International Journal of the Whole Child
2024, VOL. 9, NO. 2

**Play Therapy: Development, Learning, and Therapy**
**Classroom Calming Corners: Peaceful Spaces for Times of Transition**

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**Abstract**

In a school environment, it is important to have a response strategy when students experience dysregulation of their emotions. Promoting social and emotional learning assists students in developing these skills. Mindfulness is one practice that helps students de-escalate when their emotions begin to elevate. One strategy, a classroom calming corner, is an area of the room equipped with soft furnishings and soothing materials to help students return to equilibrium so that they are able to remain in the learning environment. Data from the findings reveal that calming corners in one elementary school classroom and one middle school classrooms were successful and valuable for students returning to a state of equilibrium. Overall, students and teachers reported satisfaction with using the calming corners.

*Keywords:* Classroom calming corner, emotional regulation, mindfulness, social and emotional learning

The rapid expansions of social and emotional learning (SEL) research and interventions that Jones & Bouffard (2012) noted over a decade ago has since only accelerated. In the wake of the positive findings from Durlak et al.'s (2011) sweeping meta-analysis, major developments on the SEL front include the integration of disparate SEL viewpoints (National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development, 2018) and the implementation of our growing knowledge of SEL by policymakers (Dusenbury et al., 2019). To verify the findings of Durlak et al.'s (2011) seminal study, Cipriano et al.'s (2023) follow-up meta-analysis confirmed that the subsequent progress has continued a trend of SEL programming's positive, far-reaching impact. Although the effectiveness of these programs, which focus on addressing students' emotional and interpersonal skills and social problem-solving abilities, are dependent upon the quality of their implementation and interventions, Cipriano et al.'s (2023) meta-analysis of 424 experimental and quasi-experimental studies found that, compared to control groups, participating students were more likely to have improved attitudes, relationships, academic achievement, and positive school-related behaviors.

## Background and Evidence for SEL's Effectiveness

In what is considered one of the most significant documents in the history of SEL education, Elias et al. (1997) pointed out the universal desire for schools to go beyond academics and provide children with a foundation for becoming caring and responsible citizens. To do so, the authors espouse the importance of helping young people develop social-emotional competence, which they define as "the ability to understand, manage, and express social and emotional aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development" (p. 2). These competencies have since been further defined and categorized; Jones et al.'s (2021) framework places SEL skills within three broad domains: social/interpersonal skills, emotional processes, and cognitive regulation. They further posit that SEL fosters a set of beliefs within the learner, all pertaining to their identity, perspectives, and values.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning's (CASEL; 2024) more established framework organizes SEL competencies across five interrelated domains: *self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills,* and *responsible decision-making*. Collectively referred to as the CASEL 5, each area encapsulates the necessary proficiencies and attitudes for identity development, emotional regulation, healthy relationship building, goal setting, and empathic understanding. These broad conceptualizations allow for SEL to serve as an umbrella term for many subfields of psychology and neuroscience—each with a particular focus on emotion regulation, prosocial skills, and aggressive behavior problems—and many educational interventions, such as bullying, character education, conflict resolution, and social skills training (National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development, 2018).

SEL skill development begins in the earliest years and continues throughout childhood and adolescence, influenced by relationships and social environments through informal interactions as well as structured programs (Meland & Brion-Meisels, 2023; Pacheco & Xiong, 2023). As widespread awareness and the resulting policymaking have caught up with the research, the CASEL 5 have been implemented as part of learning standards from preschool through high school (CASEL, 2024). Self-awareness, in the context of the CASEL 5, involves our ability to recognize our cognitions and emotions as they occur. Self-management helps us regulate these inner feelings and thoughts, allowing us to more readily navigate stressful experiences. Social awareness involves an understanding of and empathy for others, and then our relationship skills help us with our ability to communicate effectively, cooperate, and resolve conflicts. Finally, responsible decision making involves our evaluation of meaningful information and the subsequent choices we make with consideration of our impact on the well-being of others.

According to Jones et al.'s (2021) evaluation of what are considered leading SEL programs, the most effective SEL programs have five things in common. First, they incorporate elements of SAFE: sequenced, active, focused, and explicit. Second, these programs occur within supportive contexts. Third, they build the competencies of the adults who are administering the programs. Fourth, SEL programs are equitable and sensitive to trauma. Finally, they set reasonable short- and long-term goals.

SEL programs by design are in a natural alignment with concerns surrounding multiculturalism and social justice, which have seen a resurgence in recent years (Jones et al., 2021). SEL curricula are conducive to the principles of inclusion, with program emphases on identity development, perspective taking, and celebration of people’s differences. Some programs go a step further, providing culturally relevant pedagogy to help students make connections between SEL and their cultural background, considered particularly relevant for ethnically-diverse or low socioeconomic status (SES) students (Crain, 2022). From a neurodiversity perspective, students with cognitive disabilities such as autism have also been found to benefit from these practices, particularly with helping teachers better understand these students based on the training they receive for teaching SEL (Kim & Ballin, 2023). The trauma-informed nature of SEL interventions has proven especially beneficial for students who have had adverse childhood experiences (Jones et al., 2021).

Although the implementation of SEL programs is a school-wide effort, it is the classroom itself in which SEL lessons have the opportunity for the greatest impact (Cipriano et al., 2023). Interventions that are considered most effective involve coupling an explicit lesson on an SEL concept, such as self-regulation, with concrete, practical strategies, such as regulating one's emotions by recognizing when it is time to walk away from a contentious situation (Lin, 2021). Other strategies taught through SEL lessons may include feelings check-ins with the teacher, journaling about emotions, or creating imaginary umbrellas as protection from hurtful words. Children may also be taught to identify the strategies that they know work best for them, such as a recognition that an activity such as reading helps them feel calm. SEL interventions, particularly the ones designed to improve self-regulation and self-awareness, appear to share either explicit or implicit connections to the now well-researched concept of mindfulness (Ewert, 2023; Jones et al., 2021; Lawlor, 2016; Lin, 2021).

**The Mindful Element to SEL**

Mindfulness is a nonjudgmental, non-elaborative awareness of the present moment, acknowledging and accepting feelings, thoughts, and sensations as they arise (Bishop et al., 2004). Mindfulness can be attributed to the regulation of attention on "experiences in the present moment, an orientation or curiosity, openness, and acceptance (Bishop et al, 2004, p. 232). Proponents believe that the conscious awareness of the present that we build through mindfulness practice improves our emotional regulation and the compassion we have for ourselves and others (Siegel et al., 2016).

Unsurprisingly, given the large degree of overlap between purported mindfulness benefits and SEL programmatic aims, mindfulness-based interventions have found their way into SEL curricula (Semple et al., 2017; Siegel et al., 2016). Mindfulness's focus on improving our conscious awareness and emotional regulation aligns with the CASEL (2024) domains of self-awareness and self-management, respectively (Siegel et al., 2016). Further, the self-oriented nature of these two domains may make them ideal starting points for SEL curricula to target, especially in light of Cipriano et al.'s (2023) research suggesting that SEL programs were more effective when they taught intrapersonal skills before interpersonal skills. When appropriately emphasized, self-awareness and self-regulation may help counterbalance the "herd instinct" that emerges in primary school-aged children, allowing them the opportunity to engage with the interpersonally-focused CASEL domains by first knowing themselves better, allowing them to become less reactive and more conscious of how they respond to the actions of others (Association Montessori International [AMI], 2024; CASEL, 2024; Cipriano et al., 2023).

Jones et al. (2021) aptly noted that SEL's incorporation of mindfulness techniques can help foster a sense of calm and focus. Interventions may take the form of mindful breathing, focusing on bodily sensations, and even forms of meditation (Lawlor, 2016). Contemplative practices like yoga, tai chi, and even listening to the birds on a nature walk are particularly helpful for sustained attention, and they are considered useful for developing both self-awareness and self-regulation. Stated benefits are not just anecdotal: randomized-controlled trials testing the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions have been found to lead to improvements in cognitive and emotional control and regulation, attention, optimism, and executive functioning broadly, among other benefits (Andreu et al., 2023; Flook et al., 2010; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

## A Calm Space in the Classroom

One such mindfulness-related intervention that has gained traction for promoting a sense of calm and focus in the classroom is the calming corner (Ewert, 2023). A calming corner is a quiet area of the classroom, typically equipped with soft furnishing and soothing materials that are expressly designed to allow students to practice mindfulness-based strategies to help them return to and maintain a sense of calm when they become overwhelmed or upset (Crain, 2022; Skinner, 2020). Whether referred to as calming corners, calm down or cool down corners, regulation or relaxation stations, peace corners, or calming or calm down stations, the overall goal is the same: give students time away to identify and manage their emotions, practice calming strategies, and prevent further emotional escalation so they can better focus on classroom instruction (Action for Healthy Kids, 2024; Crain, 2022; Dixon, 2016; Dumitrescu, 2023; Jefferson Center, 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Lin, 2021; Maich et al., 2019; Pacheco & Xiong, 2023).

Since Lantieri's (2008) pilot of one of the first calming corners, the concept has risen in popularity, even finding its way into popular media such as television shows and social media reels (Fielder, 2023; @variahaworth, 2023). Besides the positive impact on students, teachers may also stand to benefit. One study's utilization of calming corners improved teachers' perspectives toward problem behaviors in students when their emotions were better managed, helping teachers become aware that "students were not the problem but that they may sometimes have a problem…." (Kim & Ballin, 2023, p. 11).

There is no shortage of instruction and opinions on how calming corners may be designed and implemented (Maich et al., 2019; Plastino, 2024; Sager, 2024; Watson Institute, 2019), and premade kits are even available for purchase to help jumpstart the process (Amazon, 2024). Balancing safety and privacy with the need to monitor potentially-distressed students, all while working with the existing infrastructure of the classroom, serves as a challenge that leads educators to different conclusions as to what their classroom's calming corner may look like (Maich et al., 2019). However, creating entry and exit procedures, providing soothing tools, and fostering a general atmosphere of relaxation are some practical guidelines for incorporating a calming corner in the classroom. Further, calming corners are never used as punishment for misbehavior, only presented as an option for any student who needs some time away from classroom instruction to work through difficult emotions before returning their focus to the lesson (Craig, n.d.). Calming corners, in combination with other SEL interventions, have been shown to be effective for promoting a sense of calm in children who have historically had to bear the brunt of society's most emotionally dysregulating experiences, including children who are racial minorities, living in poverty, neurodiverse, and trauma-inflicted (Craig, n.d.; Crain, 2022; Kim & Ballin, 2023).

## The Present Study

As more research is conducted on this mindfulness-derived SEL intervention, little has been said regarding its application for children at age or grade-specific transitional periods in their lives, a time in which children are likely at a relatively higher risk of experiencing emotional dysregulation as they adjust to a new environment. Lawlor (2016) promoted mindfulness

strategies more broadly for transitional periods during the day when children were going to and from the classroom and switching between classroom activities. Diaz (2022) made specific mention of calming corners as an important addition to classrooms as children were returning to school after the COVID-19 pandemic, a tumultuous period in the lives of many children who likely benefitted from increased attention to calming strategies.

However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no studies have narrowed their research to focus specifically on grades that are heavily associated with major transitions in the lives of children. First grade is considered especially important for developing literacy skills; inadequate development of foundational skills have been found to lead to continued reading challenges through fourth grade (Mader, 2021). It is also a time of significant change when first graders often face new routines and expectations, as well as classrooms that often look very different than that of kindergarten (Breiseth, 2024). Given that first-grade children are already at a time in their lives when emotions often run high, the need for self-regulation is particularly critical to avoid disruption of their scholastic experience and the classroom climate as a whole (Wilson, 2011).

Another period of major change in a child's life is the transition from elementary to middle school, which is often a milestone they reach when going into the sixth grade (Morin, n.d.). Developmentally, sixth graders are engaging in the early stages of identity formation and establishing some independence, but they may also experience more emotional lows at this time in their lives (Healthwise, 2020). These mental and emotional changes occur alongside their bodies' physical changes as well, all while students are navigating what is typically a brand-new environment with many new and unfamiliar people (Gilewski & Nunn, 2016). Compared to first graders, students at this age are at risk of becoming overwhelmed by these sudden changes; therefore, a mindfulness-based SEL intervention may be especially impactful and sorely needed.

The present study sought to add to the existing research on calming corners by further examining their effectiveness for two grade levels marked by major transition periods in the lives of children: first and sixth graders. We hypothesized that consistent with previous findings, students and teachers would rate their subjective experiences with calming corners positively and consider its utilization a success for their well-being and the classroom climate as a whole.

## Methodology

This research was performed at an elementary school and a middle school operated by a large public research university in the southeastern region of the United States during the 2021-2022 school year. The materials for two classroom calming corners were purchased with a $1000 grant awarded to the first two authors by the university's research consortium (see Appendix A for inclusion of materials), the purpose of which was to provide seed money to obtain preliminary findings to apply for larger research grants. Although calming corners can be used across all ages, both at school and at home, this study focused on first-grade students who are new to a more structured learning environment and sixth-grade students who have recently transitioned to middle school. The classrooms selected were based on teachers' self-nomination and school administration approval to ensure that they would be placed in classrooms with teachers who wanted to utilize the intervention. Before beginning the study, the teachers were provided with

an introductory video explaining the purpose of the classroom calming corners, how to implement them in the classroom, and the assessment instruments.

**Assessment Instruments**

This study utilized a self-report survey based on identified surveys to collect first-hand information from students in middle and elementary school students. Data was collected through surveys that utilized statement items with rating scales: Student Self Report Self-Regulation Questionnaire (pre and post), Child Intervention Rating Profile (post), and Teacher Intervention Rating Profile (post). Additionally, within the calming corners, students measured their subjective unit of discomfort (SUD) on their individual log sheets.

After parental consent and student assent were obtained, students completed the Student Self Report Self-Regulation Questionnaire: Fast Track Project Child Behavior Questionnaire, which is a 20-item questionnaire designed to measure the self-regulation skills of children and adolescents (Bandy & Moore, 2010). Students completed the same questionnaire at the conclusion of the project.

To enhance the use of the Calming Corner intervention, teacher and student social validity measures were obtained from the participants. Student and teachers' perceptions of the intervention were obtained through a post-intervention survey known as the Child Intervention Rating Profile (CIRP; 8 items) and the Teacher Intervention Rating Profile (TIRP; 12 items). The CIRP and TIRP were adapted from the original Intervention Rating Profile (IRP) developed by researchers Witt and Martens (1983). The CIRP and TIRP were adapted to work as a measure for this study to extend research in treatment acceptability to classroom-based mindfulness treatments from both the student and teacher perspectives. These subjective measures were obtained through student and teacher self-report about their perceptions of the intervention and how helpful it was for supporting student wellness, emotional regulation, and mindfulness in the classroom setting. This form of assessment is known as social validity. Social validity measures may help us to identify common features of procedures that are likely to be adopted and persist in a specific environment overtime by being deemed acceptable by the participants (Common & Lane, 2017).

Participants' ability to communicate and utilize learned self-regulation skills from the calming corner intervention was obtained using Subjective Units of Discomfort Scales (SUDS), or Feelings Thermometers, administered throughout the classroom-based intervention. This scale, developed by Joseph Wolpe (1969), is a self-assessment tool rated on a scale from 0 (low discomfort) to 10 (high discomfort). The SUDS is a subjective tool the clinician uses to evaluate student progress and the success of the student's current treatment and intervention. Although the data for SUDS is not reported in this study, it provided students with the ability to self-reflect on their SUDS before and after each use of the calming corner which may have impacted their other survey responses.

**Results**

First, the researchers reviewed the pre/post test data from the Student Self Report Self-regulation Questionnaire. Students ranked each of the 20 items on a scale of 1-4: 1 = all of the time, 2 = most of the time, 3 = some of the time, and 4 = none of the time. Items 4, 5, 15, and 19 were reverse scored and recoded before data analysis. Lower scores indicate an ability to self-regulate. Most questionnaire items showed a decrease in scores for both first-grade and sixth-grade students, which indicated an increase in ability to self-regulate. However, first graders' scores changed more, especially for items related to coping and personal control (1, 2, 5, 6, and 10). Table 1 below summarizes the results from pre and post-tests.

**Table 1**

*Student Self Report Self-regulation Questionnaire*

| | Campus Middle (*N*=80) | | | Campus Elementary (*N*=19) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Items | Pretest *M* | Posttest *M* | Change | Pretest *M* | Posttest *M* | Change |
| Q1: I wait my turn during activities. | 1.75 | 1.63 | -.12 | 2.00 | 1.39 | -.61 |
| Q2: I cope well with disappointment or frustration. | 2.54 | 2.56 | +.02 | 2.65 | 1.94 | -.71 |
| Q3. I accept it when things do not go my way. | 2.15 | 2.06 | -.09 | 2.06 | 1.73 | -.33 |
| Q4: My feelings get hurt. | 2.36 | 2.36 | No Change | 2.11 | 2.00 | -.11 |
| Q5: When I get upset, I whine or complain. | 1.63 | 1.64 | +.01 | 2.22 | 1.71 | -.51 |
| Q6: I control my temper when there is a disagreement. | 2.49 | 2.24 | -.25 | 2.44 | 1.78 | -.66 |
| Q7: I stop and calm down when I am frustrated or upset. | 2.49 | 2.34 | -.15 | 2.22 | 1.84 | -.38 |
| Q8: I think before I act. | 2.41 | 2.18 | -.23 | 2.22 | 1.76 | -.46 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q9: I do what I am told to do. | 1.71 | 1.74 | +.03 | 1.72 | 1.63 | -.09 |
| Q10: When I want something, I am patient when waiting. | 2.08 | 1.91 | -.17 | 2.39 | 1.75 | -.64 |
| Q11: I follow the rules. | 1.76 | 1.62 | -.14 | 1.71 | 1.50 | -.21 |
| Q12: I stick with an activity until it is finished. | 1.95 | 2.01 | +.06 | 1.67 | 1.35 | -.32 |
| Q13: I can concentrate and focus on one activity at a time. | 2.12 | 1.99 | -.13 | 1.89 | 1.94 | +.05 |
| Q14: I ignore kids who are fooling around in class. | 2.22 | 2.23 | +.01 | 2.11 | 1.64 | -.47 |
| Q15: I fight to argue with adults. | 1.51 | 1.45 | -.06 | 1.82 | 1.50 | -.32 |
| Q16: I tell new kids my name without being asked to tell it. | 2.48 | 2.41 | -.07 | 2.28 | 2.06 | -.22 |
| Q17: When people are angry with me, I control my anger. | 2.34 | 2.33 | -.01 | 1.94 | 2.00 | +.06 |
| Q18: When someone tells me a rule that I think is unfair, I ask about the rule in a nice way. | 2.29 | 2.30 | +.01 | 2.00 | 1.93 | -.07 |
| Q19: When I disagree with my parents, I yell and scream. | 1.47 | 1.39 | -.08 | 1.78 | 1.46 | -.32 |
| Q20: I ask friends for help with my problems. | 2.37 | 2.38 | +.01 | 2.00 | 2.44 | +.44 |

At the conclusion of the project, students who utilized the calming corner were asked to complete a satisfaction survey. This eight-item form is an adapted version of the Child Intervention Rating Profile. Students ranked their agreement with the statements on a scale ranging from 1-6, with 1 = "I agree" and 6 = "I do not agree". The lower the score, the higher the rate of satisfaction, with the exception of higher scores on items 3 and 4, indicating a higher rate of satisfaction. The lowest scores (highest satisfaction) for both grade levels concerned the usefulness of the calming corner for themselves and other students (items 5 and 6). Table 2 below shows the results of the survey.

**Table 2**

*Adapted Child Intervention Rating Profile*

| Items | Campus Middle (*N*=55) *M* | Campus Elementary (*N*=17) *M* |
|---|---|---|
| 1. The calming corner support program was useful. | 2.25 | 3.24 |
| 2. I think the calming corner intervention helped me. | 2.42 | 3.53 |
| 3. Using the Calming Corner intervention caused social problems with my friends.* | 5.13 | 5.19 |
| 4. There were better ways to teach me how to address my social-emotional needs in the classroom.* | 3.30 | 3.56 |
| 5. This program could help other kids, too. | 1.75 | 1.41 |
| 6. I liked the calming corner intervention we used. | 1.85 | 1.59 |
| 7. Being in this calming corner intervention helped me to regulate and interact more appropriately in the classroom when upset. | 2.76 | 2.82 |
| 8. Being in this calming corner study helped me feel more connected to my teachers, classroom, and peers. | 3.24 | 2.31 |

*Reverse scored-Higher score indicates greater satisfaction for these items.

Students were able to leave comments about the calming corner on this form. Some students commented that they never used the calming corner, and those forms were removed before analysis. However, several students who did not attend also commented that they thought the calming corner was a good idea, observed it helping their friends, and thought it would help others. Themes in students' comments that used the calming corner include overall satisfaction and liking the materials (playdough, stress balls, slime, and fidgets). A few students mentioned that there needed to be more than one because often, when they wanted to use it, it was already occupied. Another student commented that she wished there was a way to use the calming corner

without having to explain why. Below are some student comments about calming corners (all from middle schoolers):

*"The [calming] corner was very useful and helped me with some of my emotions and how I was feeling."*

*"The calming corner made me more happier when I came out."*

*"The calming corner helped me to relax when I got frustrated or angry. I loved the stress balls and the slime."*

*"I think it was very helpful and it really made me calm down when I had a big project due soon."*

Additionally, at the end of the intervention, teachers completed the Teacher Intervention Rating Profile (TIRP), a 12-item survey instrument regarding teachers' satisfaction with the intervention on a 6-point scale, with 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. The higher the score, the greater the satisfaction. The results indicated that these two teachers were generally satisfied with using the classroom calming corners. One teacher also mentioned that she enjoyed using the calming corner herself. Due to the larger standard deviation in item number 7 ($M = 4$, $SD = 1.4$) as compared to the other items, the researchers wondered if the teachers understood this item or if the double negative was confusing. Means and standard deviations for the TIRP are included in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Teacher Intervention Rating Profile (N = 2)*

| Items | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|
| 1. This integrated classroom support would be an acceptable intervention for the community for supporting mental health and SEL needs of children in classrooms. | 5.00 | 0.00 |
| 2. Most people and participants would find this classroom support appropriate for supporting knowledge, awareness, and the SEL needs of children within classroom setting. | 5.00 | 0.00 |
| 3. The classroom calming corners should prove effective in changing in the school beliefs about embedding SEL into the classroom environment. | 4.50 | 0.71 |
| 4. I would suggest the use of the calming corner supports within other classrooms. | 5.00 | 0.00 |
| 5. This school's children's needs related to SEL are significant enough to warrant use of the calming corner intervention. | 5.00 | 0.00 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6. I would be willing to use the knowledge I obtained in this project moving forward in my classrooms. | 5.00 | 0.00 |
| 7. The calming corner supports in the classroom did not result in negative side effects for me as a participant/teacher. | 4.00 | 1.41 |
| 8. The calming corner intervention would be appropriate for other teachers and classrooms in this school. | 5.00 | 0.00 |
| 9. The calming corner intervention for classrooms is much needed intervention. | 5.00 | 0.00 |
| 10. I liked the procedures used in the calming corner program and intervention. | 4.50 | 0.71 |
| 11. The calming corner intervention was a good way to handle the multiple SEL needs of children in the classroom. | 4.50 | 0.71 |
| 12. Overall, this classroom support intervention model would be beneficial for the school/district at large. | 5.00 | 0.00 |

## Discussion

Based on the data gathered and presented in this article, calming corners at these laboratory schools appeared to be successful and useful for students. Overall, students and teachers reported being satisfied with the calming corners. For future studies, other methods of gathering data might be considered, such as different assessment forms, student, teacher, and caregiver focus groups, or surveys. Additionally, implementing the calming corners with more students, teachers, and schools will allow for more advanced statistical analyses and generalizability.

## Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the small sample size, sample setting, and survey method of data collection, which impacted the data analyses of this study. Due to the small sample size, the data analysis in this exploratory study leaned toward descriptive statistics. Implementing the calming corners with more students and teachers would allow for more advanced statistical testing rather than simply descriptive statistics. A laboratory school is created and backed by a university or an institution to train teachers. Their goals are three-fold: education, training, and research. This structure provides a natural link between education and research to develop and test new approaches to model best practices. Data collected from different settings may produce a different result than laboratory schools due to how they are set up and their overall goals of educating, training, and research (Wilcox-Herzog et al., 2013). Surveys were used to gather data from a predefined group of participants. The survey method is one of the most effective and trustworthy methods to collect data; however, it has limitations, such as survey errors, constraints, and survey-related effects (Wright, 2014). For future studies, other methods of gathering data might be considered, such as student, teacher, and caregiver focus groups to gain rich qualitative data.

## Future Directions

For future studies, other methods of gathering data might be considered, such as different assessment forms or student, teacher, and caregiver focus groups or surveys. Additionally, implementing the calming corners with more students and teachers will allow for more advanced statistical testing rather than simply descriptive statistics. Utilizing other school settings would provide greater generalizability to populations outside of teacher training laboratory schools.

## Implications

Utilizing SEL methods in the classroom has proven beneficial for students' socio-emotional, behavior, and academic outcomes (Cipriano et al., 2023). Calming corners can provide a student-initiated method of providing services to students when they become dysregulated. They can be created in educational settings with materials and supplies that may already be in the school or purchased (see Appendix A).

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# Appendix A

## Creating and Using a Calming Corner in Your Classroom

- Find a corner in your classroom that can permanently act as your new calm-down corner. Designate the space as a special area where your students can spend time on their own when their emotions are running high.

- Like calm down corners at home, fill the space with soft, plush seating options and options for books, quiet toys, art and journaling supplies, blankets, and stuffed animals. Set up the partitions to provide enough privacy for the student while still allowing visibility by the teacher. Post a set of visual calming strategies in the area to provide self-managing reminders for the student. Information about specific materials are provided below.

- Students must be taught how, when, and why to use the calming corner materials. Let the students know that they are allowed to go to this area at the first sign of becoming distressed. Tell them they can ask for access to the calming corner by holding up a break card, or you may prompt them to take a break. Also, remind the students that they only stay in the corner for five minutes and must use a timer. Once the five minutes are over, meet them back at their desk for a brief check-in. This reinforcement may help the student repeat this desired behavior in the future.

- Utilize the calming corner with all students in your classroom as needed. If you believe that the student is beginning to use this area frequently and suspect the student is possibly avoiding work, you may decide to provide a limited number of break cards the student can use in the morning and in the afternoon to curtail this behavior (Author, 2021).

### Materials Needed

- Bean bag chair(s) or floor cushions/large pillows
- Soft rug
- Relaxation CD and player
- Headphones
- Books and magazines
- Playdough/puddy
- Bubbles
- Fidgets
- Art materials/ coloring books
- Partitions/dividers for privacy
- Visual calming strategies
- Visual timer