absence of students that the class regularly experiences. I chose the time period of 9:00am-1:00pm as both schools have extremely similar schedules during this time. For both schools, this time period includes the end of parent drop off, some sort of morning play, snack, outside play, lunch, and transition into nap. Observing both schools at similar times and during similar schedules, simplifies capturing how instruction and behavior differ according to the school pedagogy.

**Social-Emotional Instruction.** I spent four days at each observation site where I collected data on teacher instruction around SEL. For Site A, I remained in an observation booth while the class was inside, and sat on a bench away from play while the class was outside. Site B does not have an observation booth, requiring me to be present in the classroom while the class spent time both inside and outside. While in the booth at Site A, and in the classroom at Site B, I
observed the different forms of social-emotional instruction the teachers use. I tracked the event that prompted each instruction (Table 1), what the instruction included (specific dialogue), what SEL competencies teachers addressed in the instruction (Table 2), and the type of instruction used (Table 3). The full coding spreadsheet can be found in Appendix B. I recorded every instance of instruction observed. In addition to these codes and content scribning, I also tracked the date, the students and instructors present, the length of interaction, and the time of day the observation took place.

**Table 1**

*Stimulus Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Code Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>peer to peer conflict teacher stepping in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>solitary child needing direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td>child group needing direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC</td>
<td>individual child in group needing direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRP</td>
<td>child requested support with peer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRS</td>
<td>child requested support for self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>ideal behavior exhibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>planned lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>emergent lesson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2

**Competency Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Code Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Relationship Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO</td>
<td>Social Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM</td>
<td>Self-Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RD</td>
<td>Responsible Decision-Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3

**Instruction Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Code Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>Explicit Instruction: Telling the child what to do with their body, what to say to someone else, or what to think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>Explicit Lesson: Explaining why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Modeling: Teacher uses “I”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>Practice with Guidance: Teacher guides one or more student/s with prompts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Practice with Check In: Teacher follows up with student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also conducted interviews with the two main teachers at each school. These interviews serve as an opportunity to provide insight into the observations collected, and to hear from the teachers’ perspective how they translate school curriculum into their classroom. I asked the head teachers to explain their curriculum, what they view as most important in preschool education, and how Social-Emotional Learning presents in their class. Specific research questions can be found in Appendix A. A priori codes for teacher interviews include instruction type and SEL competencies as listed above for observation data. I use additional codes to track curriculum descriptions (SEL, Curriculum as Practice, Play-Based, Kindergarten Readiness, Emergent Curriculum and Child Led Curriculum), i.e. how the teachers identify their curriculum, how they structure the curriculum, and what it emphasizes. Curriculum description codes allow for connections between teacher understanding and school pedagogy, and connections between teacher understanding and teacher action as seen in observations.

**Student Behavior.** I spent an additional three days focused on observing the student social-emotional skill exhibition. Because of the need to focus on student interactions, I left the observation booth and entered the classroom at Site A, as this allowed me to catch small moments which were difficult to hear from the booth. From the classroom at both observation sites, I tracked student behavior and dialogue, categorizing moments along the lines of social emotional competencies and rating each student in the interaction according to the level of
competency exhibited in their actions. Similar to teacher instruction I recorded the addressed competency(ies), the date, student(s), content length, location, and current activity along with the details of the interaction and the competencies associated. Table 4 details the ratings attributed to each individual skill per child after observation.

**Table 4**

*Competency Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Code Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>No skill exhibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Some skill exhibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Excellent demonstration of skill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Review of Classroom Environment At Research Sites**

I selected two preschools for this study in Amherst, Massachusetts based on preexisting relationships between me and the staff. Given the implied lessons about Social-Emotional Learning inherent in the set up of the classroom environment, I provide the following descriptions to give context for the subsequent data analysis.

**Observation Site A**

Located on a college campus, this site serves students aged six weeks to twelve years and is open 7:00am to 5:30pm Monday through Friday. A community organization focused on providing community centers and housing runs the school. This observation site provides tuition assistance and has options for transportation support. The preschool class selected for the study is one of two classes in the three to five year age range. The class consists of three main teachers and twenty students. One main teacher transitioned into the classroom at the beginning of the
semester and was still establishing their role during the study observations. The school follows The Creative Curriculum, detailed above in the “Common Preschool Curriculums” section, and makes use of Teaching Strategies GOLD for their lesson planning (a template providing tool to help with classroom planning). I evaluate the center handbook detailing the philosophy, curriculum, and teacher actions at the school in the “Data Analysis” section as the explicit curriculum for the study.

Throughout the classroom, signs on the wall indicate how many students can be in each space (between one and four). Established spaces in the classroom include the art easel, the block area, the one person space, the kitchen, the drawing area, and the book corner. Teachers do not always set up the art easel, however the smocks always hang accessible for students to put on themselves. The block area has a range of cars, different size blocks, and a few people characters. The one-person space is placed underneath a teacher desk, and includes fidget toys, books, pillows, and signs. The signs include an emotion names poster and a planning board with velcro, and three spots for students to choose from a basket of next step options and put together their own plan (next step options include “take a deep breath”, “ask for a hug”, “read a book”, ect.). The drawing area has art supplies always accessible to the kids, and the reading area has a shelf of books and a permanent nap mat set up to sit and read on. Teachers use three to five tables to set up “curriculum learning centers,” also with signs indicating the amount of students they allow in the space. These activities change daily, and include matching games, scooping practice, pattern making, simple counting, and sensory options. According to the Teaching Strategies GOLD lesson plan, teachers base these curriculum centers around “science exploration, math, creation station, blocks, dramatic play, sensory exploration and literacy.” Teachers expect materials to stay in their designated location in the classroom. Teachers hold
daily meeting times where they usually sing one song, read one book, and give one announcement. The song and book can be seen on the schedule plan.

All of the students have their own “inside cubby” where they place creations to take home. Behind the main food table on a shelf sit utensils, cups, bowls, and plates kids use to eat with. Kids can get up and get their own utensils during lunch as they need, and teachers expect them to put away their dirty place mats and cutlery when they finish. On a wall the “daily schedule” lists the activities they go through during the day with pictures. Signs on both doors leading out of the classroom are “stop signs” to signify that the kids have to ask to leave. Current child artwork posted includes organized activities about valentines day.

The class spends about an hour outside, depending on the weather. The outside space has three individual playgrounds, fenced separately. One is a slab of concrete with a shed full of bikes, another is a big grass hill with swings and a sand pit, and the last is a climbing structure. The entire school shares these three outdoor play spaces and rotates their times in order to provide access to all spaces for each class throughout the week. In the hall with cubbies of outside clothes an ordered list on the wall pictures the steps to go through when getting ready to go outside.

Observation Site B

Also located on a college campus, this school serves students aged two months to five years. The three classrooms in the school include, one infant, one toddler, and one preschool. The preschool classroom has two main teachers and two support staff with fifteen children aged three to five years. The school follows the Reggio Emelia pedagogy, detailed in the “Common Preschool Curriculums” section above. Open daily from 8:15am to 3:30pm, this school is considerably smaller than Site A. It provides less tuition assistance to families and no
transportation services. The school defines their explicit curriculum as the Mission and Vision Statement which I evaluate in the “Data Analysis” section.

The preschool classroom has a few established areas, including the book reading area placed in the center of the room, a sand table, and an art easel. Teachers regularly open the art easel and leave paint and paper prepared for the passing child. The book area has a couch, chairs, and a rotating selection of books easily accessible to children. The rest of the room changes daily, with materials placed in bins on the wall mostly accessible to the children, blocks regularly get taken down to build structures which remain in the space for seconds or days. When students first arrive at school, stations with blocks or letters may be set out to help with transition into school, but throughout the rest of the day the teachers provide minimal guidance on how the students play and learn. Teachers place and remove tables and chairs regularly to create more space to play. This includes one-person tables students can opt to eat at during lunch or snack.

Teachers fill inside cubbies with individual selections of legos students can use during quiet times, and provide drawing boxes for each child which contain markers and paper, both of which they leave available to students. Out in the hall a daily schedule hangs next to the student’s cubbies, and unorganized pictures drawn by kids decorate the classroom walls. A long piece of paper the kids scribbled and drew all over takes up a lot of space on one wall. Other wall hangings include papers covered in paint, drawings of apple trees from an activity, and pictures of kids' faces, names, and pronouns. Teachers hold daily meeting times which range in what they cover. According to the teachers, they sometimes plan what they address based on community opportunities like writing valentines to farm animals, but most often meeting times consist of emergent discussions based on what comes up in the class like sharing if students had a hard
time sharing the bikes that day. Regular meeting times can include the reading of a story, sharing / going around about a question, or a group activity like a freeze dance party.

Kids spend the majority of their time at school outside. This class has its own outdoor play area which includes hiding spots, a sand box, a wooden climber, bikes, hammocks and other objects like planks of wood, tires, and old broken kitchen utensils. Materials from inside the classroom regularly find their way outside, including the bin of animals, picnic blankets and books, and block activities placed on the picnic tables. The class usually spends the entire day outside, except for napping, weather permitting (as the result of COVID). During the winter the amount of time outside highly depends on the weather and appropriate attire available.

Data Analysis

In order to answer how different preschool curriculums support the development of social-emotional skills, I analyze the social-emotional instruction teachers provide at each preschool based on written pedagogy/curriculum, teacher interviews, and observed teacher instruction. Next, I evaluate children’s social-emotional skills based on observations of interactions between students. Finally, I explore relationships between SEL instruction and student outcomes.

I examine data from each observation site individually and bring them together in the discussion. For each site, I look for consistency, or lack thereof, across the explicit curriculum as stated in the institutional mission and teaching materials, teacher reports from interviews, and actual instruction from observations. I examine student behavior for each site through the lens of information gathered from the explicit curriculum, instructor interviews, and teacher instruction. The results of these analyses from each observation site come together comparatively to find a possible relationship between curriculum and student behavior.
Observation Site A

Curriculum Analysis. I define the explicit curriculum for this site as the center handbook which details the school philosophy and their use of the Creative Curriculum and Teaching Strategies GOLD. The handbook mentions Social-Emotional Learning three times. The curriculum specifies the existence of a continuum of learning around this developmental area and notes the inclusion of three steps detailing the typical sequence of development (steps only accessible to the teachers). The school notes how SEL supports other areas of development (physical, math, writing, etc.) and how they take into account students' social and emotional development with these areas. The explicit curriculum mentions the competencies of self-management, self-awareness, and relationship skills in reference to what the school helps to develop. The curriculum also mentions instruction types modeling, explicit instruction, and practice with guidance abstractly in the section detailing the educator's role. Overall, learning happens at structured learning stations which teachers develop with support from The Creative Curriculum and Teaching Strategies GOLD.

Teacher Interviews. Both teachers at Site A emphasized the value they put on developing self-management skills. One teacher explained how she has “...talked to kindergarten teachers, and they say that what's most important is that the child can function independently… they can move here, they can sit and follow a direction, and then Kindergarten will work on all the other stuff… if you can’t self-regulate, you can’t write your name.” This highlights what these teachers note over and over in their interviews — the use of preschool as a space to “practice.” When asked to define SEL, both teachers said it’s about practicing engaging with peers and managing themselves. They didn’t emphasize using practice as an active model of instruction, but they explained the setup of the classroom to serve as a space to facilitate practice.
In regards to the development of self-management skills, one teacher mentioned a poster they use as practice with guidance to get children to make their next plan (further detail of this poster can be found in the Review of School Pedagogy section).

Other types of instruction the teachers highlighted in their interviews included modeling and explicit instruction. Modeling in regards to how the teachers act towards each other and talk about their own mistakes, and explicit instruction in regards to how they guide their students through big feelings and how they structure their classroom. The teachers also note how they design their classroom structure to facilitate the development of Social-Emotional Learning through using numbers dictating how many students can be in each space.

Along with emphasizing the importance of developing self-management skills in preschool, teachers at this site also mentioned responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness in their own words during their interviews. The teachers explained how they bring student interests into the classroom by being purposeful about how they design each learning station and how they place books throughout the classroom. Teachers discussed responsible decision-making in regards to learning how to share and take turns, and they mentioned relationship skills in regards to problem solving and communication.

Teacher Instruction. Twelve hours of observations of teachers at Site A highlight the importance they place on self-management and responsible decision-making. Figure 2 shows the proportion of social-emotional instruction spent on each competency. Self-management instruction constitutes a large proportion (37% of observed instances) of social-emotional instruction and given how much the teachers highlight the importance of self-management development in their interviews coupled with the inclusion of self-management in the explicit curriculum, this makes sense. On the other hand, despite noting social awareness in interviews,
observations show teachers provide the least amount of instruction around social awareness to their students (3% of observed instances) out of all the competencies. Teacher interviews also mentioned relationship skills however teachers provide a much smaller percentage of instruction around relationship skills (15% of observed instances) to students compared to self-management (37% of observed instances) and responsible decision-making (35% of observed instances).

**Figure 2**

*Site A Observed Proportion of Instances Of Teacher Instruction Per Competency*

Teachers use explicit instruction the most at this site during student instruction (46% of observed instances) (Figure 3). This goes against what both of the teachers emphasized as most important in preschool education — practice, which the explicit curriculum also mentions. However, teachers use practice with guidance as the second most used form of instruction (21% of observed instances). Modeling receives the least attention as a form of instruction (4% of observed instances).
**Student Behavior.** I observed student behavior across twelve hours at Site A. I coded each observation of a student using a skill as no skill exhibition (0), some skill exhibition (1) and great skill exhibition (2). For each interaction, I scored each child present based on what competency skills I observed them using or were challenged to and failed to use. Overall, observations of students show mostly no skill exhibition (49% of observed instances) with great skill exhibition being observed the fewest times (23% of observed instances). Figure 4 shows this right skewed distribution based on counts of observations at each skill level. In general, the students at the site exhibit poor performance with social-emotional skills.
This can be explored further by faceting on competency to show the distribution of student skill levels for each competency. By doing so, it becomes more clear what competencies students perform well in and in what competencies they show minimal skill. Figure 5 brings this faceting to life where counts of observations for each skill level are shown per competency. I collected more data for some competencies than others. This can be explained in many ways, perhaps by this particular preschool environment not challenging the students around the competencies or by preschool in general not being a space where, say, teachers and the environment challenge students' self-awareness. Further research should be performed to explore this shortcoming in the data set.
Based on Figure 5, I observed the best outcomes for student skill exhibition for self-management. The bimodal distribution shown here represents the highest average skill level. Students at Site A do the best at exhibiting self-management skills out of all the competencies. Based on the inclusion of self-management in the explicit curriculum, the consistent focus on the importance of self-management skills during teacher interviews, and the prevalence of instruction around self-management skills during instruction observation (Figure 2), it makes sense that this competency elicited the highest average student level.

Responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness all show a right skewed distribution where students exhibit level zero the most. The explicit curriculum for the site does not mention responsible decision-making and teachers only mentioned the competency but did not detail instruction for the competency during interviews. Despite the high frequency of instruction around responsible decision-making compared to other competencies (Figure 2), a large proportion of student skill observations show a level zero for this competency. Figure 5 does show a slight bimodal distribution with a second peak at level two, this could be explained by the large proportion of instruction teachers provide around this competency.
The explicit curriculum mentions relationship skills as important, and teachers mentioned the competency in reference to problem solving and communication during interviews. However, this falls out of line with observed teacher instruction, where relationship skills constitute a significantly smaller percentage of instruction compared to responsible decision-making and self-management. Figure 5 shows student relationship skill exhibition where I coded most kids as not exhibiting the skill at all (i.e. they got a zero). With minimal instruction and superficial mentioning of the competency in the explicit instruction and teacher interviews, low student skill levels are unsurprising.

Observations on student skill exhibition resulted in minimal data on student self-awareness and social awareness, meaning I did not see many students challenged to use these skills. Social awareness shows a small right skew and self-awareness shows students exhibited some skill (i.e. most students got level one), however the limited data makes it difficult to draw any conclusions. This does align with the low percentage of instruction around these two competencies in comparison to the other social-emotional competencies (Figure 2), which raises the question, if teachers provide more instruction, would more student skills be observed?

Overall, self-management receives the most attention in the explicit curriculum, the teacher interviews, and in the observed teacher instruction and elicits the best student outcomes. Other competencies which receive less attention in interviews and in the explicit curriculum show consistently lower student skill. However, with responsible decision-making also constituting a large proportion of the observed teacher instruction, data presents a slight bimodal distribution of student skill level. Perhaps if the teacher interviews and expressed curriculum provide similar attention to responsible decision-making as they do to self-management then the
large proportion of observed teacher instruction on the competency would elicit similarly high observed student skill levels.

**Observation Site B**

**Curriculum Analysis.** Site B’s explicit curriculum minimally mentions how they focus on social-emotional development. The words “Social-Emotional Learning” do not appear in the written curriculum, but the school does emphasize, in their own words, how they help students develop around responsible decision-making (“As members of a group learning environment, children develop a deep understanding of citizenship and social democracy…”), relationship skills (“They will celebrate and experience joy in group accomplishment and in group challenge”), and self-awareness (“We invite the children to build on and articulate their knowledge through dialogue with art, literacy and sensory materials that provoke their curiosity”). The curriculum notes how educators take into account the social needs of the group through the use of observation, collaborative inquiry, and reflection. The expressed curriculum only explained the use of peer mentorship as an instruction type highlighting this school's focus on community and view of the child as a knowledge bearer.

**Teacher Interviews.** Both teachers at Site B described Social-Emotional Learning in reference to each individual competency. However, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and self-awareness came up the most during the interviews. The development of relationship skills and responsible decision-making came up in reference to the development of community — the teachers emphasized the individuality of this group, their interest in dance, and how they bring that interest into the classroom to help develop community and connections. One teacher touched on the position of the school within the larger community and how they attempt to get kids “thinking about themselves as part of a classroom community and the school
community and the larger world community and things that are happening in the world and trying to connect with other classrooms, college students, college classes, Hampshire college, the farm, so that’s sort of like the concentric circle that’s always going as a background.” Another teacher shared a moment they had with a student where they got them to see how cool of an opportunity they have to create their own community at school. Overall, both interviews detailed this concept of community in reference to care for the space and development of connections and this equates with how the explicit curriculum touches on relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

Both interviews mentioned self-awareness in regards to the development of personal interests and individuality. One teacher said Social-Emotional Learning is about “kids finding their individual voice and feeling confident and empowered and actively engaged participants in their learning and in the classroom.” This competency constituted significantly less of the teachers explanations of SEL compared to their discussion of relationship skills and responsible decision-making. One teacher noted the self-awareness side of SEL but did not flesh out what it meant. Both self-management and social awareness also received minimal attention in the interviews despite being mentioned in passing, and the explicit curriculum does not include these competencies.

One teacher went through and detailed each step of a typical trajectory of skill development and the instruction types they use. This included explicit instruction, explicit lessons, modeling, practice with guidance, and practice with check-in. Teachers explained modeling as how co-teachers talk to and treat each other as peers. They also detailed their use of books to address social-emotional development based on emergent themes which come up in the classroom. However, the types of instruction practice with check-in and practice with guidance
came up the most during interviews at Site B. Both teachers detailed how they support students during difficult situations to help enhance their practice of social-emotional skills. Despite the inclusion of peer mentorship in the explicit curriculum, it did not come up in either interview. Overall, despite their lack of appearance in the explicit curriculum, interviews mentioned all instruction types and practice with guidance, practice with check-in, and modeling received the most attention.

**Teacher Instruction.** Twelve hours of observations of teachers at Site B reveals that most instruction around social-emotional skills focuses on the relationship skill and responsible decision-making competencies. Figure 6 shows the proportion of instances of instruction teachers give around each social-emotional competency in comparison to other competencies. Relationship skills (30% of observed instruction instances) and responsible decision-making (28% of observed instruction instances) both received the most attention in teacher interviews in regards to their discussions of community, and the explicit curriculum mentions both. Based on how often the interviews and explicit curriculum discuss these two competencies, it makes sense that they receive the majority of teacher instruction. In comparison, the explicit curriculum mentions self-awareness and received some attention in the interviews, but appears less in the SEL instruction (20% of observed instruction instances). This could be attributed to the more vague explanation of this competency in the teacher interviews, thereby shown in their instructional behavior through less attention.
Teachers most often use practice with guidance for instruction around social-emotional competencies (39% of observed instances), with explicit lessons being the one they use second most (22% of observed instances). The explicit curriculum mentions no instructional method, but practice with guidance and practice with check-in received a lot of attention in the teacher interviews. Modeling also received a good amount of attention in interviews but observations show teachers use this form of instruction the least (6% of observed instances). This could be explained by a shortcoming in the data collection process, as teachers discussed modeling in reference to how they interact with each other and I rarely collected those moments of interactions between teachers as instructional data. However, the interviews included all forms of instruction, and data reveals the use of a wide range of instruction types showing a connection between teacher interviews and observed instruction. Overall, practice with guidance falls in line with what the teachers discussed as an important instructional method, however practice with check-in and modeling do not appear to be consistent with the attention given in the interviews.
**Figure 7**

*Site B Observed Proportion of Instances of Instruction Type Utilized During SEL Instruction*

![Bar chart showing the proportion of instruction types utilized during SEL instruction at Site B.](chart)

**Student Behavior.** I observed student behavior across twelve hours at Site B. I coded student skill exhibition as no skill exhibition (0), some skill exhibition (1) or great skill exhibition (2). For each interaction, each child present scored based on what competency skills I saw them using or were challenged to and failed to use. Overall, observations of students show that they are pretty good at using these skills (37% of observed instances received a 2 score, and 29% of observed instances received a 0 score). Figure 8 shows this left skewed distribution based on counts of observations of each skill level. This means that in general, the students at the site do pretty well with social-emotional skills.

**Figure 8**

*Site B Observed Instances of Student Social-Emotional Skill Exhibition*

![Bar chart showing the count of observed instances of each skill level.](chart)
This can be explored further by faceting on competency to show the distribution of student skill levels for each competency. By doing so, it becomes more clear what competencies students perform well in and what competencies they show the least skill. Figure 9 brings this faceting to life where counts of observations for each skill level are shown per competency.

**Figure 9**

*Site A Observed Instances of Student Skill Exhibition Per Competency*

![Observation Site B](image)

Responsible decision-making and relationship skills both show a distribution where it’s more common for students to do really well (2) than really poorly (0). This connects with the extended attention given to these competencies in the teacher interviews, the inclusion of these competencies in the explicit curriculum, and my observations of teacher instruction where a large percentage of SEL instruction addresses these competencies. Here, a connection between attention to competencies by the school and teachers and student outcomes appears to be present.

Students perform best with self-management skills. This is very interesting given that the curriculum does not mention self-management and the teachers did not discuss it much in the interviews. Self-management constitutes the third-most addressed competency during SEL instruction (Figure 6), but the fact that students do so well surprises me considering the amount of attention given to it in teacher interviews and the explicit curriculum.
Students perform relatively poorly with self-awareness — the most common skill level was zero. Self-awareness receives minimal instruction at this site, and teachers did not talk about it much during interviews. This may explain why students present zero as the most common skill level. Teachers also gave little attention to social awareness in interviews and in observed teacher instruction. However, some students still present a level two exhibition for this competency! This does not align with the amount of attention social awareness receives in the explicit curriculum, the teacher interviews, and the observed teacher behavior.

Overall, students do well with responsible decision-making and relationship skills, consistent with the attention given to these competencies in the explicit curriculum, the teacher interviews, and the observed instruction. Worse performance for self-awareness can be attributed to the vagueness of the description of the competency in interviews and the low percentage of instruction around the competency compared to other competencies. Self management shows great outcomes as students receive a fair percentage of instruction despite being discussed minimally in interviews and not at all in the explicit curriculum. Finally, student social awareness skills appear to be inconsistent with the instruction teachers provide and discussion of the competency in interviews and the explicit curriculum. Some connection seems to be found between a lot of instruction, extensive discussion in interviews, and inclusion in explicit curriculum and good student skill exhibition based on results around responsible decision-making and relationship skills.

Discussion

Both preschools serve the same age range of students, but the two sites use different methods of teaching social-emotional skills and place emphasis on different Social-Emotional competencies. In addition, I saw that students at the different sites have very different levels of
social-emotional skill development. In this section I bring the results of the analyses from each observation site together comparatively to find a possible connection between types of instruction and curriculum around SEL and student behavior outcomes.

Social-Emotional Instruction

Both schools place emphasis on developing relationship skills in their written curriculum and pedagogy. However, their view of preschool as a place to develop relationship skills appears to differ. Site A’s explicit curriculum outlines how The Creative Curriculum -

- sets up the physical environment and maintains interest areas that establish a classroom structure and promote a daily routine and schedule, choice times, and small- and large-group times. This environment creates a classroom community that promotes positive relationships where children make friends and learn social problem-solving skills (see blinded explicit curriculum in Appendix E).

This explicit curriculum detailing the environment and its role can be seen put into action in the classroom through the curriculum learning centers with written regulations on how many students can be in one area at a time in an attempt to create a safe environment where the students can practice interacting with each other. Teachers keep interest areas (i.e. the kitchen, the art center, the block area, and the book nook) very consistent day to day, creating a sense of structure and routine, but near the end of observation a teacher shared in an interview how they just created a “baby station”, as two students in the class expect new siblings. This shows that they have a core set of areas with some variability, according to the needs and interests of the students.
Unlike Site A, teachers have no regulations on how many students can be in a space at Site B. In their written Mission and Vision Statement, Site B notes the importance of relationship skills in a slightly different manner —

“We value the peer mentorship that emerges when children of varying ages are encouraged to work together as a community. As members of a group learning environment, children develop a deep understanding of citizenship and social democracy and revel in the joy that is harnessed when they learn from one another. We witness the children’s role as participants within and creators of their own cultural communities” (see blinded explicit curriculum in Appendix E).

Here, relationship skills appear to have to do with how students build each other up and create a space together. When Site B teachers talked about SEL in their interviews, they emphasized this group's interest in dance, and how they bring that interest into the classroom. They also noted the importance of students finding their voice and being active participants in their community, as well as building trust for those they exist in community with.

Overall, within relationship skill instruction, teachers at both schools mentioned how they use students' interests and life experiences in the classroom activities, however at Site B the teachers emphasized the active use of those interests to create relationships and community. Teachers at Site A, as well as the explicit curriculum at the site, seem to view the use of regulated stations as a space to support the development of relationship skills. The teacher and schools reliance on the environment to support the development of relationship skills may result in less relationship skill instruction at Site A (15% of observed instances) than at Site B (30% of observed instances). Regardless of the reason, teachers at Site A spend a smaller proportion of their social emotional instruction on relationship skills as compared to instruction on other skills.
Figure 10 shows this lower percentage of social emotional instruction on relationship skills through the observed percentage of instructions around each competency out of all social-emotional instruction comparatively between each site.

**Figure 10**

*Observed Proportion of Instances of Teacher Instruction Per Competency*

Figure 10 also shows how greater emphasis appears to be placed on self-management at Site A (37%) than at Site B (19%) as seen through instruction observations. Results from teacher interviews and the explicit curriculum supports this difference. Teachers at Site A emphasized the importance of self-management in preparation for Kindergarten, noting how they view self-management as the basis for all other learning. A teacher at Site B also noted the need for SEL skills to be able to accomplish basic academic tasks: “…but ultimately if they can’t share the pencils, then they won’t be writing their names. So I'll get to the writing and learning how to
write their names but they have to have the backdrop of ‘I was using that pencil and you took it from me.’” However, the written pedagogy at Site B does not include anything directly addressing the development of self-management, while Site A’s written curriculum specifies how teachers “support and reassure children experiencing upsets, including fussing or crying” and that they “display a happy, upbeat demeanor on a regular basis, as reassurance and role modeling for children in the program.” I did not find explicit space for instruction around self-management skills in either site's daily schedule. With more emphasis placed on self-management in Site A’s explicit curriculum and shown in how the instructors think about preschool, perhaps this contributes to more self-management instruction provided to students as shown in Figure 10.

These two schools clearly prioritize competency development differently as seen through their observed instruction and their written pedagogies/curriculum and interviews. How the teachers provide instruction must be included in this conversation. As detailed in the Social-Emotional Learning section above, teachers can provide social-emotional instruction in a range of ways. Overall, teachers use explicit instruction much more often at Site A (46%) than at Site B (21%). Figure 11 depicts this by representing the percentage of instances each type of instruction took up out of all social-emotional instruction. Teachers at Site B use practice with guidance the most of all instruction types (39%) which presents most often during instruction around relationship skills. One teacher at Site B detailed each step within one instructional progression and touched on explicit instruction, explicit lesson, modeling, practice with guidance, and practice with check in. This can be seen in their use of all forms of instruction for each competency during observation.
Site A’s written curriculum emphasizes the use of modeling as instruction, however I did not observe many occurrences of teachers modeling SEL skills (4% of all SEL instructional methods). Teachers at both schools talked about the importance of modeling a quality relationship between co-teachers during their interviews, however I observed minimal use of modeling, with the most observed at Site B (6% of all SEL instructional methods), despite it not mentioning modeling in the explicit curriculum and Site A including modeling in their explicit curriculum. This may have been a downfall of the observation methods used, as I collected instances of instruction based on words said and did not account for non-verbal forms of instruction which may have constituted a large percentage of modeling. Therefore, these numbers represent the observed instances of verbal modeling.
Figure 12 combines mode of instruction and competency addressed to explore if different competencies received different types of instruction. In this figure, each observation site is depicted faceted on the five competencies. In each competency graph the counts of the type of instruction teachers use for instruction around the competency are shown. This graph highlights the wide range of instructional methods teachers use at Site B across all competencies, and how I observed teachers rely heavily on practice with guidance. Site A, on the other hand, shows teachers rely heavily on explicit instruction across most competencies. Teachers at Site B use explicit lesson and explicit instruction for the responsible decision-making competency much more than for other competencies at the site. However, they do not shy away from their high use of practice with guidance and check in as I also observed these as highly utilized modes of instruction at Site B for responsible decision-making. Meanwhile, Site A observations of responsible decision-making instruction reveal more of a reliance on explicit instruction and explicit lessons. Instruction around relationship skills at Site B makes use of all types of instruction, however teachers use practice with guidance, by far, the most. On the other hand, Site A also shows counts of using all forms of instruction around relationship skills but teachers use explicit instruction, by far, the most. Both sites veer from their typical instructional patterns when teaching about self-awareness (with Site A not relying on explicit instruction and Site B not using a wide range of instruction) with both sites heavily relying on practice with guidance. Teacher self-management instruction mostly consists of explicit instruction at Site A, while primarily practice with guidance at Site B. Social awareness elicited minimal observations at Site A making it difficult to make any conclusions, while observations at Site B show a wide range of instruction types teachers use for this competency. Overall, Figure 12 provides further evidence of the difference in instruction around the competencies that teachers use at these sites.
Figure 12

*Observed Proportion of Instances Instruction Type Utilized During SEL Instruction Per Competency*

Note. EI = Explicit Instruction, EL = Explicit Lesson, M = Modeling, PC = Practice with Check In, PG = Practice with Guidance

After reviewing the instruction teachers provide at both schools through the observations, interviews, and written pedagogy/curriculum, I can identify a few important findings. I found Site A to place the most emphasis on self-management, as seen in their explicit curriculum, teacher interviews, and observation. This site also shows the most use of explicit instruction, in contrast to teacher interviews which emphasized how preschool provides a place to “practice.” Site B places the most emphasis on relationship skills and uses a lot of practice with guidance to instruct around relationship skills, while providing a consistent range of other forms of
instruction as well. This connects with their written pedagogy as well as the interviews with the teachers. Clearly, the SEL instruction between the two schools differs in both the delivery method and in the competencies addressed.

**Student Behavior**

Shifting focus to the students, how does their Social-Emotional skill exhibition differ between the two schools? Student competency level observations overall reveal the most common skill level at Site A is zero (49% of observed instances), and the most common skill level at Site B is two (37% of observed instances). Figure 13 depicts the counts of observations where students exemplified a skill level comparatively between the two sites. A right skew distribution can be seen for skill level observations at Site A, and a left skew distribution can be seen for skill level observations at Site B. Clearly, I observed a big difference in the outcomes students exhibit between the two schools.
To look more closely at these skill levels in reference to specific competencies, Figure 14 facets the data on competency. In Figure 14, counts of observations of students who exhibited specific skill levels for each competency are shown comparatively between the two sites. Here, relationship skills show better outcomes for students at Site B as exemplified in the slight left skew. This is opposed to the right skew in Site A’s observed student relationship skill levels. A high right skew in responsible decision-making for Site A contrasts the mostly normal distribution of responsible decision-making for students at Site B. I observed student self-management competency levels to have a lower mean score at Site A than B. Self-awareness skills show lower levels at Site B than A and social awareness levels are bimodal at Site B while right skewed at Site A.
Between the two schools, students exhibit different social-emotional skill levels across all competencies. This is interesting to explore within the context of differences in instructional beliefs and procedures around Social-Emotional Learning. For example, as previously mentioned, I observed better student responsible decision-making outcomes at Site B than A. Figure 15 shows student competency outcomes for each site underneath the observed social-emotional teacher instruction at each site to allow for easy comparison across sites. The explicit curriculum mentions responsible decision-making at Site B and not at Site A. Teacher interviews replicated this where discussions about students' roles within the community to uplift it constituted a large percentage of the interviews at Site B, while teacher interviews at Site A only mentioned responsible decision-making in reference to “sharing materials” and “taking
turns.” However, as shown in Figure 15, observations reveal that teachers at Site A provide more instruction about responsible decision-making in proportion to all of their instruction compared to Site B. Teachers provide largely explicit instruction and explicit lessons at Site A, while teachers use a wide range of types of instruction for responsible decision-making at Site B. This raises the question of if varied instruction helps improve student competency? Teachers at Site B consistently provide more varied instruction across all competencies and overall students have better social emotional skills, while teachers at Site A use less variety and their students show not as good social emotional skill exhibitions. Simultaneously, more instruction around responsible decision-making at Site A than B does not connect with the amount of attention given in the explicit curriculum and teacher interviews. This finding might be explained by students having lower skill levels around the competency at Site A, requiring more instruction (i.e. explicit instruction). The lower skill levels at Site A could also be explained by the reliance on explicit forms of instruction, as the wide range of instruction types teachers use at Site B may impact the higher skill levels found for students. These uses of instruction specific to competencies can be seen next to student outcomes specific to competencies in Figure 16 for each observation site to allow for comparison across. Further research should be conducted to make any conclusive comparisons, but I did observe a difference in instruction and outcomes between the two schools.
Figure 15

*Observed Proportion of Instances of Teacher Instruction Per Competency and Student Skill Exhibition by Level*

*Observation Site A*

*Teacher Instruction*

*Student Level*

*Observation Site B*

*Teacher Instruction*

*Student Level*
Figure 16

*Observed Instances of Instruction Type Utilized During SEL Instruction and Student Skill Exhibition by Level*

*Observation Site A*

*Observation Site B*

Note. EI = Explicit Instruction, EL = Explicit Lesson, M = Modeling, PC = Practice with Check In, PG = Practice with Guidance
Observations of student relationship skills also show better outcomes for students at Site B than A (Figure 15). Both schools address the development of relationship skills in very different ways as shown through the teacher interviews, instruction observations, and the written pedagogy/curriculum. The explicit curriculum at Site A mentions relationship skill development in reference to the set up of the classroom environment to support student relationships. During the interviews, teachers emphasized the use of the environment to support relationship skills in reference to the use of numbers in the classroom which dictate how many students teachers allow in an area. Teacher observations replicate the use of the environment to support relationship skill development through minimal observations on teacher instruction around relationship skills. On the other hand, teacher instruction around relationship skills constitutes a large proportion of social-emotional instruction at Site B. There, the explicit curriculum notes how the school encourages students to collaborate together. Teacher interviews replicated this emphasis on community as both teachers extensively detailed their hands-on development of communication and community in their classroom. A possible connection can be found here with the hands-off reliance on environment to develop relationship skills at Site A resulting in lower student skill levels and the extensive focus by teachers on community development at Site A resulting in higher student relationship skill levels. The higher teacher use of practice with guidance within the instruction around relationship skills at Site B (Figure 16) may also impact the student outcomes.

Both the explicit curriculum and how the instructors think about preschool as shown in their interviews and observed instruction at Site A place great emphasis on self-management. Teachers only mentioned self-management in passing during interviews at Site B and it is not included in the explicit curriculum. However, I observed student competency levels to have a
lower mean level at Site A than B despite the students receiving more instruction proportionally at Site A (Figure 15). This outcome may have to do with the different types of teacher instruction students receive for the competency (Figure 16), or perhaps lower skill level for students at Site A requiring more instruction. Teachers at Site A rely more heavily on explicit instruction while teachers at Site B rely more heavily on practice with guidance. Necessary to note is how self-management has the highest mean student competency level of all the competencies at Site A. The greater emphasis the teachers and the school expressed curriculum place on self-management appears to be resulting in better outcomes than other competencies at Site A, however the student outcomes remain lower than those at Site B. Here, the student outcomes could not be predicted by the consistent mentioning of self-management in the explicit curriculum, the interviews at Site A, or the larger amount of instruction teachers provide to students along the competency. Instead, the instruction type teachers use appears to play a very important role. A lot of teacher instruction does result in the highest mean student observed level, but it does not result in better outcomes than students Site B.

In regards to results around self-awareness and social awareness, I collected a significantly lower amount of data on teacher instruction around these two competencies at both schools than the other competencies. However, interestingly, the data does represent a right skew in student outcomes around self-awareness at Site B despite the focus on the competency in the explicit curriculum and teacher interviews at the site. Because I collected such a small amount of data on student outcomes around this competency at Site A, it is difficult to make any comparison as despite the normal distribution of student outcomes at Site A, I still found more instances of level two skill at Site B than A and I observed very similar proportions of instruction around the competency (Figure 15). Neither school's explicit curriculum mentions social
awareness but teachers did mention the competency in passing during interviews at both sites. I observed a larger proportion of instruction around this competency at Site B with a bimodal student outcome distribution contrasted by a right skew distribution at Site A where students received less instruction proportionally (Figure 15). More instruction in general, similar to what I observed with Site A around self-management, appears to support better outcomes for students. Further data visualization can be found in Appendix C and Appendix D.

**Limitations**

As a nine-month-long project, this study has a number of limitations. First - the observation sites themselves. I selected these for my convenience and based on past interactions with the schools where I had already noticed differences between the curricula and daily practices. Therefore, I entered into the observations with preexisting assumptions on the effectiveness of the schools. In addition, with only one school selected for each pedagogical/curricular practice, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the impact of their pedagogy/ curriculum on Social-Emotional Learning without further data from other schools following similar practices.

Second, multiple possible confounding variables may have impacted the study immensely, including the difference in the student-to-teacher ratio between the two schools, and the fact that eleven new students started in the classroom at Site A in January while all the students at Site B have been in the class since at least September. Also necessary to note is the difference in demographics between the two schools. While one school offers tuition aid that the majority of students use, the other school offers no tuition aid while requiring a very high tuition. The clear difference in economic class between the two schools may have had a big impact on
the importance placed on each individual social-emotional competency and more research needs to be conducted to explore how this confounding variable impacted the results.

A third limitation to note is the observational methods. Because no student social-emotional behavior observational tools aligned with what I attempted to observe in the preschool classrooms I had to develop my own method of observation. I did not have time to test this specific method prior to beginning to collect data for the project. This means that the method has not been validated and may have resulted in inaccurate data. Additionally, it would have been better to have multiple observers to allow for bias check.

Finally, given that I did not ask the preschool students about their decisions at each moment, I could only document what I saw and not what went on in their head. This means that at moments when I observed them executing an unideal behavior there may have been a lot of thought behind their actions, for example they got quiet and did not respond to the teacher because they felt overstimulated and needed silence. This form of self-management was not able to be recorded with this observational method thereby making multiple moments of social-emotional skill exhibition undocumented. Overall, much more research needs to be conducted on this method of observation and on the impact of the Reggio Emilia pedagogy and The Creative Curriculum on social-emotional skill development.

**Further Research**

Further research should be conducted to explore the impact of demographics on the results of the study by including multiple sites to allow for cross referencing. Research on the possible differences in student social-emotional outcomes based on demographics of the student body could help discern the role of the school in relation to the home. Exploring home cultures could point to a bias in the literature as some of the SEL competencies could be culturally bound
and not universal. In addition, further research with more sites would allow for exploration on the role of the teacher-to-student ratio and allow for comparison among schools with similar pedagogies. In any research done on this topic in the future, multiple researchers should work together collecting data at the same sites to allow for calculating inter-rater reliability so as to help validate results.

Teachers at Site B mentioned the use of peer mentoring as an instructional method. I did not look for peer mentoring in my observations. Additional research should explore this and possible additional instructional methods, perhaps ideally by interviewing teachers before beginning classroom observations so as to note instructional methods they mention and look out for them during observations.

I also struggled with finding data collection methods that aligned with my research questions. I could not find other comparative research methods evaluating instruction and student behavior observationally as was necessary to capture what really happens in the classroom and the student’s use of skills in real world settings. As a result, I created my own data collection method in which I coded teacher instruction and student behavior. Further research should be conducted to validate this data collection method for use in studying SEL instruction and outcomes.

**Conclusion**

In order to truly understand the curriculum students receive at each school, it should be explored through the written pedagogy/curriculum, the teacher beliefs/understandings, the teacher behaviors around what competencies they address and how, and the environmental set up of the classroom. In other words, understanding curriculum means understanding not only what is explicitly stated, but also what is invisible or implied, and what emerges as a result of student
need. No conclusions can be made by simply looking at the explicit curriculum as this does not paint the full picture of what is happening in the classroom or the skill levels students display in the classroom. This impacted the design of the study through necessitating the evaluation of multiple variables to understand school curriculum.

I had difficulty finding methods for evaluating child learning of social-emotional skills thereby making it difficult to evaluate their skills connected to school curriculum and instructional practices. I created an observational method which allowed me to evaluate teaching methods and student behaviors in a way which supported analysis when searching for relationships across student outcomes and school practices. The observational method allowed me to see how much instruction teachers provide for each competency, the types of instruction they use, and the level of competency students show. This method proved very useful during analysis and effectively exhibited the difference in instructional choices and student outcomes between the two schools.

Overall, it appears as though when teachers place more emphasis on a competency, I observed slightly better student outcomes for that competency. Clearly a necessary piece in this analysis has been the instruction type students receive. Explicit instruction, while effective when used enough, shows to be less impactful than practice with guidance and practice with check in. However, the study shows the most effective form of instruction is the use of a wide range of instructional techniques opposed to heavy reliance on one. By providing students with multiple points of entry into the skill, students have more opportunities to learn tools within the competencies in multiple contexts to help with bridging into new situations. This provided context into why I observed better outcomes for self-management at Site B than Site A. Even
when receiving a lot of instruction, the type of instruction used plays a big role in student outcomes.

Emergent, learner-centered curricular approaches that address in the moment student behavior show to use a lot of practice with guidance and practice with feedback as instructional methods. As the observed most impactful instructional methods on student skill levels, the use of these instructional methods by this curricular model creates a preschool environment which well supports the development of social-emotional skills. Non-emergent, set preschool curriculum which designs the classroom environment to support the development of social-emotional skills shows to use a lot of explicit instruction and explicit lessons as instructional methods. Reliance on the environment to get students to develop self-management skills or relationship skills appears to be ineffective. Preschool teachers should involve themselves emergently to help students with their competency development.

In order to make any conclusions about the connection between curriculum, instruction and student outcomes around SEL, much more research needs to be conducted to include a wider range of schools following pedagogical and curricular practices. Student social-emotional skills brought from home, their home culture, the student-to-teacher ratio, and many other factors impact the social emotional skills students exhibit and the instruction teachers decide to provide. While the study finds a connection between curriculum and student outcomes, this is just the beginning in a much larger missing piece of educational research.
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Appendix A

Interview Questions

- How would you describe the curriculum you follow in your classroom in general?
- What do you think is most valuable for children to learn in preschools?
  - How would you define Social-Emotional Learning?
- To what extent does your school emphasize SEL?
  - Do you follow any explicit SEL curriculum?
  - How do you feel about that curriculum?
  - Can you give me an example of how your classroom supports the growth of Social-Emotional competencies

Appendix B

Data Collection Forms

Appendix B. Social-Emotional Instruction Data Collection Form

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<thead>
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<th>Date</th>
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<th>When</th>
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Appendix B. Student Behavior Data Collection Form

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Appendix C

Student Skill Exhibition Per Competency Per Student

**Figure C1.** Observation Site A Student Skill Exhibition Per Competency

Note. GA-GU = Students, RD = Responsible Decision-Making, RS = Relationship Skills, SA = Self Awareness, SM = Self Management, SO = Social Awareness
**Figure C2.** Observation Site B Student Skill Exhibition Per Competency

Note. EA-EO = Students, RD = Responsible Decision-Making, RS = Relationship Skills, SA = Self Awareness, SM = Self Management, SO = Social Awareness
Appendix D

Further Data Visualization

Figure D1. Observed Teacher Instruction Type By Competency
Figure D2. Observed Proportion of Teacher Instruction Type and Student Skill Exhibition
Appendix E

Observation Sites Written Curriculum

Site A Written Curriculum.

[Redacted] is..... A Place to Enhance a Child’s Learning Experiences..... A Place to Explore Personal Interests.....
A Place to Make Friends and Learn Cooperation..... A Place to Feel Positive about Yourself.....
A Place to Grow, to Learn, to Experience..... [Redacted] is a Home Away from Home..... A Place to Share and Love.....

[Redacted] is based on the philosophy that each child has inherent talents and should be given the opportunity to explore those talents to the fullest. Our program provides opportunities that help each child explore and learn about her/his individual uniqueness while acknowledging and honoring her/his cultural diversity within the community. In building upon life’s first experiences, we utilize a comprehensive curriculum that provides each child a variety of developmentally appropriate learning experiences. [Redacted] adheres to all state and national standards, including those of EEC, DOE, and NAEYC. Care is taken to ensure that the child’s needs are met on an individual basis, no matter what the age or need. Through the use of community resources, we ensure the quality of learning for children as their individual needs indicate.

The [Redacted] utilizes the Creative Curriculum, a nationally known system used in early education programs for children aged 0-5. The Creative Curriculum is a comprehensive curriculum with a clear organizational structure and a particular focus on interest areas. A Curriculum Framework presents the five components of The Creative Curriculum for
Preschool and gives educators all the information needed to set up your program. The five components are:

1. How Children Develop and Learn
2. The Learning Environment
3. What Children Learn
4. The Teacher's Role
5. The Family's Role

How Children Develop and Learn

Knowing how children develop and learn is the basis for planning your child’s program, and guiding her/his learning. The Creative Curriculum® enhances social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development. Goals and objectives for each of these developmental areas are organized into a series of Developmental Continuum objectives. Since children do not master a skill all at once, each objective has three steps that illustrate the typical sequence of development. A special category called forerunners helps educators to look at emerging behaviors for each objective and enables us to assess all children's learning and development, including children with special needs.

The Learning Environment

The learning environment is the structure of the classroom that sets the context for caring, teaching and learning. The Creative Curriculum sets up the physical environment and maintains interest areas that establish a classroom structure and promote a daily routine and schedule, choice times, and small- and large-group times. This environment creates a classroom community that promotes positive relationships where children make friends and learn social problem-solving skills.
What Children Learn

The Creative Curriculum identifies the knowledge, skills, and concepts important for toddlers and preschool children to acquire in each content area: literacy, math, science, social studies, the arts, and technology. Most important, the curriculum emphasizes that young children who develop strong social and emotional skills are best prepared to learn in all these other areas.

The creative curriculum describes the key components of these content areas as follows:

- **Literacy:** vocabulary and language, phonological awareness, letters, words, print, comprehension, books and other texts, and sources of enjoyment. Mathematics: numbers; patterns and relationships; geometry and spatial awareness; measurement; and data collection, organization, and representation
- **Science:** physical science, life science, and earth and the environment
- **Social Studies:** spaces and geography, people and how they live, people and the environment, and people and the past
- **The Arts:** dance, music, drama, and the visual arts
- **Technology:** awareness of technology, basic operations and concepts, technological tools, and people and technology
- **Most importantly,** we teach these subject areas in ways that respect how preschool children develop and learn, taking into account their social and emotional development.

The Teacher's Role

The Creative Curriculum describes the teacher's role as an ongoing cycle of observing children, guiding their learning, and assessing their progress. We work to motivate children, to build on their prior knowledge and strengths, and to support their learning in an intentional way by using a variety of strategies to increase their knowledge, skills, and understandings.
Educators use Teaching Strategies Gold, a comprehensive, research-based assessment system, to support effective teaching and children’s development and learning. We use assessment information to guide children's learning throughout the day: during large- and small-group times, routine times, long-term projects, and in interest areas.

- Educators take time to actively listen to each child regarding her/his needs and concerns. Educators encourage children to express interests and concerns.
- Educators maintain body postures that maximize good communication. This includes positioning at eye level, whenever possible.
- Educators demonstrate warmth and emotional support with positive nurturing relationships, comfort and hugs.
- Educators support and reassure children experiencing upsets, including fussing or crying.
- Educators display a happy, upbeat demeanor on a regular basis, as reassurance and role modeling for children in the program.
- Educators call children by name and show interest in hearing about their personal interests and concerns.
- Educators show enthusiasm regarding child activities, efforts, and accomplishments.
- Educators positively communicate with parents regarding each child’s activities, efforts, and accomplishments.
- Educators participate in children’s games and activities.
- Educators encourage social friendships and actively assist children to identify cooperative strategies that support the same.
- Educators communicate positively and supportively with co-workers, as role modeling for effective adult relationships.
The Family's Role

Home and school are a young child's two most important worlds. Children must bridge these two worlds every day. If home and school are connected in positive and respectful ways, children feel secure. To facilitate this security, staff work consistently to increase family participation, communication and understanding. Teachers and administrators work to build a true partnership that truly values the family's role in each child's education and recognizes how much we can accomplish when we all work together.

The Creative Curriculum provides opportunities for families to communicate with center staff, to partner with them in developing child learning, and to work together to resolve challenging situations throughout the child’s years at the center. Progress reports will be made available 3-4 times annually, as will opportunities for parents to conference with staff regarding their child(ren).

**Site B Written Curriculum.**

We believe in the child’s right to play with a tangible sense of adventure, exuberance, and joy. We value the transcendent nature of unrushed, spontaneous play and the powerful inquiries and relationships that are built when children are given uninterrupted time with materials and with each other. Play provides an imaginary world in which children can master skills, can develop deeper understandings of what they observe in their daily lives, and can safely explore issues of power and agency. We believe that thoughtful risk-taking is an important part of the learning process. When given opportunities to challenge their bodies and minds, children develop trust in themselves and expand their self-view of their own capabilities.

We value the peer mentorship that emerges when children of varying ages are encouraged to work together as a community. As members of a group learning environment, children
develop a deep understanding of citizenship and social democracy and revel in the joy that is harnessed when they learn from one another. We witness the children’s role as participants within and creators of their own cultural communities. Their spontaneous, invented classroom rituals are passed down from year to year and become a part of our [ ] tradition.

As educators, we strive for collaborative inquiry, observation, and reflection to facilitate the development of a daily program that responds to the social, cognitive, and sensory needs of the individual and group. We observe the children at play and translate it, giving value and language to deepen our adult understanding of their work. We nurture the scientist in the child and the child’s natural inclination toward discovery and innovation. We invite the children to build on and articulate their knowledge through dialogue with art, literacy and sensory materials that provoke their curiosity. We document our work with children and colleagues and the children’s work with each other – our goal is to capture the uniqueness and capability of each child, the value of their words and discoveries, and our teaching practices of observation, reflection, self-assessment, and co-construction.

We strive for authenticity in our interactions with children, in our development of a curriculum that reflects the uniqueness of each group of learners, and in our commitment to reflecting the values of our community in our philosophy and daily practice. We appreciate the ways in which the culture of our community changes with the individuals who inhabit it. We honor our history and yet, every year, we respond to the changing pulse of the new children and families who walk through our doors. We value collaboration in every aspect of our work, including our ongoing dialogue and partnership with colleagues, children, families, and members of the larger college community. We appreciate the talents, diversity and enrichment that our work with the students, faculty and staff of [ ] provide for our program. We aim to
be a resource for educators and for future educators in training. In our role as teacher researchers, we are charged with the mission of expanding our society’s image of the capabilities of the young child. We advocate for childhood and for the rights of children and actively challenge educational practices that undermine the possibility that children can be agents of change in their communities.

The children who pass through the __________ will view themselves as powerful and vital citizens, with rights and responsibilities within their classroom, school, family, and larger communities. They will celebrate and experience joy in group accomplishment and in group challenge. They will develop a strong sense of self and an appreciation for their own uniqueness. As life-long learners, the children of the __________ will embrace the endless possibilities of discovery that exist in that sacred space of listening, wondering, and asking.