

# Emotion Coaching in an Inclusive Setting: Training Preschool Special Educators

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**Abstract**

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Early childhood is a significant time for emotional development and the formation of self-regulation skills. This study took place at an early childhood center and involved training early childhood special education teachers about emotion coaching. Emotion coaching is speaking with children about their emotions by helping them identify how they are feeling and talking about it. Teachers at this school received training on emotion coaching in an effort to promote the inclusion of all children into the preschool setting to fit their individual needs. This site included children at risk, children that qualify for special education, and typically developing children. Sixteen preschool educators attended a training session on emotion coaching, given by a certified trainer, at an early childhood center as part of typically scheduled staff training. After

the training, the teachers participated in a series of surveys to provide information about their experience working in an inclusive classroom and, as educators, what they learned, how they will implement what they learned, and how they might put those thoughts into practice.

Implications of this study include finding out if teaching special educators about emotion coaching helps them feel more confident and able to include all children into preschool.

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## **DEDICATION**

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## Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The preschool years are a defining time for emotional development. When a child is a toddler, they begin to learn some emotion words and can begin to label how they feel. As children progress through preschool, their expressive vocabulary increases and they gain more abilities to discuss emotions in a social context and regulate their emotions. Table 1 shows the indicators of typical development are described from birth to preschool.

Infancy	<p>Crying to cooing, feelings of hungry, sleepy, temperature (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000)</p> <p>Universal facial expressions (anger, fear, joy) but not linked to specific events (Zeman, Cassano, Perry-Parrish, Stegall, 2006)</p> <p>Temperament begins to develop (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000)</p>
Infancy to 1 year	<p>Sensitive to cues of other people (Zeman, Cassano, Perry-Parrish, Stegall, 2006)</p> <p>Form attachment to adults, some self soothing, express basic emotions (Denham, et al. 2008)</p> <p>Developing differentiated emotional expressions that are connected to specific occurrences and language skills that assist in labeling these emotional states (Zeman, Cassano, Perry-Parrish, Stegall, 2006)</p>
1- 2 years (Toddlerhood)	<p>Empathy begins to develop, desire to make others and toys “feel better” (Zeman, Cassano, Perry-Parrish, Stegall, 2006)</p>

	<p>Group play, express more social emotions (guilt, shame, empathy), more independent emotion regulation, some idea of self-competence, autonomy (Denham, et al. 2008)</p> <p>Self-conscious emotions (shame, embarrassment, pride)- varies across cultures (Saarni, 1999)</p>
3-5 years (Preschool)	<p>Anticipate others' emotions (Zeman, Cassano, Perry-Parrish, Stegall, 2006)</p> <p>Separates easily from parents, make friendships (Denham, et al. 2008)</p> <p>Expression of blended emotions, understands expressions of basic emotions, more independent emotion regulation (Denham, et al. 2008)</p> <p>Larger repertoire of behavior strategies to manage emotions specific to social context (Zeman, Cassano, Perry-Parrish, Stegall, 2006)</p> <p>Display rules (say please and thank you)- intentional separating of emotional experience and facial, vocal, behavioral expression displayed, understanding that expressed emotion doesn't necessarily have to match one's subjective emotional experience (Zeman, Cassano, Perry-Parrish, Stegall, 2006)</p>

Thorough knowledge of child development is vitally important for teachers. There are tools for professionals to use in order to assess this development. Teaching Strategies Gold, is one assessment tool used by teachers to assess where children are in terms of the early stages of

social emotional development. They assess children based on how they regulate emotions and behaviors of themselves, establishing and sustaining positive relationships and participating cooperatively and constructively in group situations. Assessment includes documenting what is observed in the classroom and assigning checkpoints to that observation. The site in which the study took place uses this tool.

It is important to note that these typical stages of development are based on North American culture. Different areas of the world, such as South America, Asia, Europe, Australia, and Africa all have different ways of viewing certain emotions and theories of emotional development according to an article by Rubin (1998). He also compares cultures as part of this research. For example, in North American cultures and Western Europe, there is an emphasis on being assertive and competitive. When assessing children on social emotional development, we may look for these things. Being a child that is assertive and competitive in a Chinese culture may not be as much of an asset as in Western culture. Chinese cultures place value on being obedient and submissive, so being shy is seen as a more valuable quality. It is clear that different cultures might look for different qualities when assessing children in the realm of social emotional development.

Many theorists have attempted to develop ideas about how emotional development occurs from a psychological viewpoint. Lev Vygotsky, for example, theorized about the *zone of proximal development*. He proposed that emotional processes should not be separated from cognitive ones because all systems are connected and experiences build on one another. Vygotsky stated that learning helps a child move toward development. The *zone of proximal development* is described as the place between where a child can independently learn and develop and the potential a child has to learn with the assistance of adult support and guidance

(Levykh, 2008). Because adults play such an important role in development, it is important to consider the theories of Vygotsky when considering how children learn about emotions. Based on this theory, adults can create opportunities for children to develop those higher cognitive processes that aid emotional development. Because adults help facilitate learning, teachers and the time a child spends in preschool is of significant importance during the early years of development.

Preschool is a key time to assess and help develop emotional literacy and self-regulation skills. As described by Zeman, Cassano, Perry-Parrish, and Stegall (2006), preschool are the years in which children begin to understand that the emotion they display does not necessarily have to match how one really feels. They also start to learn some rules of social communication, such as to say “please” and “thank you.” Young children are just starting to learn self-regulation and emotion regulation strategies as they enter the preschool years and form strategies throughout preschool. Thompson (1994) defines emotion regulation as extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions; especially their intensive and temporal features, to accomplish one’s goals. By the end of preschool, children are capable of using their awareness of their own and others’ emotions to talk about and manage everyday emotional experiences (as cited in Rubin, Coplan, Fox, & Calkins, 1995).

## 1.2 FACTORS THAT AFFECT EMOTION REGULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Development of emotion regulation occurs with every experience a child encounters and is often shaped by important people in the child’s life. Many researchers have focused on the parents’ role in shaping how children regulate their emotions (e.g., Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996). In a study by Denham (1997), parental expression of emotion was shown to affect a child’s ability to succeed in the preschool classroom. Parents that approached emotions positively were associated

with children that approached emotions in a more balanced, socially competent way. It is important that parents talk to their children about their emotions and teach them to regulate because children rely on their parents so much as models for this. Children observe their parents and learn how they react to emotions such as fear, shame, anger, pride, embarrassment, and other emotions (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Izard, Stark, Tretacosta, and Schultz (2009) describe that when a child has a significant person in their life and they feel loved, they associate people with trust later in life. If a child grows up feeling unloved, they are at risk for depression and developing emotional beliefs that they are “rejected.” If the child doesn’t get assistance creating emotion regulation strategies, they may have more behavior problems and depression.

As children get older and cognitive abilities increase, they start to develop core beliefs about emotions. Their executive functioning skills play a role in how this development occurs. Executive functions include working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive and mental flexibility. These are all crucial processes that children and adults use to make decisions, solve problems, and complete the daily tasks of life. Children who do not have well-developed executive functioning skills have problems completing assignments and inhibiting impulsive behaviors (Blair & Diamond, 2008). Adults are able to help facilitate this development and give children the tools to develop executive functioning. According to research reported by the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, executive functioning skills are the building blocks for early development of cognitive and social capacities (2011). In order to help children with self-regulation skills, executive functioning must be considered.

Research reported by the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child has also shown that children that experience adversity early on in life are more likely to exhibit deficits in executive functioning (2011). Socio-economic status, changing of caregivers, maltreatment, and

a number of other adverse situations affect the development of emotion regulation skills (Joseph & Strain, 2003a). For these children, educators need to be more mindful in strategies of teaching play skills, how to make friends, problem solving, and other social-emotional skills. Children from a low socio-economic background also show higher rates of behavior problems (Harden, et al., 2000; Kaiser, Hancock, Cai, Foster & Hester, 2000). Challenging behavior might interrupt a child's ability to learn and form relationships with teachers in preschool settings. Interventions can be used to help aid this process if children do not develop executive functioning and emotional development skills in natural settings. Programs that are federally funded, such as Head Start and ECEAP, are examples of early childhood settings that provide intervention for children at-risk for atypical development based on family income level. These programs focus on helping children find a safe place to learn and grow. When a child is comfortable and has relationships with adults, they are more likely to learn emotion knowledge and self-regulation. Many children learn emotion regulation skills from participating in preschool activities, playing with friends, and interacting with family.

### 1.3 EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IN CLASSROOMS

Both parents and teachers need strategies to help children figure out how to cope with big emotions like sadness, anger, or even excitement. Many programs have looked at intervening with parents of children that are considered "at-risk" to help support them in coaching their child (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001). Once children enter preschool, they begin to spend a lot more time out of the home and more time with educators. Researchers have recently started looking at preschool programs and how they support children with learning about how to regulate their emotions. Programs that begin in preschool and continue into a child's schooling later on are more likely to have lasting benefits and support appropriate positive behavior, but

there are few with a large evidence base (Greenberg et al., 2003). Including teachers in the training process better helps to improve behavior problems at school because it keeps teachers and parents on the same page and aware of social-emotional learning. Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Hammond (2001) gave parents of children in Head Start a 12-week training program called the Incredible Years. This was a follow-up study that also included teachers in the training. The researchers found that in the first study, when only parents were involved, behavior problems at school did not significantly change, but in the follow-up study that involved teachers, there were significant changes in children's aggressive and noncompliant behaviors at school. Children experienced a 30% drop in noncompliance and peer aggression at school. This suggests that training teachers helps generalize improvements in child behavior to the school setting.

Joseph and Strain (2003a) reviewed eight comprehensive social-emotional school programs designed for children under 6 years old. They created a list of criteria in order to determine how much evidence each program had. Only two out of the eight programs had a high body of empirical evidence. Those programs were The Incredible Years: Dinosaur School (Webster-Stratton, 1990) and First Step (Walker, 1998). Years later, Barton, Strain, and Powell (2014) reviewed eighteen programs that focused on social-emotional learning using quality indicators that they developed. A few examples of those quality indicators are the evidence-base for the program, intervention fidelity, and replication across groups and settings. Ten programs were school-based and eight programs were parent-focused. The programs generally focused on teaching social-emotional skills and reducing challenging behaviors. Six of the eight parenting programs received high ratings and only two out of the ten classroom curricula received high ratings. This suggests that there are high-quality parent training options and it is a common area of research, but more of an evidence-base is needed for social-emotional curriculum to be used in

schools. Results also showed that almost all of the programs focused on increases in pro-social behavior rather than just decreasing challenging behaviors. This is significant because social-emotional competence in early childhood predicts outcomes later on (Barton, Strain, & Powell, 2014).

Teachers also support social-emotional development through teaching emotion words and their definitions. Joseph and Strain (2003b) suggest teaching emotion words as the child is experiencing their emotion, by playing games about identifying emotions, and by having special reinforcement for children to identify emotions. It is important that children considered “at-risk” receive social-emotional support, but there is not one clear path as to how to give this support in preschool.

The Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP) is another curriculum used to support teachers on coaching children. In a study by Raver, et al. (2009) the teachers attended weekly workshops related to various types of social-emotional support such as using specific praise and establishing classroom routines. Results showed that teachers in the treatment group showed improvement in classroom climate and were more responsive to the needs of their students. There were less negative practices and teachers were better at monitoring challenging behavior. They also found that classroom quality was improved when the teaching program had a package of workshops on classroom management paired with in-class mental health consultation. This suggests that by providing professional development and support to teachers, they improved instruction and had a more positive classroom climate.

Programs such as The Incredible Years, Preschool PATHS, and Tools of the Mind were used as enhancements in The Head Start CARES (Classroom-based Approaches and Resources for Emotional and Social skill promotion) program (Hsueh et al. 2014). Researchers studied

these programs as enhancements to Head Start centers to determine the effects of these enhancements on 3-4 year old children in the classes and their social emotional skills. They found that the enhancements did increase the amount of instruction teachers spent on social-emotional learning. They also found that teachers reported more closeness with the children and fewer behavior problems, although there was no statistical difference in behavior problems. This suggests that enhancements to classroom social-emotional instruction increase learning opportunities and teacher closeness to students. Implications of this study suggest that 3-year-olds can benefit from social-emotional instruction as well as 4-year-olds.

#### 1.4 EMOTION COACHING

Discussing emotions with children has been an area of research for many years. Gottman, Katz, and Hooven (1996) have done research specifically with parents and their *meta-emotion philosophy*. Meta-emotion is described as one's thoughts and feelings about one's own emotions and one's children's emotions. They've also described one meta-emotion philosophy called *emotion coaching*. Emotion coaching parents are aware of their child's emotions and can talk about those emotions in a differentiated manner. Emotion coaching has five components that the researchers have listed: parents' awareness of low intensity emotions in themselves and their children, their view of their child's negative emotion as an opportunity for intimacy or teaching, validation of their child's emotion, assistance in verbally labeling emotions, problem-solving with the child, setting behavioral limits and discussing goals and strategies for dealing with the situation that led to a negative emotion. In this study (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996), researchers found that parental meta-emotion affects their child's achievement in school and is related to child outcomes later in life. They also found that meta-emotion is related to parenting behavior, suggesting that parents' personal views affect how they parent their child. These

findings were prominent in showing that parents are important figures in helping a child develop emotions and self-regulation skills. What a parent thinks about emotions affects their child's outcomes in the realm of social-emotional development.

In order to see if there was a correlation between parent meta-emotion philosophy and their child's academic achievement in school longitudinally, Hooven, Gottman, and Katz (1995) interviewed parents with a meta-emotion interview when their child was four years old and again when they were eight years old. They also gave children a physiology test (among other experimental measures) to measure vagal tone, which is associated with the autonomic nervous system. Children whose mothers coached them through their anger had a higher vagal tone when hearing a sad story, meaning they were tuned in with their emotions. Children whose parents were aware of their own emotions had better scores on math. Children overall experienced better outcomes when their parents were conscious of emotional development and their own feelings.

Emotion coaching is a philosophy that other researchers have also used in order to study the way parents talk to their children about emotions. Havigurst, Wilson, Harley, and Prior (2009) developed a parenting program called Tuning in to Kids. This program focused on developing emotionally responsive parenting by teaching parents about emotion coaching and the steps to problem solving with their child. The results showed that the parents who participated reported increased abilities in responding to their children's emotions. They also reported a decrease in their child's problem behavior and a shift in attitude when it came to talking about their child's strong emotions in the moment.

Emotional development can be affected by risk factors such as parental marital conflict. Katz and Gottman (1997) looked at protective factors that may reduce negative outcomes for preschool-age children faced with parental marital conflict. Marital conflict is one risk factor that

affects emotional development in young children. They found that parental warmth served as a buffer against negative outcomes in academic achievement and emotion regulation ability.

Parental warmth is one piece of the emotion-coaching philosophy. They also found that scaffolding and praising buffered against child behavior problems. Warmth and scaffolding/praising can be buffers to conflict between parents in a household where a child is learning emotion regulation.

Gottman and colleagues have numerous studies related to talking to children about emotions within the family setting. Parental views and reactions to emotions affect child outcomes when children are very young. Emotion coaching is one suggestion for parents to talk to children about emotions (Gottman, Katz & Hooven, 1996; Havigurst, Wilson, Harley, & Prior, 2009). This study aims to examine teacher meta-emotion and emotion coaching in classroom settings. As society is changing and early childhood education is becoming an essential place to learn social-emotional regulation skills, it is important to find a way to approach emotional development in the classroom.

## 1.5 SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers have a great effect on the social and emotional development of the children in their class. It is important to give teachers professional development opportunities in order to help them continue to improve classroom practices that will affect a child's life and wellbeing. Some teacher preparation programs do not require educators to study emotional development in children; however, to best understand how to speak with children about their emotions, teachers should receive training. According to Jennings and Greenberg (2009) there are no in-service training programs that improve teachers' knowledge and skills in relation to children's social and emotional development that have carefully assessed the effects on the teacher and classroom

atmosphere. According to Poulou, standardized teaching programs should place a larger emphasis on child social-emotional development (as cited in Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Providing in-service training to teachers that have already gone through standardized teaching programs is one solution to educating about social-emotional development. According to Kedzior and Fifield (2004), high quality professional development programs should have several characteristics such as being content-focused, extended rather than one-time, collaborative, part of daily work, ongoing, coherent and integrated, inquiry-based, and teacher-driven.

## 1.6 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Talking to children about their emotions in a developmentally appropriate and effective way is something that parents and educators have struggled with for many years. One of the issues commonly seen in preschool classrooms is how to approach children experiencing strong emotions and how to facilitate emotion regulation. Children are just starting to gain the capabilities to make sense of their emotions and need some support in doing so. Many classrooms use posters of emotion faces, social emotional curriculums such as “How Does Your Engine Run?” and books such as, *The Bucket Book*. These work for some children and don’t work as well for others. There isn’t one research-based, universal way to discuss emotions with children and teach them self-regulation skills.

Preschools are moving toward inclusion programs in which there are children with special needs, children that are typically developing, and children that qualify for services such as Head Start or ECEAP. Early childhood special education teachers often teach these inclusion programs. The special education program that prepared the majority of teachers in the study educated teachers on behavioral principles as well as the general developmental trajectory for

emotions. All children require an individualized approach, for example, a child with autism exhibiting challenging behavior might benefit from a teacher using behavioral principles to reinforce appropriate behavior and positive behavior support to prevent the challenging behavior; a child that qualifies for ECEAP that exhibits challenging behavior might benefit more from discussing how he or she feels and why he or she feels that way. To date, there is not one clear way for teachers to learn multiple approaches and strategies to discuss emotions with children.

Many researchers have focused on how to help parents talk to their children about emotions. One researcher, John Gottman, developed the ideas of meta-emotion and emotion coaching as a way for children to discuss how they feel with their parents. This strategy involves identifying the emotion, listening to the child, and thinking of a strategy to make it better together. This study examined giving preschool teachers a professional development training on the principles of emotion coaching developed by John Gottman. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of giving early childhood special education teachers training on emotion coaching as a method of talking to children about their emotions in the classroom. Research questions include: is emotion coaching a way of talking to children about emotions that is realistic and helpful to special education teachers? Can emotion coaching be applied to all students? How do teachers plan to use emotion coaching in their classroom? Implications for this study include identifying a universal and effective way of approaching emotions with children in the preschool classroom.

## Chapter 2. METHOD

### 2.1 SETTING

This study was conducted at an early childhood center in the Pacific Northwest region. The center has inclusive preschool programs for children 3-5 years old as well as Kindergarten and infant toddler classrooms. This study involved educators in the preschool and Kindergarten classrooms. Educators include preschool head teachers, Kindergarten head teachers, assistant teachers, Para educators, and a social worker. The preschool program includes children that qualify for Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), special education services, and children that are typically developing. ECEAP is a comprehensive preschool program that provides free services to eligible children and their families. Children are eligible based on family income and need as well as age. The children that qualify for ECEAP attend preschool at the center for the full day and the rest of the children attend half-day preschool. Previously, children that are in ECEAP were served in the ECEAP classroom. This year is the first year that children in ECEAP are included into the blended preschool classrooms as part of inclusive preschool. The blended preschool classrooms focus on teaching using the general education curriculum, The Creative Curriculum, while providing accommodations and modifications to allow all children access to the lessons.

Teachers receive a beginning-of-the-year professional development training that includes learning Right Response, CPR, and trainings from the National Center for Quality Teaching and Learning. Each quarter, head teachers attend an ECEAP training that encompasses principles such as embedded learning opportunities, stating expectations, and creating a high-quality learning environment.

## 2.2 PARTICIPANTS

This study involved four separate research activities including an observation of classrooms, a pre-survey, post-survey, and follow-up questionnaire. The participants for each activity are described in the following sub-sections. All activities were done at the same developmental preschool in the Pacific Northwest, however different groups of teachers may have participated in each activity. Participants were kept anonymous.

### 2.2.1 *Classroom Observation of Emotion Words*

Observations were conducted in four preschool classrooms. Teams in that classroom consisted of a Head Teacher, a Para educator, a Graduate Student Assistant, and Related Services staff, such as a Speech Language Pathologist and Occupational Therapist. The classrooms consisted of five children that are typically developing, five children on Individualized Education Plans, and five children that qualify for ECEAP.

### 2.2.2 *Pre-survey*

Sixteen educators were invited to complete an online pre-survey related to emotion coaching before attending a training event at the preschool. The pre-survey can be viewed in Appendix A. Fifteen out of the sixteen educators chose to participate and took the pre-survey online. The pre-survey was sent out to all teachers in the pre-school program, including four Head Teachers, four Para educators, and eight Graduate Student Assistants. Eight educators were between the ages of 20 and 25, five were between 25 and 30, and two were between 30 and 40. In relation to education, four participants had a Bachelors' degree, seven are currently in a Masters' program, and four have their Masters' degree. When asked how many years of experience that they had working with children, two participants had 1-2 years, two had 2-4 years, seven had 4-6 years

and four had more than 6. When asked how many years they have worked at the developmental preschool where the study took place, one has been there 1 year, five have been there 2 years, two have been there 3 years, four have been there 4 years, and three have been there for more than 4 years. When asked if they had attended any professional development trainings on social-emotional development, four responded yes, six responded no and five did not respond.

### 2.2.3 *Post-survey*

The post-survey can be viewed in Appendix B. Upon program request, all staff members at the early childhood developmental preschool (including Kindergarten and Social Work staff) were invited to attend the staff training and to complete the post-survey. There were twenty-eight educators that attended the staff training; so twenty-eight survey requests were e-mailed to attendees. Fifteen out of twenty eight participants filled out the post-survey questionnaire. It was encouraged that the sixteen pre-school educators fill out the survey. Fourteen out of sixteen preschool teachers and one social worker filled out the post-survey. Due to anonymity of survey, it is impossible to know if it was the same people that completed the pre-survey. Participants ranged in age from 21 to older than 60. Six participants were 21-25 years old, five were 25-30, three were 30-40, and one was older than 60. Seven participants are currently in a Masters' program, five have Masters' degrees, and three have a Bachelor's degree in areas such as Urban Studies, Fine Arts, and International Studies. Four participants have studied Behavior Analysis, eleven have studied Early Childhood Special Education, and one has a degree in Social Work. Six participants have their teaching certificate (or it is in progress) and two have their Board Certified Behavior Analysis certificate. When asked how many years of experience they had working with young children in an employment setting, two responded 1-2 years, five responded 2-4 years, five responded 4-6 years and three participants said more than 6 years of experience.

When asked how many years of experience at the center where the training took place, two responded 1 year, four responded 2 years, two responded 3 years, two responded 4 years, and five responded more than 4 years.

#### 2.2.4 *Follow-up Questionnaire*

A follow-up questionnaire was given to educators at an all-staff meeting and staff members that attended the training were asked to fill it out. There were 16 participants. Teachers were asked to only complete the questionnaire if they attended the training. Some may have filled out the questionnaire that did not participate in the surveys.

### 2.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was a quasi- experimental study with a pre and post measure. The results were supplemented with observations and anecdotal data.

#### 2.3.1 *Survey Design*

The survey was created with a pre and post design to analyze differences in responses before attending the emotion coaching training session and after. It was created with the assistance of experts in the field. Each survey began with a demographics section with questions about years of experience and areas of education. The pre-survey consisted of questions to assess participants' experiences and confidence in helping children with strong emotions and assisting in self-regulation. The post-survey has the same demographics section then asks some social validity questions as to the effectiveness of the training and assessment of the participant's understanding of the training material. A 5-point Likert scale was used in both surveys to assess educator's level of comfort in emotional situations.

## 2.4 PROCEDURE

### 2.4.1 *Classroom Observation of Emotion Words*

An observation was done in each morning preschool classroom at the developmental preschool for 30 minutes during their free choice time. In that observation, a tally was collected of how many emotion words were used by educators. The emotion words were chosen from a research article by Joseph and Strain, Box 2 (2003b, p. 3). The preschool classrooms also often use a book called *The Bucket Book* by Tom Rath, Mary Reckmeyer, and Maurie J. Manning. This book uses language such as, “that filled my bucket.” Those words were also recorded, but were not used in the reported observation score.

### 2.4.2 *Pre-survey*

A pre-survey was sent out to all preschool Head Teachers, Para educators, Graduate Student Assistants, and other administrators using the email listserv system. It was emphasized that all preschool staff should complete the survey. The survey was voluntary and anonymous. The pre-survey was about a 15-minute online survey with a demographics section, confidence questions and some social validity questions.

### 2.4.3 *Training at the Center*

The training at the center was on a Wednesday afternoon in a lecture hall within the building of the developmental preschool. The trainer was an experienced educator in the field of emotion coaching. She was certified by the Talaris Institute and works as a parenting educator in the Seattle area. The trainer brought materials developed by Dr. John Gottman and the Talaris Institute. Educators were given information about the 5 steps of emotion coaching, watched

several videos portraying different parenting styles and participated in group discussions regarding questions about emotion coaching and how to use it.

#### 2.4.4 *Post-survey*

The post-survey was sent by e-mail one hour after the training to the 28 participants that attended the emotion coaching training, with an emphasis that preschool educators fill it out. This survey consisted of a demographics section, scenario questions, social validity, and satisfaction questions. It was a 15-20 minute survey and participants were given one week to fill it out. It was anonymous and voluntary.

#### 2.4.5 *Follow-up Questionnaire*

About one month after the emotion coaching training, staff members were invited to fill out a follow-up questionnaire at an all-staff meeting. This had four questions and was anonymous. It took staff members about 5 minutes to complete the questions and time was given at the beginning of the staff meeting. Three questions required participants to generate their own response. These responses were then coded based on common theme.

### 2.5 SOCIAL VALIDITY

In the pre-survey, participants were asked if they had previously attended professional development and questions regarding their confidence level in dealing with various emotions and challenging behaviors. In the post-survey they were asked questions regarding their satisfaction with the training and if it was useful. They were also asked if and how they would apply emotion coaching in their classroom. The follow-up questionnaire also served as a social validity measure

because it asked staff members what they have done in their classrooms (a month later) as a result of the training.

## Chapter 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 CLASSROOM OBSERVATION OF EMOTION WORDS

Table 2 shows the results from the classroom observation of emotion words used during 30 minutes of free choice time in the four preschool classrooms. Emotion words during preschool free choice time increased from a total of 2 to 5 words among the four classrooms after the training.

Classroom	1	2	3	4	Total
# of Emotion Words Before Training	1	0	1	0	2
# of Emotion Words After Training	1	2	2	0	5

### 3.2 PRE-SURVEY

Results from the pre-survey are represented in Table 3. There were mixed responses regarding a teacher's confidence in helping a child solve a challenging behavior. 60% of teachers agree or strongly agree that they use at least 3 emotion words a day in their classroom before attending the training. 93% of teachers agree or strongly agree that it is a teacher's job to help children understand and express emotions. Teachers had mixed responses regarding what to do when a child intentionally hurts another child. Most teachers responded that they agree or strongly agree that they know what to say to a child that is upset or overwhelmed.

PROMPT	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel confident in helping a child solve challenging behaviors	7%	7%	20%	53%	13%
I use at least 3 emotion words a day in my classroom.	7%	20%	13%	40%	20%
It is a teacher's job to help children understand and express emotions.	7%	0%	0%	40%	53%
I know what to do when a child intentionally hurts another child.	0%	20%	33%	40%	7%
When a child gets upset or overwhelmed, I know what to say to them to debrief and help them get back to the group.	0%	0%	20%	73%	7%

### 3.3 POST-SURVEY

In the post-survey teachers answered questions regarding the training and their understanding of emotion coaching as a result of the training. Answers are summarized in Table 4. Table 5 shows the results of three scenarios with questions about how participants would handle situations in which children were experiencing strong emotions. Participants were asked questions about what they would say to a child given the scenario. Participant answers were coded based on how many of the five emotion coaching steps they used in their response. The steps of emotion coaching include being aware of a child's emotions, recognizing that emotions are an opportunity to connect with the child, listen with empathy, help the child name the emotion, and set limits and find good solutions. The first scenario was about a child who was sad (see

Appendix for survey questions). The second was about a child that was excited and the third was about a child that was hurt. Their answers were coded based on their description of the 5 emotion coaching steps. If teachers described a step in emotion coaching, they got a point for that step.

PROMPT	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
As a result of this training, I feel more comfortable that I can remain calm under pressure when children share unexpected information	7%	0%	20%	60%	13%
Emotion coaching is the correct approach for every child.	0%	33%	40%	20%	7%
I understand when to use and when not to use emotion coaching.	0%	0%	7%	60%	33%
I understand how to use emotion coaching and how principles apply.	0%	0%	0%	67%	33%

Scenario	Sad	Excited	Hurt
Score of 4-5	60%	13%	67%
Score of 3 or lower	33%	80%	27%
No response	7%	7%	7%

### 3.4 FOLLOW-UP

In the follow-up questionnaire, participants were asked questions about what they retained from the training the month previous. Participants generated their own responses. Responses were coded based on common themes and outlined in Table 6. Some participants responded with more

than one theme. There were 16 participants. Participants were also asked, “Have you used the strategies from the training?” 100% of participants circled “yes.” Participants also generated their own responses when asked to describe how they used emotion coaching. Some common themes, in which at least 5 participants included, were validating emotions, talking through the problem and solutions, and taking time to listen.

Table 6	
<b>What is the most significant thing you learned from the training?</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>
When to use emotion coaching	5
Steps of emotion coaching	4
Slow down, give time, listen	4
Parenting styles	4
Empathize	2
Speaker’s story	1

### 3.5 SOCIAL VALIDITY

The social validity questions included on the post-survey are summarized in Table 7. Teachers were asked, “What is the most significant thing you learned from the training?” and, “What are some ways you will apply what you learned?” They were able to check as many boxes as they liked. Participants had a high level of responding and 12/15 participants stated that they will apply emotion coaching with their students.

Table 7	
What is the most significant thing you learned from the training?	What are some ways you will apply what you learned?
What emotion coaching is (5)	Use with students (12)
How to use emotion coaching (4)	Team discussion (9)
What to say to a child experiencing a strong emotion (4)	Handouts for families (4)
When to use and when not to use (4)	Make visuals (3)
What my parenting style is (3)	Team training (3)
Already understood emotion coaching (1)	Take data on emotion words (2)
Other: Steps to follow when training staff (1)	Realize more scenarios I could have used this (1)

## Chapter 4. DISCUSSION

Research has suggested that the ability to recognize and interpret emotions in preschool has long-term effects on social behavior and academic competence (Izard, C. et al., 2001). The purpose of this study was to determine if emotion coaching is an effective way for special education teachers to talk to their preschool students about emotions and emotion regulation. Results from the observation of emotion words, the pre-survey, the post-survey, and the follow-up results are described below. Results suggested that the emotion coaching training was useful for preschool teachers within the inclusive setting that they teach.

Before the emotion coaching training, the four preschool classrooms were observed. Results from the observation showed that teachers used two emotion words collectively during the observation period. In the survey sent out before the training, 60% of participants responded that they use at least three emotion words a day in their classroom. This suggests that teachers are not aware of how often they use emotion words. After the training, another observation was done in the four preschool classrooms. It was observed that classrooms used five emotion words

as a whole, which shows an increase in language usage around emotions after the emotion coaching training. The professional development opportunity appeared to increase teacher awareness around emotional literacy with their students. Research shows that helping children increase their emotion word vocabulary is the first step toward teaching emotional literacy and regulation. Joseph and Strain (2003b) describe that a larger emotional vocabulary helps children to have more words to describe how they feel and to better communicate that to others. Emotion coaching incorporates this concept in the step of “defining the emotion.” Emotion coaching is therefore one way of helping teachers to be more aware of increasing their usage of emotion words and one way for children to gain more vocabulary around their feelings.

The pre-survey subsequently suggested that teachers feel it is their job to help children learn about emotions. This is an important perspective to consider because it shows that teachers could be open to learning more about social emotional development if they feel it is part of their job to help children with their knowledge of emotions. Research on professional development suggests that when content is congruent with a teacher’s current ideas and thoughts, it is easier to integrate what they learn into their teaching practice. If the lessons are incongruent, teachers are more resistant to learning. From the pre-survey results, teachers felt it was their job to help students understand and express emotions, suggesting that teaching about emotion coaching is congruent with the principles of the participants.

The post-survey contained some questions with scenarios as to how participants would respond after attending the training. Those responses were coded based on how many of the five emotion coaching steps they described in their response. For the scenario in which the student was sad, 60% of participants responded using at least four emotion-coaching steps. In the scenario where the student was mad, 67% of participants responded using at least four emotion-

coaching steps. In the scenario where the student was excited, only 13% of participants responded using at least four emotion-coaching steps. These findings suggest that educators are less likely to use the steps of emotion coaching when discussing a positive emotion with a student. Future studies may assess the need for discussing strong positive emotions with children.

Increasing teacher awareness around social-emotional learning is exceptionally important for early childhood education. A study by Gilliam (2005) found that pre-kindergarten students are expelled at a rate of three times as frequently as their older peers in kindergarten through grade twelve. This expulsion is often a result of challenging behavior, as described in the study. Emotion coaching could be one way to reduce challenging behavior because it helps teach children communication skills and vocabulary to share their needs and help get them met. By helping children communicate more successfully and reducing challenging behavior, they are more likely to stay in school. Children that are expelled from preschool may not have some of the pre-requisite skills that they need to enter kindergarten, so it is important to find ways that they can stay in their preschool classrooms. If children are expelled from preschool, it can also affect their social-emotional skills later on. By teaching social-emotional skills in preschool, teachers are able to prevent some challenging behaviors and teach self-regulation skills that children can carry with them.

Schools should focus on teaching emotional and behavioral regulation because it is likely to be a more effective strategy in promoting school success throughout the school years than focusing solely on academic content (Blair & Diamond, 2008). There are various ways that emotional and behavioral regulation is taught in preschool. Emotion coaching is similar to other social-emotional curricula reviewed by Barton, Strain, and Powell (2014) in that the target

population is young children. Emotion coaching can be used anywhere by anyone that knows the five steps. In the curriculum review, researchers described ten classroom-based curricula and five parent-based curricula. These programs all target social-emotional competence and behavioral outcomes. The researchers created some quality indicator ratings based on the evidence base around each curriculum. Emotion coaching was not a curriculum reviewed in this study and does not have a large enough research base to fit the quality indicators. More research should be done to determine if emotion coaching could effectively reduce challenging behavior. It is similar to some of these programs because it is inexpensive, takes little time to learn, and can be used by parents as well as teachers.

The current study assessed teacher behavior in relation to emotion coaching as a result of professional development. Future ideas for research include assessing the challenging behavior of children in a center where emotion coaching is not used and if challenging behavior changes once teachers have been given professional development in emotion coaching. More studies are needed to identify the effects of emotion coaching and its use in school programs. Many of the participants in this study use behavior support principles in their classrooms. Future research could focus on emotion coaching from a behaviorist perspective and how it could relate to behavior principles.

Limitations of the current study include the sample size, the lack of diversity of the population, and the difference in participants between each stage of the study. The sample in this study utilized the participation of teachers that taught at the same early childhood center, so it had a small sample size and small level of diversity. The same Early Childhood Special Education program at the nearby university educated most of the cooperating teachers that participated. The educators were also from similar age groups and from similar backgrounds.

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## APPENDIX A

### PRE-SURVEY

How old are you?

15-20

20-25

25-30

30-40

40-50

50-60

60+

Education completed:

High school

Bachelor degree

Currently in Masters' program

Master's degree

Currently in PhD program

PhD.

Other:

Degree Area (mark all that apply):

Early childhood education

Early childhood special education

Behavior analysis

Psychology

Child development

Early childhood and family studies

Other:

Credentials (mark all that apply)

Teacher certification

BCBA

BCaBA

BCBA-D

Other:

How many years of experience do you have working with students in early childhood education?

0-1 year

1-2 years

2-4 years

4-6 years

more than 6 years

How many years of experience do you have working and/or volunteering at the (early childhood center in study)?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- more than 4

Have you attended any professional development events on social emotional development or emotional literacy? If yes, please describe.

How often do you respond to the following situations in your classroom?

	Multiple times a day	About once a day	A few times a week	Rarely	Never	I would like help or new strategies to support children with this issue
crying						
tantrums						
whining						
Aggression (hitting, kicking)						
frustration						
Other challenging behaviors						

I feel confident to help a child problem solve on their own when they have a strong emotion.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I use at least 3 emotion words a day in my classroom.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

It is a teacher's job to help children understand and express emotions.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

I know what to do when a child intentionally hurts another child.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

When a child is in time-out I know what to say with them to debrief and help them get back to the group.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

What strategies do you use in your classroom when working with a child exhibiting a strong emotion? (check all that apply)

Time-out

Name emotion

Give time to process

Read a children's book

Take a break

Peer support

Ignore

Other:

## APPENDIX B

### POST-SURVEY

How old are you?

- 15-2
- 20-25
- 25-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- 50-60
- 60+

Education completed:

- High school
- Bachelor degree
- Currently in Masters' program
- Master's degree
- Currently in PhD program
- PhD.
- Other:

Degree Area (mark all that apply):

- Early childhood education
- Early childhood special education
- Behavior analysis
- Psychology
- Child development
- Early childhood and family studies
- Other:

Credentials (mark all that apply)

- Teacher certification
- BCBA
- BCaBA
- BCBA-D
- Other:

How many years of experience do you have working with young children and/or their families in an employment setting?

- 0-2 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-4 years
- 4-6 years
- more than 6 years

How many years of experience do you have working and/or volunteering at the (early childhood center in study)?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- more than 4

I have ECEAP students in my classroom (preschool)

Yes

No

I do not currently teach in a classroom.

As a result of this training I feel that I can remain calm under pressure when children share unexpected information.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

#### SCENARIOS

Alex comes into class today and seems very withdrawn. He hangs up his coat and backpack then goes to the break area. Alex's dad reports that he had a tough morning and might need some time to himself. Alex sits in the block area for a few minutes then goes to play with blocks. Drew knocks over Alex's blocks. Alex starts crying. Describe what you would do.

It is Lashawnda's birthday and she is very excited. During circle she raises her hand after every question to make a comment about her birthday. If you are leading circle, what might you say to Lashawnda?

Your class is playing "Red Rover" during gym time. Oliver falls and trips when it is his turn to run to the other side. He runs to the corner, sits down, and puts his head in his hands. What might you say to Oliver?

Overall, what is the most significant thing you learned from the emotion coaching training?

What emotion coaching is

How to use emotion coaching principles with children

What my parenting style is

What to say to a child experiencing an emotion

When to use and when not to use emotion coaching

Other:

What are some ways you are going to apply what you learned in this training in your classroom?

Handouts for families

Team training

I will use emotion coaching with my students  
 Take data on use of emotion words  
 Make visuals  
 Team discussion

Emotion coaching is the correct approach for every child.  
 Strongly disagree  
 Disagree  
 Neither agree nor disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly agree

I understand when to use and when not to use emotion coaching.  
 Strongly disagree  
 Disagree  
 Neither agree nor disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly agree

I understand how to use emotion coaching and will apply the principles in my classroom.  
 Strongly disagree  
 Disagree  
 Neither agree nor disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly agree

What is one scenario from your personal experience in which you wish you knew how to use emotion-coaching principles and would have applied them?

Emotion coaching is giving too much attention to a child experiencing strong emotions.  
 Strongly disagree  
 Disagree  
 Neither agree nor disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly agree

Emotion coaching with a child is reinforcing negative reactions.  
 Strongly disagree  
 Disagree  
 Neither agree nor disagree  
 Agree  
 Strongly agree

Has this training made you see a different perspective in working with children's emotions?

Any more thoughts on emotion coaching or this training and it's relevance to the (early childhood center in study)?

