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**Trading Behaviors: De-escalation Techniques and Behavior Modification in
a Middle School Emotional Support Classroom**

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Abstract

The purpose of this teacher action research study was to explore the effects of introducing a curriculum that presented introspection, de-escalation, and self-regulation into an Emotional Support classroom in the hopes that the students would be able to develop higher confidence in themselves, build healthier relationships, and increase their feeling of school belonging. Four students in grades sixth through eighth grade participated in the action research study which was conducted in a suburban middle school in Eastern Pennsylvania with approximately 845 students in grades sixth through eighth. Methods of collecting data included observational field logs, emotional wellbeing surveys, and mindfulness journals. The data gathering instruments used were student observations, mindfulness journals, and emotional wellbeing surveys.

Students were taught de-escalation lessons over a nine-week period and had access to a journal that could be used for data collection activities such as notes from lessons, handouts, or personal entries. Students took charge of their emotional wellbeing through the techniques that were introduced to them. The findings suggest that when students are given the tools to better their emotional wellbeing, they will utilize them to decrease the number of times they have an incident of crisis as well as decrease the duration of each crisis incident. The findings also suggest that these lessons can help improve students' self-image, social relationships, and academic performance. All of the participants reported

positive feelings of accomplishment with the de-escalation lessons and behavior modification techniques.

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Researchers Stance

I was always a “good kid” growing up. I did well in school, I obeyed my parents, my favorite activity was reading quietly, and I was involved in many school clubs and after school activities. Sure I had trivial problems, like any grade schooler who thought the world was coming to an end because they didn’t have a date to prom. Even in college you worry about what the best party is to go to on a Saturday night, or whether your football team will win the Homecoming game against the rival college. Growing up, transitioning into adulthood, makes you realize how silly those concerns were.

Suddenly you’re graduated from college, with student loans to pay for. You need to get a job to gain experience, but every job you can find to apply to requires you to have experience. Now you have new worries, valid ones, and the laissez faire days of going to class in your pajamas and eating pizza for three square meals a day are over.

I struggled at this point in my life, but I managed to scrape by and make things work. Part of this particular journey lead me to working several jobs just to afford my loan payments from tutoring kids in English, babysitting on weekends and in-service days, and aiding as a paraprofessional at my old middle school. It was that last job that made me realize how much I enjoyed working in a school with students every day. I decided it was time to go back to school to earn my teaching certification, so I applied for graduate school.

Now I found myself working two jobs, and going to grad school simultaneously. Trying to juggle all of these things left me exhausted, mentally, emotionally, and physically. I found myself in a position where I didn't want to get up in the morning because I knew I had a fourteen hour work day ahead of me. Instead, I hit snooze, snuggled closer to my cat, and pulled the blankets over my head. I found myself crying a lot more and, for reasons unknown to me at the time, my relationships and friendships were suffering, I was irritable, high strung, and miles more anxious than I had ever been in my life.

I didn't understand how I could be at this point. There was no way that I could keep all of this up until I completed grad school. I'd burn out way before then. All my other friends were graduated with good jobs, married, and homeowners. Shouldn't I be there, too?

I needed a way to calm my mind and stop these questions from interfering with my daily life. I thought about how interested I was in Buddhism, and how they believe that the path to Enlightenment is through practicing morality, meditation, and wisdom (Lama, 2003, p. 117). So, I decided to head to my favorite bookstore, to pick up a book on Buddhism. It discussed everything from the types of meditation, and how to meditate, to how meditation can lead to introspection and calming of the mind (Lama, p. 119). Meditation was always something that people, including my younger self, laughed at, saying it was for

hippies. Now I thought, what was the harm in trying it out? If it helped Buddhists, and was backed by science, it had to help me at least a little.

I started using a guided meditation app on my phone, along with a heaping helping of skepticism. However, after a few sessions, I found myself breathing a little easier, because that's all this guided meditation was—focusing on breathing.

Taking just ten to twelve minutes a day to focus on quieting my mind and breathing, left me feeling refreshed and ready to take on my next daily task whether it was going to grad class or cooking dinner. As I continued to practice meditation, I was able to delve deeper into non-guided, or self guided, meditation and found my own mantras, which brought about a deeper inner peace within me.

Along with meditation, I took up another great holistic healing practice, yoga, which is much more than being able to bend yourself into a pretzel; it is about becoming more aware of yourself, your body, and your mental state, as well as being a wonderful workout. Today I am able to combine my meditation and yoga. At the end of every yoga session there is a few minutes of savasana, which is an incorporated meditation session.

Making sure that I made time in my schedule for both of these things on a daily basis really made a positive impact on my mental health. It meant I took a few minutes for myself every day to make sure that I was relaxing between the events filling my hectic schedule.

I knew that if I were going to spend the next three years in grad school, I was going to need a steady job with hours that I could work around classes with. I knew that if I wanted to work in education after I finished my program, I should align myself with education during my program, so I applied to be a paraprofessional at a middle school.

If you had asked me five years ago where I would be when working in a school, my answer would have been, “in an ELA classroom teaching students grammar”, or “in the library, sharing my love of reading with the students.” Never would I have answered, “in special education, working with students who receive emotional support services.” While working in English is my end goal after graduation, I will always look back fondly on my time in Emotional Support, and be thankful that this is where I started. I’ve grown so fond of each and every one of my students and have learned more about patience and personal relationships than I ever thought I would. My time spent here has made me that much better prepared for future teaching than I would have been otherwise.

Fun fact: I work for the same school district that I attended when I was in grade school. Because of this, I have had the pleasure of seeing how things have changed, for the better and the worst, over the years. When I was attending middle and high school, I never took notice to how many special education programs were offered. As general education students, we were vaguely aware of a class consisting of a few students that would be the equivalent of a combination

of today's self contained classes. These kids were mostly hidden in the back corner room of the school, and only showed up to art and music classes.

We were also aware of our fellow students that were labeled "disruptive." These were the kids who couldn't stay in their seat, who called out during class, and were constantly sent to the hallway or the principal's office, but I never would have known if they were given special education services.

When I started working back at my old middle school, I quickly learned to my delight that all of these students now had a universal design for learning, classrooms better designed for all students' needs. They were now, presumably, given better resources to fit their needs, increasing their learning experience and the learning experiences of those around them.

I started in the Emotional Support room almost four years ago, beginning to learn the ins and outs. My district runs on an inclusion class basis, so all of our students are out in Regular Education classes. I noticed, though, that many of the teachers weren't well equipped to meet the needs of our Students who receive emotional support services. They never seemed to have patience with them, and they were quick to point out every little thing the student did, blaming them for any and all bad behavior in the classroom. Many of the teachers would simply send the students back to the Emotional Support classroom. The key to intervention is to try to keep them in class, and not immediately send them back to the Emotional Support room. As part of the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA), students who receive special education services should learn in the least restrictive environment, meaning that they should spend as much time as possible out in regular education classrooms with their peers, and not secluded in special education classrooms.

It also didn't take long to realize that while the program was a wonderful one with plenty of intervention and guided help, there seemed to be one big thing missing from the program: skill intervention to prevent crisis incidents. The entire program seemed based on having a room for students to come to when they got kicked out of class, and even the room wasn't properly set up to provide a relaxing atmosphere where the students could decompress when kicked out or when they needed a break.

I began thinking about how these two aspects of my life, my own mental health journey and my work in Emotional Support, could be combined. If yoga and meditation could improve my rough moments so much, would it be as helpful to my students? While contemplating this question, I ran into an issue. I work with students who receive special education services in a general education classroom. They would be out and about in General Education classrooms. They wouldn't rightly be able to just stand up when they are becoming escalated and do yoga in the middle of the room. Nor would it be acceptable for them to put everything down and attempt to meditate in the middle of classroom instruction.

There had to be things put in place that the students would be able to do during classroom instruction without distracting other students. With this in mind I set off to find mindfulness activities for them to do while in class during instruction if need be.

I'm very excited to see how these activities and lessons will impact my students and allow them to take a minute to do their own breathing in the middle of their hectic lives, just like I learned to do for myself.

Literature Review

Introduction:

Emotional Support classrooms have begun to find themselves in more school districts, providing a safe and caring environment for students. First, we have to understand what it means for a student to be in need of emotional support. Many people assume that students who receive emotional support services are simply students who have a bad attitude problem. This isn't the case. Many of these students will cycle through reactions based on triggers from their environment. The conflict cycle explains how a moment of crisis begins with a stressful incident, which incites a student's feelings, leading to the observable negative behavior. Often times the adult or peer's reaction to the behavior causes another stressful incident, beginning the cycle all over again (Long, 1998, p. 10).

In order to be eligible to receive emotional support services, a student has to be found eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to receive services. This can manifest in different ways depending on each individual student. "While some students have mood disorders, such as depression, others may experience intense feelings of anger or frustration. Further, individual students react to feelings of depression, anger, or frustration in very different ways" (Quinn et al., 2000, p. 8). Due to the broad spectrum of disabilities and needs that can be supported through an Emotional Support program, it is important to understand each student's individual needs.

The first step to obtain these services for a student is referral. This involves the "identification, evaluation, and disposition of cases involving students who are **at-risk** students by a local school committee known as the Child Study Team" (Pierangelo, 2007, p. 15). This means that a school based support team collects data on the student to help make recommendations of interventions for the student in question. These interventions are implemented and monitored for appropriate progress. If adequate progress is not demonstrated by the student within a given amount of time, a referral for special education evaluation is made. Based upon the findings of the evaluation, recommendations for specially designed instruction, program modifications, and educational placement are made in order to support the students' needs (Pierangelo, 2007, p. 20). After the evaluation is completed, and an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed with an IEP team, the student will receive the services necessary to better their educational experience.

What Does This Mean for the Classroom?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act provides a tiered continuum where students are placed in the least restrictive environment first (Pierangelo, 2007, p. 4). This means that the first placement considered for a student is the general education classroom without supplementary aids or services. If this environment is not conducive to the student's learning, then he or she will be considered for supplementary aids or services. Resource support with

a short term placement in a special education classroom comes next, extending into self contained placement in a special education classroom. Secondary placement of the student would be the last step in finding an appropriate placement and setting for the student. Students who have access to self contained placement fall into two categories; itinerant and supplemental. A student who is itinerant should spend no more than 20% of their school day within the supplemental classroom, while a supplemental placement has the student in the special education classroom for more than 20% of the school day.

Due to the least restrictive environment, the first step to intervention with a student who receives emotional support services should not be to send them back to the Emotional Support room. Unfortunately, many general education teachers lack the preparation and training to "implement a number of evidence-based classroom practices effectively," (Gable, 2012. p. 499).

Keeping the least restrictive environment in mind, there are preventative techniques such as identifying poor behaviors and triggers, finding appropriate interventions for each individual student, and implementing personal well-being techniques are all important factors in creating a safe environment for students who receive emotional support services. Instead of a program designed to handle instances of crisis after they've occurred, teachers are now able to implement preventative measures using a plethora of techniques catered towards proactively minimizing the chance of crisis.

This multi-faceted approach begins with simple techniques such as discussing problems privately with a student or suggesting a different environment or activity in moments of frustration. If simple measures do not work, behavior intervention will be introduced where a teacher and student discuss the behavior and the resulting consequences and develop a plan with input from the student. This allows the student an opportunity to develop coping skills and share in his or her behavior plan (Ryan 2007). One popular technique put in place during behavioral planning is a token economy. "Token economy is a behavior modification program that employs a variety of reinforcers that encourage students to change their own behavior" (Stover, 1994, p. 4). According to Drabman, a token economy has proven to increase academics as well as appropriate social behaviors by decreasing verbalizations of students who receive emotional support services in the classrooms where it has been implemented (1973, p. 10).

When schools offered social and emotional well-being lessons, students "felt more connected with their school and improved on measures of positive behavior, such as classroom discipline and attendance and they evidenced a reduction in mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and alienation" (Midford et al., 2016, p.363). While these lessons were beneficial to all students, they are extremely important to implement into Emotional Support classrooms

which integrate social and emotional skills in a safe environment to help minimize aggressive and antisocial behavior (Portnow et al., 2015).

A study done on emotional education of students in a middle school in Australia found that the achievement scores of their students went up approximately 11% after social and emotional learning programs were implemented (Midford et al.,). While social and emotional skills are beneficial for all students, students who receive emotional support services can benefit from them by showing them healthy ways to cope with emotional turmoil and enhancing their likelihood of achieving positive outcomes later in life by better equipping them to face life's challenges in a healthy and balanced way.

By implementing these programs, schools are allowing students who receive emotional support services to better understand their behavioral challenges and find positive ways of dealing with instances that could result in crisis. These programs may not be enough, though. In their book, *Teaching and Working with Children Who Have Emotional and Behavioral Challenges*, Quinn et al., discusses how if a student is hyperactive or has a distractibility due to a neurological condition, it may be necessary to modify each classroom activity to aide in the child's concentration and focus on a topic or assignment (Quinn et al., 2000).

Sustained attention activities may prove to be too difficult for such a student and "the challenge is to minimize such counterproductive experiences

while simultaneously providing positive learning opportunities,"(Quinn, et al., p. 19). Whether this modification takes on the form of multiple breaks or chunking of assignments will depend on the teacher as well as the individual student.

However, each student in the program will be different, and require a different approach to better their environment. A high expectation approach is based on individuality and strengths of each student. Rolfe states that "identifying each youth's unique strengths and gifts, nurturing them, and using them to work on needs concerns" (Rolfe, 2008, p. 5) creates the space for a student to believe that he or she can and will succeed. Students who receive emotional support services tend not to feel the ability to accomplish what they want, and see it as a waste of time to try.

Besides autonomy, or the feeling that they can succeed, students also need to have a sense of control and ownership over their own lives. Having meaningful participation in their lives can meet this fundamental human need (Rolfe, 2008). Research has found positive developmental outcomes from an increase in meaningful participation including a decrease in risk behaviors and increase in academic factors. These stem from students "being given valued responsibilities, planning and decision-making opportunities, and chances to contribute and help others in their home, school, and community environments" (Rolfe, 2008, p. 5).

Meaningful participation for students can come in the form of something as simple as chores, or for older students, a part time job. Recognizing that they

are helping to make choices within the household or classroom shows students that they are acknowledged as valued participants in the environment. Students who have this decision making power learn responsibility and are better able to form better self-management and control (Werner and Smith, 1992). For students with IEPs, it is important to involve them as a member of their own IEP committee once they reach thirteen years of age. This involvement in their own planning can provide them a sense of responsibility as well as offering them a chance to input what services they feel they need.

The presence of caring and strong relationships within the student's life is another important factor. It could be argued that caring relationships are the more critical factor in promoting healthy development in students. A caring relationship can be with anyone who has a supportive connection in the student's life and who can model and support healthy development and well-being (Rolfe). These relationships can simply be someone the student is comfortable going to when in need of support, or an adult who shows an interest in who the student is, actively listening to and talking with the student. These caring relationships can be provided within the school setting by creating relationships between the student and teachers that they feel safe confiding in.

These three external assets have been referred to as "protective factors" because of their ability to "mediate against involvement in risk behaviors such as substance use and violence" (Rolfe, 2008, p. 5). A survey done by Add Health of

90,000 youth in grades 7-12 found that the students who were more rounded in these three areas: presence of caring relationships, meaningful participation, and high expectations, were unlikely to engage in alcohol and drugs, violence, or other risky behaviors.

Self-regulation:

An important step to bettering a student's emotional needs is self-regulation. "Self-regulation skills make it possible for children to adapt to new challenges and solve problems-both within the classroom and outside of it" (Shapiro et al., 2014, p. 4). With more attuned self-regulation, students will be better able to understand their own emotions, identify emotional triggers, and come up with appropriate solutions to avoid disruptive behavior or incidents of crisis.

The goal of self-regulation is for the student to turn his or her attention inward, and understand what occurred that led to their crisis as well as how they handled the situation. By understanding the behavior and what caused it, students can better map out a plan for future use during similar experiences and come up with ways to prevent the crisis from occurring. Practicing self-regulation regularly may help enhance their ability to reflect more deeply on their emotions and garner a better understanding of the environments and situations that trigger them most. This will better position them to engage in a executive functioning (Shapiro et al., 2014).

De-Escalation Techniques Using Contemplative Practices:

Crisis can present differently in each individual student, often times it manifests in verbal outbursts or physical confrontation because these are seen as the only solutions to a conflict or unsettling environment (Cabeza, 1995). "Like all children, students with emotional and behavioral problems vary in their characteristics and needs, in their likes and dislikes, and in their reactions to classroom events" (Quinn, et al., 2000, p.19). Because of the diverse needs of an Emotional Support classroom, it is important to introduce students to different de-escalation techniques in order to help minimize instances of crisis as well as crisis time. There are many techniques that can be used to help aide in de-escalation including creating a safe space, keeping journals, conflict resolution lessons, fidget toys, and, most importantly, practicing mindfulness.

Mindfulness practices are a way to involve students in the regulation of attention, bettering focus. More than simply helping students to focus, these contemplative practices intend to take that focus and attention and align them with attitudes of openness, acceptance, and interest, allowing the students to become more aware of their emotions and their surroundings (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 2). "These practices at their core involve regulation of attention. In addition, these practices often focus on cultivation of prosocial attitudes and behavior such as compassion, empathy, and respect for others" (Shapiro et al., 2014, p.2). A study

done by Shauna Shapiro showed that "increases in mindfulness mediated reductions in perceived stress and rumination" (Shapiro, 2008).

Mindfulness practices include breathing techniques. To start, breathing techniques in their purest form simply mean focusing on the rise and fall of one's breath, working as an anchor to the present moment (Shapiro et al., 2014), or trying to empty the mind of superfluous or intrusive thought.

It has been found that when breathing techniques are used as a relaxation technique with adolescents who show signs of anxiety and low self-esteem, these feelings were successfully reduced (Reynolds and Coats, 1986), as well as when used to treat anger and other severe behavior problems. However, these practices can't be used only in instances of crisis. Repetition of the mental activity alters neurocircuitry within the brain and strengthens the synaptic connections that are used (Stiles, 2008), promoting the development of executive function, emotional regulation, and perspective taking. Long-term use of breathing techniques has also been correlated with better attention control (Jha et al., 2007) which is ideal for students with limited focus and control skills (Flook et al., 2010).

For Students who receive emotional support services, managing emotion can be a difficult task to undertake. Ortner suggests that mindfulness training may soothe the interfering negative stimuli in an environment and allow the student to remain calm while working on a cognitive task, or dealing with an unpleasant situation (2007).

A branch off of breathing techniques, and another excellent contemplative practice, is to practice stretching. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine described stretching as a mind and body intervention (2011). Stretching incorporates posture poses, accompanied by controlled breathing techniques. These practices are designed to promote physical and psychological well-being (Frank et al., 2014). Stretching has been known to evoke a calming effect on those who practice it regularly. A study conducted by the Hammill Institute on Disabilities showed that "challenging behavior decreased to zero" in the majority of their subjects (Cannella-Malone, 2011). Combining the physical aspect of stretching with the breathing technique practices help to reduce stress, tension, tiredness, and relieve excess energy as well as increasing concentration and attention span.

The connection between body, mind, and soul can provide a gentle space for personal de-escalation. A study conducted by Khalsa et al., showed that stretching could also provide a "protective benefit against normative decreases on several indicators of mental health and well-being seen in middle-school age students" (2011, p. 80).

Set-Up of Classroom:

Although this study is focused mainly around skill sets, research shows that one major factor in increasing crisis in a student who receives emotional support services is stimuli (Gordon & Browne, 2007). Each student has

individualized needs. The more stimuli that is present in a room, the harder it is for some students to stay calm and behave appropriately. However, some students respond well to increased stimuli. To combat this, sometimes the solution is as simple as creating an environment that is conducive to relaxation for students whether they need increased, or decreased stimuli.

The set-up of a classroom can be a major component of a child's learning as evident by Cheryl Smith's dissertation, "Creating the Classroom Environment: Perceptions of First Year Teachers". Smith's study focused on four themes of first year teachers setting up their classrooms, including classroom arrangement and organization because "components of the environment include the choices teachers make concerning the physical setting (equipment and materials, room arrangement, facilities)" (Smith, 2009, p. 2).

The environment of a classroom that a student walks into should communicate how the student is expected to behave, work, and love in that setting (Olds, 2001). Because of this, a classroom environment for an escalated student who receives emotional support services should communicate a safe and relaxing atmosphere where the student is able to go to de-escalate. The implementation of a relaxation room for students who receive emotional support services is vital to prevent over-stimulation and promote healthy de-escalation.

The goal of the relaxation room is to provide a soft and open setting that will help to curb behavior problems (Gordon & Browne, 2007), and to have a

place for the students to go during moments of crisis when they need to leave the previous classroom. Creating a space with dim lighting, pleasant smells, or gentle music and sounds is more conducive to relaxation and provides less stimuli.

"Teachers have significant influence over the amount of visual and auditory stimulation students receive within the classroom, and, therefore, they should be aware that students who are easily distracted may require less stimulation than is typical" (Quinn et al., 2000 p. 26).

Having interactive objects to stimulate all five senses and keep the mind off of the crisis trigger is also beneficial. Such objects as a lava lamp for sight, a small fountain for sound, a diffuser for smell, and fidget toys for touch engage all the senses and allow greater focus for an escalated student. This environment provides a "quiet, 'safe' place to sit and work or to calm down after an emotional outburst" (Quinn, et al., 2000, p. 26).

Research Design and Methodology

Research Goals

The intent of this action research project was to teach a curriculum that presented introspection, de-escalation, and self-regulation into an Emotional Support classroom in the hopes that the students would be able to use de-escalation strategies to develop higher confidence in themselves, build healthier relationships, and increase their feeling of school belonging. The participants began by attending mindfulness lessons once a week, and then were able to use the provided handouts to help prevent or de-escalate their inappropriate behaviors. As the lessons progressed, the participants kept track of their lessons, resources, and thoughts through journal prompts. I was able to keep track of their progress through student observation, emotional well-being surveys, and reviews of their journals.

Setting & Participants

This action research project took place in an Emotional Support classroom at a suburban, middle school in Eastern Pennsylvania. This classroom services 11 students; 10 white males, 1 white female. The participants ages range from 12 to 15 years old. My study focused on four of the males in particular. All of the students had disabilities that contribute to their eligibility for Special Education services including, but not limited to; emotional disturbances, traumatic brain

injury, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Tourettes, high functioning aspergers or autism, and learning disabilities. Each of the students also had an Individualized Education Program (IEP), or a 504 Plan that provided them with weekly goals that they must try to meet. These were all taken into consideration during the course of the study.

Throughout this project, the participants were observed in several classrooms, including the emotional support classroom, the sensory room, and in their regular education classrooms. Each of these students had access to a journal that could be used for data collection activities such as notes from lessons, handouts, or personal entries.

Data Gathering Methods

Observations: The project began with participants participating in de-escalation lessons which included a mindfulness activity. During each lesson they learned a new technique to help minimize the frequency of crisis incidents. While they participated in the lessons, I kept a journal of observations for each student. I included attitude towards the lesson, engagement in the technique, as well as things that the students would say to me or each other.

Journal Prompts: In several of the lessons the participants were given journal prompts to respond to. Each student has his or her own journal that they were able to respond to given prompts in, as well as encouraged to write thoughts

in throughout their day. The journals were also used to record when a technique was used in class and how effective the student thought it had been.

Surveys: The last method of data collection was the results from three emotional well-being surveys. There are six internal assets that are associated with positive development and learning. These are cooperation and communication, self-efficacy, empathy, problem solving, self-awareness, and goals and aspirations (Rolfe, 2008). Each of these assets can be assessed using a psychological evaluation survey. These surveys are brief, but they can identify where the student feels he or she stands in regards to having high expectations, meaningful participation, and caring relationships within the four key environments of school, home, community, and peer groups (Rolfe). Using these surveys, it is possible to gauge if a student is struggling with high expectation.

It was explained that none of these surveys would be graded so that they would answer the questions honestly. One survey was administered in the beginning of the study as a pre-survey. The second was administered in the middle of the study as a progress monitoring tool. The third and final survey was given at the end of the study and the data from all three surveys were compared to see if there had been progress or not.

Research Design

Students were first introduced to the action research study and provided student assent forms to sign. Parental consent forms were then sent home

explaining the project. Once consent forms were returned to me, activities commenced as follows:

Week One:

- Journals were handed out and first prompt was assigned
- Emotional Wellness Pre-survey was introduced and administered to collect initial data
- First skill lesson in patience was taught.
- First stretching pose; Mountain Pose

Week Two:

- Stress Control skill lesson
- Introduced deep breathing using Take 5 Breathing technique. Breath in while counting to 5, and breath out while counting to 5
- Next journal prompt assigned and time provided to answer.
- Second stretching pose introduced; Child's pose and reviewed mountain pose

Week Three:

- Recapped stress control lesson
- Introduced Introspection skill lesson.
- Discussed emotional awareness and understanding how you're feeling in any given moment and being able to identify possible crisis triggers

- Handout: 54321 Mindfulness added to journal
- Journal prompt assigned and time provided to answer.
- Third stretching pose introduced; Downward Facing Dog

Week Four:

- Concentration and Focus skill lesson
- Discussed how we can ignore distractions and focus on the task at hand
- Handout: Distraction To-Do List. Create a list for each distracting thought you have in a day.
- Journal Prompt
- Fourth stretching pose; Warrior Pose

Week Five:

- Self-regulation skill lesson
- Discussed using appropriate emotions to deal with the demands of environment
- Coping Menu hand out added to journal
- Journal prompt
- Fifth stretching pose introduced; Tree Pose
- Administered Emotional Wellbeing midterm survey as a mid study data collection

- Introduced guided breathing techniques along with review of stretching poses

Week Six:

- Asking for Help skill lesson
- Discussed asking for help in a respectful manner and when it is necessary to ask for help
- Role played how to ask for help
- Journal Prompt
- Guided breathing techniques and reviewed stretching poses

Week Seven:

- Staying in your Seat lesson
- Discussed how we can keep ourselves focused in our seats, or when it is appropriate to ask for a small break or walk.
- Introduced fidget toys and found which ones suited each student best
- Guided breathing techniques and reviewed stretching poses
- Journal Prompt

Week Eight:

- Reviewed each previous week's lesson
- Discussed which lesson was most beneficial or helped the most
- Guided Breathing techniques and stretching poses

- Journal Prompt

Week Nine:

- Administered Emotional Wellbeing Post survey to collect final data
- Guided breathing techniques and stretching poses
- Answered final Journal Prompt
- Final check in. Recapped all of the skills and techniques again
- Collected all journals

Trustworthiness Statement

To optimize the trustworthiness and validity of the results of this study, I followed certain ethical research strategies and guidelines. Prior to initiating this study, I was granted approval and documented permission from Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB). To obtain the permission, I outlined my objectives for the study, and the included specific procedures for data collection and steps followed to reduce risk to participants in the study. In addition, I provided the board with critical documents including a copy of the student assent and parent consent forms, the survey that was used, and all resources that students would be using. I previously sought out permission from my building principal and also included a signed principal consent form in the materials sent to HSIRB.

Each consent form clarified that all documentation and data used in my study would be kept strictly confidential, and pseudonyms would be used for each student to keep all personal information private. The letters also explained that participants and parents were allowed to withdraw from my study at any time without any penalties. Participants and parents were also informed that the students wouldn't be graded on anything they did for my study. It was explained that the emotional-wellbeing survey was also not graded but that participants should try to answer each question as honestly as possible. Due to the confidential nature of my data, I also included that all information would be shredded at the conclusion of my study to further protect personal identities.

Working with students who have Individualized Educational Programs, or IEPs and 504s, it was important for me to make sure that my study followed any guidelines in said documents and that my participants would be given access to any of the accommodations that are available to them at all times. Along with this, I made sure that my participants were well aware of the study in which they had decided to participate. I used our first lesson to explain why I was conducting the study. I explained what the point of the study was, and what I hoped to accomplish with it. I talked to my participants about how I was going to observe them throughout the study as well as collect data from them, but that ultimately, I wanted the study to benefit them in and out of the classroom. They should feel

that they could participate in my study comfortably and approach me whenever they needed to.

To optimize the legitimacy of my data, my first step in beginning my study was to incorporate the help of my fellow coworkers which is a method suggested by Hendricks (2009). I utilized my coworkers by asking them to mark down whenever they saw one of my participants using one of their strategies. With their help, I was able to better track how often my participants were using their strategies in case they forgot to write it down in their mindfulness journals. This feedback helped me to create a more valid and trustworthy study.

My next step was gathering data and analyzing it. Data were collected via an ongoing field log, mindfulness journals, and an emotional well-being survey. The field log documented ongoing daily observations as well as information about mindfulness journal check-ins. Any observations that I made were written down at the earliest convenience to assure that the observation was recorded with the utmost accuracy (McNiff, 2013). If I made an observation and was unable to record a full thought along with the observation, I made notes about said observation until I was able to take the time to complete a full observational log.

Data Analysis:

With this field log being used daily, I was able to better track my data on the effectiveness of my intervention and include it as a way to help the validity and credibility of my findings. With these findings I was also able to keep track of

what strategies worked for which participant and which strategies didn't seem to help anyone. With this information I was better able to steer each student to the correct course of action for each crisis incident. I looked at my data as McNiff (2013) suggests, by analyzing it and comparing it to whether the intervention improved the learning.

Throughout my study, I needed to remind myself that some biases may have come up throughout data collection. Because I wanted these strategies to work, therefore decreasing incidents of crisis and time of de-escalation, I had to bear in mind that these strategies may not work for every participant and that participants would have preferences to the strategies that they use. Using students from an Emotional Support classroom, it was important to note that my students come with differing disabilities, emotional and behavioral, as well as different grade levels and home environments. All of these things play a role in the biases that may have occurred in my data throughout my study. With this in mind, I made sure to analyze my data in a way so that all of my findings on the effect of the strategies on crisis incidences were not influenced by my initial hopes for effectiveness.

In order to prove my data collection, I included journal excerpts, as well as student quotes.

Research Narrative

The Beginning

Working in a middle school emotional support classroom for four years isn't always the easiest placement within a school. Each student has his or her own unique and personal issues that led to his or her placement in such a program, and I quickly learned that it was imperative to adjust consequences and situations to each individual student. When friends ask me how work is going, I always like to tell them that, "Every day is a new adventure!"

There aren't necessarily always set schedules in an emotional support classroom like there are in regular education rooms; and because of this, it is hard to plan how the day might go. The lack of regularity, partnered with the unpredictability of the students' moods, make everyday a surprise, but it was one of the things that I loved about my job. It was certainly anything but mundane!

I was excited to get the new school year started. I would get to meet the new 6th graders coming up into our program, my now 7th graders, and my veteran students: the 8th graders whom I had worked with since their first year in the middle school, and will watch them move onto the high school. It was amazing to see the progress that these students had made in their seemingly short time with me, but there was still a lot of room for improvement; and if there had been one thing lacking in my years with my students, it was a preemptive strike to decrease instances of crisis with each student.

I knew when I began developing my research study that I wanted to focus on not just shortening the duration of crisis episodes, but helping to prevent them altogether. Many of the ideas that I had planned to implement were out of the ordinary for my students, and I found myself foreseeing a lot of hesitation and potential animosity towards a few of the activities. Like many middle schoolers, the main goal of my students is simply to fit in with their peers, and most middle schoolers aren't familiar with de-escalation techniques. I knew I was going to have to ease them into this.

Relaxation Room

The emotional support classroom has two back rooms within it, and over the summer I had come into the classroom and set up one of the back spaces to be a place where the students could come to calm down when their behavior was escalated to calm down. We deemed this room the "relaxation room." When students walk into the room, they have a plethora of items at their disposal to help minimize stimulation. I focused on incorporating different objects that would calm each of the five senses: sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing.

The first thing I focused on was lighting. Several of my students are sensitive to light and sound, so I made sure to include soft and dim lighting options for them. A Himalayan salt lamp and small table lamp with soft white light bulb were available for when they needed lower light. Being out of the

harsh, fluorescent lighting of a regular classroom was the first step to de-escalating and minimizing frustrations.

Next came sound. An eerily silent room isn't going to help matters, but one with gentle noise can help students to relax and focus on their emotions. In order to reach all my students, I included a white noise machine for the moments when they needed background noise but no distractions. A calming soundtrack was available for the students who were okay with a slightly more distracting, but soothing, sound. Lastly, I included a water fountain. The fountain was a great way to incorporate background noise in the room that was soothing and familiar to the students.

Smell was a simple one. I brought in a diffuser for the students to turn on when in the back room. Unfortunately, it didn't take long for it to break, so I replaced it with simple air freshener plug-ins, but allowed the students to choose which scent they wanted to plug in.

For touch, I added several throw pillows and blankets as an option for students to utilize for a small nap during their earned free time. I also included a bucket full of fidget toys. These fidget toys were available for the room, as well as to be signed out and brought with to regular education classrooms when needed.

Last was taste. In order to incorporate taste, I brought in several small snack items that the students could choose from if they were able to successfully de-escalate with no other issues. These food items were used only as positive

reinforcement for quick or appropriate de-escalation, as well as to reward good behavior in a week.

Introduction of Study

I allowed my students the first week of classes to simply adjust to being back in school. I was about to change their routine once again, and wanted them first to be settled into their core courses. September 10th was my first de-escalation lesson with the students. I brought them all into the relaxation room as a group in order to explain to them the basis of my study. After they adjusted the lighting and put on the calming music, they settled down and I explained that we would be meeting weekly together, and individually as needed to go over several techniques that they could use to help them make it through classes with fewer instances of crisis.

Landon asked what crisis meant, so we had a conversation about the emotional support program and how, sometimes, each student's behavior was not acceptable to be in a regular education classroom, but that was why they had this room to come to. Several of the students smiled or had a "light bulb" moment when they understood. I wanted to assure them that these moments were okay. We all stress out sometimes, and it's natural, but we need to learn ways to handle that stress in a healthy manner instead of lashing out or getting out of control.

I talked briefly about some of the techniques we would be implementing each week along with these lessons such as stretching and breathing practices. As

I spoke, I gauged the students' reactions to my study. I expected some snickering or a flat out "no" from some of them, but none of them complained about it. I could tell that several of them were apprehensive, or made faces, but they all agreed to partake in the study without any objection.

I had already obtained my principal consent form before meeting with the students, so I handed out the consent forms for them to sign, along with a copy of the parental consent form to bring home to their parents. I made sure to read it aloud to them and told them that they did not have to participate in my study if they didn't want to, but they all signed their forms.

To conclude the day's lesson, I handed out their journals and told them to keep everything we do during lessons in there. I also welcomed them to write in the journals whenever they felt inclined to do so. They were made aware that I would be checking in the journals every so often to see if they had written in them and to better help them in future lessons. Lastly, I explained to them that at the end of each lesson we did, I would have a journal prompt for them to answer. Some of the journal prompts may seem easy for them to answer, and some may be a bit tougher and make them think about how they want to answer it. I asked them to make their first journal entry, which was to write down what they believe helps to calm them down when they feel escalated.

Having an understanding of hobbies and interests of the students, as well as an idea of how to help de-escalate them, is crucial not only in building

relationships with them, but also because it's a wonderful way to help de-escalate them. One of the easiest ways to get a student to de-escalate, even a little bit, is to ask them questions and talk to them to help get their mind off of what escalated them. Knowing their hobbies and interests allows me to find topics to chat with the student about.

Looking in their journals I saw a multitude of differing answers to the prompt on what they believe calms them down. It was fun for me to learn a bit about my students during this first journal entry. I had some normal answers and learned that Ezra likes fishing, Luca wrote down gaming, and Landon wrote football. There was also an answer that made me laugh. Oliver wrote down chickens. I pulled Oliver aside and asked him what it was about chickens that helped to calm him down.

Oliver told me, "my neighbors have chickens and I grew up with them. When I was little I used to go pet them. Now I get to feed them. But my mom won't let me go see them if I'm bad, so I have to make my daily point goals or else I can't feed my chickens." Oliver was referring to a daily sheet of paper where his teacher in each period has to give him a zero if he didn't behave or a one if he did behave. He must have a score of eight or higher to reach his goal for the day. I made a note to bring that one up the next time he had an incident.

I felt like the first session went well. There wasn't much we could do initially, but it was important to me to spend a lot of time making sure the students fully understood my study.

Lesson: Introspection

Over the course of the first week, I was able to collect the rest of the parental consent forms that I needed to move ahead with my project. We were onto the second week and I was excited to conduct the first de-escalation lesson with my students.

I wanted to ease the students into our first lesson with something relaxing so that they weren't anxious to begin. In order to do this, I put on some calming music, turned off the overhead light and turned on the Himalayan salt lamp, and had the students do a guided extended body scan. A body scan can be performed while lying down, sitting, or in other postures that the person finds comfortable. I instructed the students to close their eyes, and relax while listening to the video. The video featured a female, soothing voice guiding the students in focusing on their breathing.

During the body scan the students were to take a few deep breaths, and then it started at the top of the head, slowly making its way down through each body part: the face, neck, back, belly, arms, hands, legs, and feet, and having them focus on how each part felt. They were to pay attention to whether they felt any

tension in an area, as well as if they felt any tingling sensations, and then were instructed to relax each part as they came to it.

While the body scan was going, I observed and took notes on how each student seemed to respond to it. Oliver and Landon both participated fully. I could see Landon occasionally shake the part of the body that we were on; he would twitch his hand into a more comfortable position, or release his jaw. Oliver's breathing became much more focused and I could see the steady rise and fall of his chest, indicating his focus on his breathing. These were smaller observations that took a few moments to catch onto. I made note of how focusing on breathing techniques would be a beneficial technique for both boys.

There was one very obvious observation as well. Luca's attitude towards the body scan was not one of excitement, but of enmity. He fidgeted and laughed the whole time, distracting Ezra from his body scan. Ezra often acts out for attention and will do things to seek the approval of other students. Because of this, Ezra followed along with Luca laughing and fidgeting. I wondered how Ezra would have done without Luca there, and made a note to pull him for an individual session.

After the body scan I conducted a lesson to teach the students better understanding of their emotional state and what triggers they may have that set off incidents of crisis. This was our Introspection and Emotional Awareness Lesson. We began by learning that the word introspection means to observe one's own

mental and emotional state. We discussed how we can know that certain things always make us upset or frustrated.

I asked if any of them already knew some triggers that they may have. Ezra immediately said ELA class. He struggles with the teacher in this class and does not have a good relationship with him. This wasn't a surprise for me, since I had observed this long before, but I made a note of it for myself. Knowing his trigger can help us come up with a plan on how to decrease the frustration he feels when it is time for that class.

No one else wanted to say what their triggers were, so I told them I'd share some of mine. I shared how graduate school was a trigger for me because it was a lot of work on top of working, and that stresses me out often. I saw Luca seemed interested in learning that I, too, had frustrations in my life.

I then passed out the 54321 Mindfulness handout to each of the students. This was the technique that went with the Introspection lesson. I had the students try it then, by writing in their notebooks five things they can hear, four they can see, three they can smell, two they can feel, and one good thing about themselves. When they got to number one, they began to snicker. I asked why that was their reaction.

Landon said that it doesn't fit in with the rest because the rest were all senses and this one wasn't.

Ezra mumbled, “There isn’t anything good about us. That’s why we’re in this class.”

Hearing this really saddened me, so I decided to take the reins for this last question. I wanted them to understand that being in this program doesn’t make them bad kids. I started by asking them how often they got yelled at throughout the day.

They all laughed and Luca said, “a lot!”

I asked, “how often does it make you feel bad about yourself, or does it make you feel like you’re not good enough?”

They didn’t laugh this time, but Luca eventually responded with a quiet, “all the time.” I nodded in response. We then talked about how being yelled at for doing something silly or making a bad choice doesn’t make them a bad person, but it reminds them what actions are appropriate and what actions are not. Because of the way it makes them feel, however, it is important to think about what they like about themselves. I gave them some examples such as, perhaps you made a good decision they were proud of one day, or maybe they are caring towards a pet. Even something as simple as lending a pencil to a friend can be something you like about yourself. I had them go back to their journals and fill in their one good thing about themselves after our talk.

When I went back to read what they had written, I was glad to see that they all wrote a serious response. Landon mentioned how proud he was that his

goal was to enter the Marines. Luca wrote about how he won his last race in Cross Country, and Oliver filled out that he was really caring towards his chickens. Unfortunately, Ezra left his last fill in blank.

I wound up having a surprise post lesson interaction with Luca, who approached me one on one after the other boys had left.

He said, “Miss D. I was really glad that you shared that homework was stressful for you. No one else said anything so I didn’t want to either, but homework is stressful for me too.”

I asked him why he thought homework was a trigger.

“Well, I’m really dumb when it comes to reading because I can’t read.”

Luca is in a remedial reading course due to a traumatic brain injury. “I can’t understand what the homework is because I can’t read it. So I just don’t do it.”

I told him that I understood and that it’s okay to struggle sometimes. We agreed to come up with a plan to better help him understand his homework so that it wouldn’t be so frustrating to him.

Emotional Wellbeing Pre-Survey

For this week, I wanted to prepare the students to take their first emotional wellbeing survey, so I made sure not to introduce any new techniques to them. I sat them down and went over the directions for the surveys. I explained that this would not be graded and would not affect their grade or class standing in any way. However, I emphasized that they should still be honest and take their time

answering the questions. They should not answer the questions the way they think they should, but should answer them according to how they truly feel. They all nodded in understanding and I passed out the test.

I instructed the students to remember not to write their name, but to write their pseudonym that they had chosen previously at the top of their tests. I did not want any influence over their answers so I left the overhead light on and left the room quiet without any calming music. The amount of time it took the students to finish their tests was approximately twelve minutes. This was sufficient enough time for me to be satisfied that they read through each question and didn't just circle answers randomly. I collected all the surveys when they were complete and looked them over, searching for any answers that would be out of the ordinary or stood out. The results of this first survey differed quite a lot from each other and some of the responses surprised me while others seemed to fit the student well.

Landon's results showed that he was in a good place regarding how he views himself. He thinks very highly of who he is. This wasn't surprising because he is very popular in his grade, is involved in sports, and has a lot of friends that he meets up with in the hallways and after school. There were two specific questions that concerned me, however. He answered that he only sometimes feels there is a purpose to his life. Because of this answer, I want to focus a lot with him on where he will go in his future. He is very interested in going into the military and enjoys talking about it. I'd like to focus more on this aspect with him

and discuss why goals can help give your life a purpose. Landon also answered that he feels restless and fidgety most of the time. This one was easier to address in one of my later lessons regarding fidget toys and remaining seated.

Luca's results were low on how well he thinks he does in his day to day life and academically. With how much he struggles academically, it didn't surprise me, and I knew I'd have to address his academics with him. He did say that he felt a connection with his fellow classmates. I felt that this response juxtaposed his response on his academic perception. Luca spends a lot of time in the Emotional Support classroom during the day and is friends with many of the other students in there. Many of the students in the Emotional Support classroom also struggle academically, so I would have thought that he would have felt more comfortable about his placement.

Luca also answered that he never understands his moods and feelings. Luca has many mood swings throughout the day, giving the teachers a sort of whiplash occasionally. Because of this, it wouldn't seem unusual for him to not understand why it is happening either. I asked him one on one if the Introspection lesson had helped him any, and if he had given any more thought to things that he found to be triggers.

"I know you asked us to think about it, but I don't really understand what you want me to think of," he said. "I don't know what a trigger is."

It occurred to me that I hadn't done a good enough job of explaining the introspection lesson. I sat down with Luca then and tried to explain better.

“Sometimes we need to take a moment and think about all the times we know we become frustrated or angry. When you think of these moments, are they always when you're doing the same thing, or at the same place? For example, I always become frustrated when I have to go to the dentist.”

He thought for a minute and replied that he was always frustrated after he would come home with his mom after spending the day at his dad's house. We talked for a while about why that was and then I sent him to his next class. I made a note to sit down with Luca and make a plan on ways he could prevent that frustration. He also answered that he feels as though everything takes extra effort most of the time. Luca needs help reading, and has immense difficulty with spelling. It takes him much longer to complete assignments. With a traumatic brain injury, Luca's advancements will look much different. Because of this, I want to help him learn acceptance of his situation and focus on higher self advocacy. This can be done through my later lesson on concentration

Ezra's results were the most confusing and concerning, but for the opposite reason I thought they would be. Ezra is considered a “high risk” student in our room and is not allowed to go anywhere without an escort throughout the school day. He has violent outbursts and often has to spend the day in our room. I thought his results would be more negative, but for the most part he answered

everything in a manner that gave him the result of being very emotionally stable. These results were in conflict with his IEP and other diagnoses that psychologists have given him. I feel as though he answered the questions the way he felt I wanted them answered and not honestly. I'm interested to see how the midway survey goes for him.

Oliver was very honest on his test. There were a few questions that came to my attention on his survey. Oliver's has three diagnoses which are High Functioning Aspergers (HFA), Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), and Tourettes. He has great difficulty in classes, but is very smart. Because of how well he does academically, it was surprising to see that he answered that he only feels successful some of the time. When I questioned him on why he answered this way, his response was that he gets too distracted when doing his work and that it takes him too long to complete it. Another question that stuck out to me was he answered "some of the time" when asked if he understands why he does what he does. Oliver is very impulsive because of his diagnoses and struggles to understand why he needs to do certain actions at certain times.

Oliver said, "Sometimes I just have to clean the room because it's always gross and it smells. I like it organized and I like inventing new ways of holding my things. That's why I put a hole in the wall and stuck the highlighter in it. It's a hook for my backpack."

When asked if he feels he has a purpose to his life he answered “some of the time”. Like with Landon, I will be addressing this in a further lesson as well as one on one. He also answered that he feels hopeless most of the time.

When I asked Oliver why he answered that way, he said, “I make fun of other people because then I don’t feel bad about myself. I’m smaller than my younger brothers and look at me! I’m practically see-through! I’m the only one with red hair. It isn’t fair. So if I make other people feel bad, they won’t make fun of me.”

Oliver makes fun of other people as a defense mechanism. I learned that he feels that if he makes fun of other people, they won't be able to make fun of himself. I want to address acceptance with him later and see him feel better about who he is as a person.

Lesson: Concentration and Focus

This week I introduced the lesson on concentration and focus. I began by discussing how people are so distracted with everything going on in life. I gave an example from my own life to show that everyone deals with these distractions on a daily basis. I told them that listening to music with lyrics was a distraction because I have to sing along, but I can’t work in silence, so I put on sounds such as rain or a crackling fire to help me concentrate. Then I asked them some of their distractions.

Oliver said, “everything is a distraction. When I have to clean I can’t work.”

“Um, the internet. We use our Chrome books for everything in classes now and it’s so easy for me to have a game up or YouTube in another tab.”

Landon said.

Ezra said, “I think about what I’m going to do when I go home.”

I explained how these were all great examples and said how they could create a list of every thought they had that they didn’t want to forget at the end of the day. By doing this, they will be able to assure that they won’t have forgotten anything, but they won’t have to focus on the thought for too long, distracting them from their current work.

This is called the Distraction To-Do List. I handed out an example sheet of one that I had made up and had them each make a list of all the things that distracted them so far that day encouraging them to continue adding to it for the rest of the day. Each student participated except for Luca. He refused to create a list stating that it was a dumb idea. I pulled him aside at the end of the lesson.

“Why didn’t you want to participate in creating the list?” I asked Luca.

“It was a stupid list,” was his first response. I waited patiently for him to continue. “Well, I couldn’t make the list even if I had wanted to.”

“Why couldn’t you make a list?” I asked.

“I couldn’t remember what I thought about today.”

I told him that there wasn't anything to be embarrassed about and that it was okay that he wasn't able to create a list during the lesson, but that he should start one now and keep it going for the rest of the day.

Oliver's list was the longest. He stayed even after I dismissed the other students to complete his list. Oliver's situation lends him to listing things often. I think this will be a great technique for him to utilize in the future.

Before dismissing the students I also had them complete a journal prompt for the day. I assigned the journal prompt, "If how I was feeling right now were a color, it would be _____. And why?"

I learned quickly that providing journal prompts would have to be modified from my original plan of presenting them. I had been planning to write the question on the board, read it aloud, and have the students write, but I was met with resistance from all of them.

"I don't want to have to write a response. This isn't ELA," Ezra complained.

Landon chimed in with, "I'm not a color. That's stupid."

I decided to do a mini lesson on emotions and the colors that could be associated with them. We watched a short clip of the movie Inside Out on YouTube to get an understanding of how they used color to mean different emotions and then discussed what some more abstract emotions could be color wise. We made a list on the board of the colors and their corresponding emotions

and then the students were better at getting to work when asked again to respond to the prompt. Landon's emotion was hyper, which is typical for his behavior. The one that stood out to me the most was Luca's answer, grey for confusion.

Lesson: Self-regulation

The lesson for this week was Self-regulation, learning to respond to the demands of daily life with a range of emotion that is socially tolerable. I mostly paid attention to Luca for this lesson because I think it will be most beneficial to him with his mood swings. I began by asking the students how many of them knew if they had let their emotions get out of control while out in a public setting. They all nodded or vocalized yes. We discussed that this is okay. Everyone can become frustrated sometimes and it's perfectly normal. Sometimes we just lose our cool or become upset for whatever reason. It's important for them to know that, while it is not appropriate behavior, it doesn't make them bad people to have these behavioral problems.

The technique that I provided for them in this lesson was a Coping Menu. A Coping Menu resembles a restaurant menu and is divided into the following sections: Appetizer Angry, Main Course Mad, and Done Desserts. Each section offers safe and effective ways to help de-escalate based on the level of crisis the student is feeling. The student gets to pick one or two de-escalation activities from the Appetizer Angry and Main Course Mad sections, and hand in the menu for confirmation. Once they have de-escalated appropriately, they can choose an

option from the Done Desserts section as a reward for a successful de-escalation.

They all enjoyed this technique.

“So we can choose anything we want from the sections?” Oliver asked.

“Yes,” I responded.

“But they’re, like, cool things, like Main Course Mad lets us use the crash pad in the Sensory Room!” Landon said.

I was glad to see they were interested in using this technique and hoped they would make the most of it.

Emotional Wellbeing Mid-Survey

I provided a mid-study survey (Appendix D) for the students. I didn’t plan any lessons for this week, so that they could focus on taking their time with the survey. When they finished, I compared the results from the pre-study survey and the mid-study survey and found little difference thus far. I noticed that many of the concerning answers from the first survey were the same. Landon still felt fidgety, but instead of “all of the time”, he selected “some of the time”. I was glad to see that. Ezra's results were also similar to his pre-survey. I felt that he was still not answering honestly and his results seemed skewed.

Lesson: Stress Control

This week's lesson was Stress Control. I created a soothing atmosphere again, turning on the salt lamp and the soothing music. The students then did another body scan, in order to relax and focus better on the lesson ahead. Once the

body scan was over, I began by explaining how stress control is focused on how to calm yourself down in moments of small or little stress. I explained that these moments can be just small frustrations or becoming fidgety.

“These moments do not include instances of crisis. If you are escalated, please use another technique or seek out our relaxation room.” I warned them.

“Do you mean like if someone is chewing gum really loud and stupidly and we get annoyed because they can’t chew like a normal person?” Oliver asked.

“Yes. when you feel annoyed or slightly frustrated, then stress control can come into play. This is a good technique to use when your frustration level doesn’t make you feel like you have to leave the room. This is a good way to help calm down while at your desk,” I replied.

I introduced Star Breathing and Take 5 Breathing. I handed out a sheet with the Star Breathing graphic on it.

“Star Breathing and Take 5 Breathing are similar to what we do during our body scans,” I began. “It is just a way to focus on your breathing and use steady breathing as a de-escalation technique.”

Take 5 Breathing, I explained, was simply breathing in for the count of 5, and then breathing out for the count of 5. This may be distracting to have to count, however, so the star on the Star Breathing graphic would be easier to follow. You simply trace each line on the star, breathing in for one line, and out for another line. We practiced both techniques together without any fuss.

First Journal Check

I was a little nervous going to check the journals. I was concerned that none of the students would have used them like I had asked. I was pleasantly surprised to find that every journal had at least one entry that hadn't been assigned during lessons. As suspected, Oliver had used the technique of creating a Distraction To-Do List multiple times. Ezra's journal showed that he used Star Breathing a few times as well. Everyone else's journals had answers to the prompts we did together, but nothing else.

Ezra's Breakthrough

Ezra was our most "at risk" student and had spent an entire week in the Sensory Room away from classmates by himself. I stayed with him and did any class work that we were able to complete outside of class. His behaviors as of late had been worse than usual. I had a discussion with him regarding his behaviors of the week. I asked him if he would like to try an individual body scan and breathing session.

"I guess, but if it's still stupid, I'm not doing it," he replied.

I dimmed the lights in the room, turning off the overhead light and lighting up the lava lamp and glow ball that are in the Sensory Room. I told Ezra that he could use the crash pad, a pile of firm yet soft, mats. He wrapped up in a blanket and laid down with a pillow.

I turned on a guided body scan video and waited as the soothing music played through the speakers and a soft female voice helped guide him through breathing practices. We did a ten minute session while I kept notice of his behavior and breathing.

As the body scan came to an end I asked Ezra how he felt afterward.

“Did you still find it stupid?” I asked.

“No, I liked doing it on my own. I think it was better because then I didn’t feel dumb doing it in front of the other kids,” he replied.

I asked how he was feeling emotionally, and Ezra said he felt calm. I asked him how he felt physically, and he thought for a minute before saying that he felt heavy. I told him that was normal and to take a few minutes to prepare before getting up to get more work done. I suggested that he use this as a mechanism when he is feeling too hyper or needs to do something to get back on track. It is perfectly okay for him to ask to leave class and go to the sensory room for ten minutes to do a body scan.

Ezra approached me in ELA the following week and asked if we could do a meditation session because he was feeling too stimulated. I removed him from class and went to the sensory room to be alone. We only did a five minute session so as not to miss too much class. He participated well and I asked him the same two questions as before; how do you feel physically and mentally?

Ezra said he felt better, more focused, and calm again. It only took one prompt for him to return to ELA. The fact that I only had to prompt him once was a big success for me and for Ezra as ELA is his least preferred class and is always a struggle to get him to attend.

Final Journal Prompt and Collection

For the final journal prompt, the students had to answer in their journals “when I’m in pain- physical or emotional- the kindest thing that I can do for myself is...” I felt that this was a difficult prompt to answer because it is a deeply personal one. I made sure that the students had a long while to answer it because I really wanted them to think about it before writing their answer.

We discussed what it means to be kind to yourself. It can look like something as simple as a walk outside, or a nap, or it can be something big, like asking for help, or going somewhere for fun. I talked about how when I’m feeling down, I like to work out. Getting my body going helps to clear my mind. After my workout I go soak in a hot bath to help relieve tension in my muscles and relax my mind. I asked them to now answer it on their own and to be detailed.

After they had all finished answering the prompt, I collected all of their journals for the final look through during my study. I noticed, while reading through their entries how much peer pressure plays a big role in my students lives. I planned a time to talk to them about peer pressure and ways to help alleviate the need to fit in.

While looking back at the entries to the prompt, I was glad to see that the students were able to find healthy ways to care for themselves in times of need. Ezra wrote that he would continue to use the body scan that we had been doing to help him relax. Landon said that he likes to get outside and throw a football around to “blow off steam”. Oliver wrote he will go and sit with his chickens. Luca wrote that he likes to play video games.

Emotional Wellbeing Post-Survey

The final week of my study, I sat down with all the students and talked to them about everything that we had covered throughout the study. I asked them if there was anything that stood out to them throughout our lessons.

“Any lesson in particular that you enjoyed, or technique that you used often?” I asked.

Oliver raised his hand right away and said, “I wrote a lot of lists of what I was thinking. I liked them because I have a lot of thoughts and they helped me organize them.”

No one else wanted to say anything, so I told them that it was okay if they didn’t want to share with the others, but that I was glad to see in their journals that they had utilized some of the techniques. I was able to tally up the number of times each technique was used after going through each journal and my notes.

We then discussed how, even though my study is ending, each of them should still be using the techniques that they had found to be helpful to them

during the study. I assured them that they would still be able to utilize any of the resources as well such as the relaxation room as needed like usual.

After our wrap up, I handed out their final emotional wellbeing survey and allowed them time to complete it. After collecting them, I went through them right away to compare them to the previous two surveys. While going through Landon's survey, I was pleased to see that the two concerns from the first survey were eradicated. His answer about how often he feels there is a purpose to his life increased from "sometimes" to "often". Having him focus on going into the military after school was a big turning point to him. We discussed in an earlier one to one about his decision to join the military in the future. I asked him why that was his goal.

"Because I know it will change my life and the lives of those around me and people I don't know. I want to make life better for people. Military people are heroes and I want to be a hero," he said.

"That's a wonderful goal and I love the compassion you're demonstrating now," I replied.

We discussed what he would need to do to make sure that he was on the right path to enter into the military. We talked about discipline, and doing well in school. I believe this conversation had a positive effect on Landon's performance and attitude towards his life.

Similarly, his answer to how often he felt restless and fidgety changed from “most of the time” to “sometimes”. This was a simple change by introducing fidget toys in the relaxation room. With the help of something to play with during classes, Landon’s concentration has improved as well. Throughout my field log, I kept track in Landon’s Social Studies and English of how often he had stayed focused during lectures when using a fidget toy.

Luca’s final survey didn’t change much from his first and second surveys. He still answered that he never understands his moods and feelings. Even after introducing him to each de-escalation technique, Luca was unable to connect with himself on a regular basis. Through my observations of Luca, I was not able to keep a pattern of improvement or deterioration when it came to his behavior with the use of de-escalation techniques. He didn’t take well to the body scans, even when done on a one to one basis without any peers around, and his journal prompts were always short, often times only one or two words.

Luca also still answered that he feels as though everything takes extra effort most of the time. Unfortunately, with his brain damage, I don’t see any of these things becoming easier for him in the near future. With the use of these de-escalation techniques I was hoping not to improve his understanding of topics, but to hopefully help him to de-escalate quicker during moments of frustration. Unfortunately, Luca did not respond well to the interventions, and still feels frustrated about his situation. I did notice, however, that while he still feels that it

takes a lot of effort to complete tasks, his concentration and willingness to complete tasks in their entirety has increased. It takes several less prompts than before to get him started on an assignment than it did before my study.

Ezra's final survey left me disappointed. Since the beginning of my project, many external things have been going on with Ezra and his situation within the school and at his home. Since the conclusion of my study, Ezra has changed schools to one that is better equipped to service him and his needs. Because of the difficulty of his nature, I was hoping to see great change in his survey results. Much of my data on Ezra supports the success of the de-escalation techniques, especially the body scan and breathing techniques. Unfortunately, his survey results were not the same. I felt that he once again Ezra showcased a social desirability bias, and answered his questions in a manner that would prove favorable for the project and for himself. His answers all showed that he is emotionally stable, and in a good place with himself. I know from previous incidents right before the conclusion of my study that this should not be the case. I was disappointed because I was most excited to see Ezra take the survey seriously to see the differences between the survey and my other data.

Oliver's survey results were wonderful to compare. My "triple knockout," as I call him, has improved in many areas. His answer to how often he feels successful increased from "some of the time" to "most of the time". He answered the question about his understanding of why he does what he does the same way

all three surveys; “some of the time”, however, I noticed myself that he was able to self correct poor behaviors more often. I was very pleased with his results.

Even though my data collection period came to an end, I wanted to make sure that all of the resources that were used during my study were still available for the students for the remainder of their time in Emotional Support. I made sure to emphasize that all options were still available to each student and they simply needed to ask when needing to leave a room, or use a technique.

I handed out new journals filled with the same resources for their personal use and told them that I would not need to collect these journals, and that they could use them for whatever they need, be it Distraction To-Do Lists, journal entries, or Star Breathing.

It is important to me for my students to succeed in every aspect of their lives, and while they demonstrated resistance in the beginning, the longer the study went on, the more they complied and went beyond what I was hoping in some instances. I was able to see small, positive changes in several of the students by the end and I will always be so proud of each of them for adjusting so well to new ideas.

Data Analysis

Throughout this study, much data was collected to help answer my research question. However, before interpreting the data and coming to any conclusions regarding my research question, the data had to be analyzed. The data analysis methods used in this study were put in place to help support my overall view of the data. The methods of data analysis used in this study were codes, bins, and themes, to better help me analyze the observations made in my field log, journals, and emotional wellbeing surveys.

Codes and Bins

Throughout the study, I was able to collect enough data to develop a coding system in order to better organize the data that was being collected. Each code is a bit of data; a word or phrase that comes up continuously and represents your data. I began to find codes by reviewing my field log and marking similarities and important ideas. I designated them a keyword, which would turn into my code. I then took these codes and looked through the Emotional Wellbeing Surveys as well as my field log, and each students' journal, highlighting areas in them that also matched up with my codes. Each code was put into a chart in alphabetical order, and added to as needed throughout the duration of my study.

The codes that became most prevalent and important throughout all of

these documents were *Concentration/Focus*, *Introspection*, and *Trigger with no Escalation Instance* (see Figures 1 and 2). These results confirm beyond a doubt that the implementation of de-escalation techniques result in a notable improvement in emotional wellbeing and stability among Students who receive emotional support services.

After my coding was complete, I created a column for related codes. Going through all of my codes, I was able to find several that could relate to one another whether it be a cause and effect relationship, or similar ideas. From these related codes came my bins. Bins are codes that have something in common. I went through my coding index and looked for which codes appeared the most often with each other and then created a set of bins in which I put the codes that showed similarities to one another. I was then able to create a graphic organizer that visually laid out my codes and bins.

Codes	Page/Line	Related Codes
Concentration/Focus	1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Stress control, introspection, self regulation, de-escalation (self, and time decrease)
De-escalation (self)	3, 8	De-escalation (time decrease), stress control, self regulation
De-escalation (Time Decrease)	1, 8	De-escalation (self), stress control, self regulation.
Engaged and On Task	2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9	Concentration, focus, student enjoyment
Fidget Reduction	3, 6, 7, 8, 9	Concentration, focus, self regulation
Introspection	2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10	Stress control, use of technique taught, self regulation
Reluctance to Participate in Group Activity	1, 6	Reluctance to participate in individual instruction

Figure 1: Coding Index Page 1

Reluctance to Participate in Individual Instruction	4, 6, 10	Reluctance to participate in group activity.
Self Advocacy	3, 4, 5, 8	Self regulation, introspection, trigger with no escalation instance
Self Regulation	4, 7, 8, 10	Self Advocacy, De-escalation (self), de-escalation (time decrease), Trigger with no escalation instance
Stress Control	5, 7, 8, 9, 10	Concentration, focus, introspection
Student Enjoyment	2, 4, 6, 8, 10	Engaged and on task
Trigger with no Escalation Instance	1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 10	Self regulation, stress control, self advocacy
Use of Technique Taught	2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	Concentration, focus

Figure 2: Coding Index Page 2

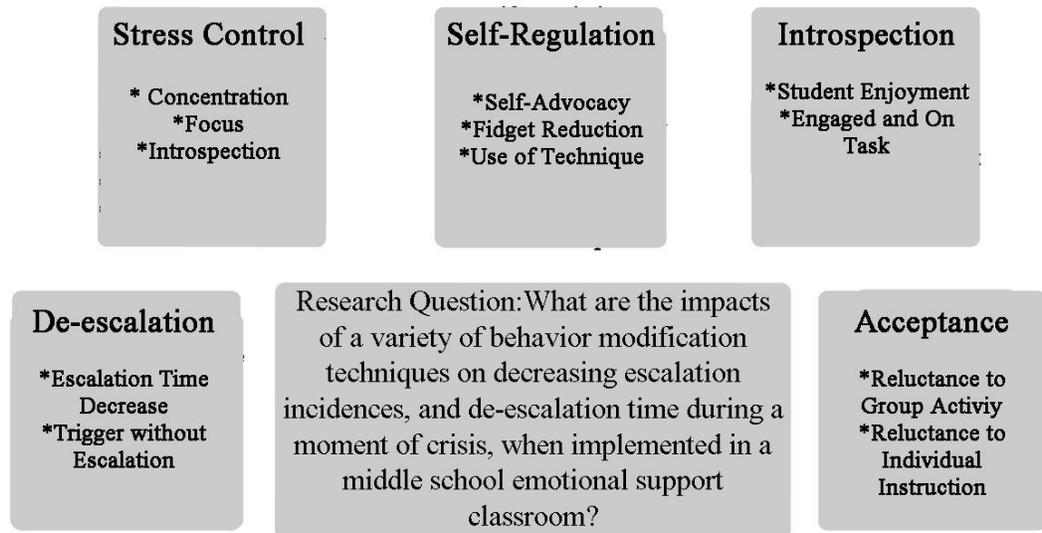


Figure 3: Graphic Organizer

My first bin was "Stress Control" which included the codes *Concentration*, *Focus*, and *Introspection*. All of these codes relate to the students being able to use techniques to calm themselves down during moments of high frustration.

The next bin was "Self-Regulation" which included the codes *Self-Advocacy*, *Fidget Reduction*, and *Use of Technique*. Each of these codes relates to the students taking initiative to use the de-escalation techniques to calm down without having to be told to.

The third bin is "Introspection" including the codes *Student Enjoyment*, and *Engaged and On Task*. These codes were a cause and effect. Introspection, the students understanding their own emotional process, leads to student

enjoyment and staying engaged and on task.

In the "De-escalation" bin are the codes *Escalation Time Decrease*, and *Trigger without Escalation*, explaining the successful de-escalation of the student after an instance of frustration.

Lastly, the "Acceptance" bin contains the codes *Reluctance to Group Activity*, and *Reluctance to Individual Instruction*. These demonstrate the reluctance of the students in the beginning of the study, versus the acceptance and increased participation as the study went on.

By engaging in a continuous analysis of my study's data, I was able to make meaningful changes to my lesson plans, and additions of individual lessons throughout my study. I engaged in several methods of data analysis in my study, giving way to a better understanding and finding of these trends and patterns, which proved helpful in answering my research question.

Observations/Field Log

I was able to go through the detailed observations, notes about the implementation and results of each lesson, quotes and statements made by students, results from emotional wellbeing surveys and journal checks, and my reflections regarding behavioral observations from the field log in order to find some of my codes. This log helped me to identify specific themes in my research. McNiff stated the importance of observations in studies when she wrote, "in a sense, all research begins with observation," (McNiff, 2016, p. 180). By going

back and looking at my field log, I was able to better reflect on ways to improve each lesson, as well as remember what extra help each student may have needed.

A benefit of the field log was that I was able to record direct quotes and conversations between the students and myself, that I would have otherwise forgotten. For example, I was able to look at direct quotes on each students' viewpoint on each technique and see which ones they preferred for moments when I needed to recommend a de-escalation technique for them to use. These direct quotes proved to be one of my most valuable data collections. Because gauging a student's emotional wellbeing can prove quite subjective, the dialogue that I held with the students was important for me to better understand if the techniques were successful or not.

Overall, when comparing field log entries from the beginning of my study, and the end of my study, there was an increase in compliance in each student as evident by their willingness to participate in the lessons more often. The longer my study went on, the more instances of dialogue I had with the students. The field log also showed that the students increased their use of the resource sheets that I provided them, such as the Coping Menu, and the 54321 Mindfulness sheet, towards the end of my study.

Emotional Wellbeing Surveys

The Emotional Wellbeing Survey (Appendix D) was given three times

throughout my study; one pre-survey, one mid-survey, and one post-survey. The pre-survey allowed me to document students' initial feelings about themselves and their schooling. The mid-survey allowed me to check on their progress halfway through our de-escalation skill lessons, while the post-survey allowed me to compare the results from the beginning of my study and end of my study to document any developments related to de-escalation skill lessons on students who receive emotional support services and find codes through them.

Specifically, I compared the pre- and post- survey data to determine if there were any changes in the way that each student viewed themselves as well as their schooling related to being provided with lessons on how to better de-escalate during moments of frustration. Further, the Emotional Wellbeing Surveys allowed me to make adjustments to future lessons, as well as plan individual lessons in certain areas of life and wellbeing with each individual student based on their responses.

By comparing the pre- and post- surveys, I was able to conclude the improvement in emotional wellbeing from the beginning of my study, until the end. All but one of my students showed improvements in the areas that they had had difficulties in at the beginning of the study. Results from the pre- survey showed some students to be fidgety and unsure of why they had such strong emotions, or how to control them. By the post-survey, the students in question answered that they felt less fidgety, and were more aware of their emotions, what

causes them, and how to control them in order to de-escalate. Only one student was unable to show any improvement from the survey results, as he was unable to answer the questions honestly.

Journals

The journals that were collected in the end and analyzed included checklists, journal prompt answers, handouts from lessons, time stamps for crisis instances, time stamps for use of relaxation room, and diary entries or other individual entries made by the student. By collecting and analyzing these journals, I was able to gather evidence of student achievement in terms of goal completion, frequency of technique use, and self observation.

This study included eight journal prompts. Each journal prompt that was analyzed helped gather data on how each student felt about himself, as well as provided details of ways to better the future group and individual lessons based on which areas needed more focus, as well as provided me with a continuation of codes.

The journals also included free entries, or entries made by the student of their own accord throughout the study. These entries included but were not limited to; entries for the Distraction To-Do List, diary-like entries on how the student was feeling at a certain time, time tables for when the student began to feel escalated as well as when they successfully de-escalated, or questions for me

that they did not feel comfortable asking in person. Each journal entry that was analyzed helped aid in the generation of evidence of student achievement related to use of de-escalation techniques as well as decreased crisis time.

Overall, when analyzing the data from the journals, I was able to conclude the students' improvement through engagement with the journals. In the beginning of my study, student engagement with the journals was limited. The students only used them to answer prompts assigned during lessons, and the responses were minimal. By the end of the study, not only were the responses to the prompts much more elaborate and thought out, but the answers showed a deeper understanding of themselves and their emotional state. Many of the responses to the prompts showed an improvement in how they viewed themselves. While answers in the beginning showed that the students' thought themselves to be unintelligent and angry, answers in the end told that they felt they were worthy of friendships and that they found themselves to have done well in certain classes and with class work. The journals also included many entries for use of the relaxation room, and any of the techniques that they had used such as Distraction To-Do Lists, and number of times the student used Star Breathing. By engaging in the use of the journals, the students demonstrated a willingness to use the techniques provided and showed how often each of the techniques was used

by each student.

Theme Statements

Themes are bins that are related to one another. Once I had my graphic organizer complete, I was able to come up with theme statements, or preliminary finding, based on these bins and the data I had collected. These themes helped me to begin answering my research question.

The purpose of my research study was to examine the effects of de-escalation skill lessons and behavior modification techniques on decreasing moments of crisis, and increasing self-regulation, introspection, and relationships in students when implemented in a middle school emotional support classroom. My goal was to discover how teaching students who receive emotional support services skills to better control their emotional state and behavioral choices might impact students' frequency of crisis as well as time taken to de-escalate.

In order to analyze my data from all perspectives, I wrote multiple analytic and reflective memos throughout the data collection period including the works of Dewey (1938), Delpit (2012), and Freire (1970). Many of the quotations within these works helped me to interpret the data I collected with fresh eyes. Analyzing my data using these philosophers' points of views helped me to generate my study's themes and findings.

As I analyzed various forms of data in this research study, five theme statements have materialized (see Figure 3), that helped organize and communicate the findings of this study.

Stress Control

Through their concentration and focus on lessons, students demonstrated positive stress control. When students actively participated in lessons and learned about the reasoning behind their emotional stresses, they were better able to understand and control their stress levels.

As a result of the de-escalation lessons, the students demonstrated their ability to adapt to their environment and emotional needs. The students showed that they were able to learn to better control themselves in situations that would have had them at a frustration level before.

Dewey (1938) notes the way that experiences can influence an acceptance or aversion to learning experiences.

"I return now to the question of continuity as a criterion by which to discriminate between experiences which are educative and those which are mis-educative. As we have seen, there is some kind of continuity in any case since every experience affects for better or worse the attitudes which help decide the quality of further experiences, by setting up certain preference and aversion, and making it easier or harder to act for this or that end." (Dewey, 1938, p. 37).

Dewey implies that each experience that students have in their educational journey will shape their attitudes in an either positive or negative way. Each time a student partakes in an experience in a classroom, it sets them up for future

success or failure.

It was my intent to use the de-escalation lessons to prepare my students to learn to handle frustrating situations in a classroom in a manner that was appropriate, as well as to help reduce the number of times that the students found situations frustrating, setting them up for more successful experiences in the future. With many of the students in the Emotional Support classroom entering my study with a disillusioned idea of school, it was critical to teach them how to identify triggers and provide them with healthy ways of controlling their stress, thus encouraging a more positive learning environment for each student.

Dewey (1938) allowed me to analyze my study in terms of the subjects that I was working with; helping remind me that, while they are labeled "Emotional Support", they are still only children, and will behave as such. This view allowed me to distinguish what was normal behavior for a student their age, and what behavior wasn't. It also allowed me to view my data in terms of cause and effect due to collateral learning, and evaluate what data came from a previous lesson taught.

Introspection

By showing their understanding of their own emotional processes, students were able to demonstrate introspection, the observation of one's own mental and emotional processes. By staying engaged and on task in each lesson that was presented, as well as when they would use the technique learned from each

lesson, they showed understanding of when they needed assistance to better their emotional state.

The time spent on introspection lessons was to better teach the students to be able to connect with themselves, in an attempt to understand why they may feel such things as anger or sadness. What occurred in these lessons was a scaffold of learning on behalf of each student.

Dewey (1938) mentions the idea of collateral learning as a student learning more than just what the lesson touches on.

“Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time. Collateral learning the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned” (Dewey, 1938, p.48).

Dewey (1938) implies that one of the biggest things we can do to undermine learning is assume that each student only learns one thing during an instructional lesson. Each student learns a multitude of lessons with each subject taught.

As Students who receive emotional support services, my participants receive access to therapists and psychologists as well as social skill lessons, on top of the de-escalation lessons that were introduced to them during my study. Everything learned in these lessons are carried over into their everyday activities,

including during classroom instruction. The goal of the de-escalation lessons were to instill in them the capability to introspect and understand themselves better, but the students showed collateral learning by taking time to respond to journal prompts and using their journals for independent responses.

Self-Regulation

The students demonstrated self-regulation by responding to stressors in their environment. By taking initiative and asking to leave the room for a short walk, or requesting use of a de-escalation technique, the students showed that they were better able to keep their emotions controlled when they felt frustrated.

At the beginning of this study, I encouraged the students to be confident in using the techniques that they were going to learn when they knew they would need them. I emphasized that it was natural to be frustrated sometimes and that these techniques could prove helpful to them when de-escalation was necessary. Each student proved to me his capability to advocate for himself the need, by asking to leave the room, or by independently going to use one of the techniques.

The ability to do what is needed in difficult situation is what my students were able to foster and grow within themselves. In order to push the students to successfully continue their self-regulation and to respond to stressors in their environment in a healthy way by seeking out de-escalation techniques, we need to celebrate the times when they make the decision on their own. Each student showed the ability to carry these lessons over into the classroom environment by

understanding when they needed to use a technique as well as when they needed to leave the room for a short cool down.

I was better able to understand how being in "special education" and having certain diagnoses could impact my student's learning and behavior in the classroom.

De-escalation

When students were able to sit through what would have been a stressor without allowing it to trigger them, or when they were able to successfully calm down after an escalation incident, students demonstrated their ability to de-escalate. Students were able to attend classes that were previous triggers with little to no coaxing.

The goal behind this study was to help eliminate instances of crisis and decrease the amount of time an instance of crisis occurred. Students who receive emotional support services tend to have quickly fluctuating moods and will act in several ways, including hiding their emotions from others and becoming disconnected from those around them, or by having outbursts.

Students with behavioral difficulties can often times be seen as simply "bad" students who don't want to do the work, when often times there is an underlying issue that needs to be addressed. The outbursts, or crisis incidents, are common for my students, and often times leads to them being called out for even minor infractions, causing a bigger rift between the student and the teacher.

However, with the implementation of de-escalation lessons, the students were able to better de-escalate themselves in moments of frustration. By being able to identify a trigger, the students were better able to remove themselves from the situation, seeking help from a de-escalation technique, rather than escalate in the classroom. These techniques helped them to de-escalate quicker, returning to the classroom ready to continue learning.

Acceptance

When students participated in activities and lessons that they had previously been reluctant to participate in, they demonstrated acceptance. Students became more comfortable with participating in group and individual sessions.

The beginning of my study was met with much resistance from all of my participating students. They thought what I was asking them to do was silly and were self-conscious of being the only one to participate during group lessons. Once I began conducting individual lessons, I found that the students were much more willing to participate. I slowly began integrating them back into group lessons again in the hopes of better helping them to rely on one another to get through difficult moments.

I wanted my students, who tend to seek asylum alone, to know that they are stronger together, and will accomplish more that way, to know that they can be there for each other in times of crisis and help one another de-escalate by reminding them of the correct way to handle a frustrating situation. The students

began to foster an environment in the Emotional Support classroom where they could rely on one another. During later group lessons, they were more willing to share their opinions and responses with the others in the room, and began to realize that they were all in the same situations, allowing them to feel like a part of a group.

The Next Action Research Cycle

At the conclusion of my study, I wanted to keep moving forward with de-crisis and behavior modification techniques with my students. I will continue to look for new techniques, tools, and activities for the students to help round their emotional wellbeing. Working with emotions can take time, time that is not allotted in such a short study, and I am curious to see if the beginning of the positive results in my study grow into more prevalent positive results.

As we look into adding more resources within our program, it is important to note the growing number of districts implementing mental health programs and resources. With more and more school districts beginning to provide mental health programs, there will be greater opportunities for students to have access to the emotional care that they need, and a greater understanding of the range of emotional needs of some students.

In my own classroom I am hoping, in the future, to establish a collaboration between teachers in Emotional Support and Regular Education teachers, to deepen the understanding of the emotional needs of our students and listen to suggestions from differing points of view on what is successful in their rooms and what is not. I would also like to create a Google Doc in which the Regular Education teachers will be able to sign out the relaxation room for use in their own curriculum, as well as sign out any resources available in our room for students in their classrooms. In doing so, we will be better able to provide helpful

techniques and resources for all of our students.

Another way I'd like to continue the study is to get the students involved in choosing techniques they would like to see implemented. By getting the students involved, and supporting student choice, the students will feel included and will be more likely to use the implemented techniques and resources. The need to be open and willing to change and adapt to the students' needs and wants is key. The understanding of individual emotional needs must be guided by the students, allowing them to explore and understand what it is that they need at any given moment to de-escalate.

Ultimately, my next steps for the program are to listen to the students' needs, teachers' needs, and to delve into new and emerging research for more resources to expand the behavior modification programs.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Principal Consent Form

September 18, 2018

Dear Mrs. Siegfried,

I am currently working towards my Master's of Art in Teaching at Moravian College. This program is based on teacher action research, helping me to create the best learning experience for students as I investigate teaching strategies that research has proven to be most effective. The title of my research is "De-escalation Skill Lesson Impacts on Emotional Support Students".

During this study, I will be conducting de-escalation skill lessons with the students in the Emotional Support Classroom. These students will be exploring techniques that will help them decrease instances of crisis as well as crisis time, and will be assigned a Mindfulness Journal to keep track of these techniques and resources as well as their thoughts throughout the day.

These lessons will be taking place during part of the students' quest period from the beginning of September through the beginning of November 2018. I will gather data to support my study through observations, mindfulness journals, and emotional wellbeing surveys. None of these items will be graded and I will only use information collected from students with parental permission to participate in the study in any written reports of my research. Student names will be kept confidential, as will the name of the school and any participating faculty members. The students may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If any student is withdrawn from my study, I will not use any information pertaining to him or her in my study. In the letter to parents, I have listed my contact information in the case that they would have questions for me.

If you have any questions or concerns about my action research study, please feel free to contact me. If not, please sign and return this letter. Thank you!

Sincerely,

I attest that I am the principal of the teacher/aide conducting this research study, that I have read and understand the consent form, and received a copy. Alyssa has my permission to conduct this study at [REDACTED].

Signature

Date

Appendix B: Parental Consent Form

April 4, 2018

Dear Mr. and Mrs. _____,

I am currently working towards a Master's of Art Degree in Teaching at Moravian College. This program is based on teacher action research, helping me to create the best learning experience for students as I investigate teaching strategies research has proven to be most effective. The title of my research is "De-escalation Skill Lesson Impacts on Emotional Support Students".

During this study, I will be conducting de-escalation skill lessons with your student. Your student will be exploring techniques that will help them decrease instances of escalation as well as escalation time, and will be assigned a Mindfulness Journal to keep track of these techniques and resources as well as their thoughts throughout the day.

These lessons will be taking place during part of your student's quest period from the beginning of September through the beginning of November 2018. I will gather data to support my study through observations, mindfulness journals, and emotional wellbeing surveys. None of these items will be graded and your student's name will be kept confidential, as will the name of the school and any participating faculty members. Your student may withdraw from the

study at any time without penalty by submitting a written response of withdrawal.
If your student is withdrawn from my study, I will not use any information
pertaining to him or her in my study.

If you have any questions or concerns about my action research study,
please feel free to contact me by e-mail at [REDACTED], or by phone at
[REDACTED]. If not, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

I attest that I am the parent of _____, that I have read and
understand the consent form, and received a copy. Alyssa has my permission to
conduct this study with my child.

Signature

Date

Appendix C: Student Consent Form

April 11, 2018

(Student's name),

I am working towards my Master's degree in Education at Moravian College. My program is based on research to see what the best learning experience is for students. My research project is "De-escalation Skill Lesson Impacts on Emotional Support Students".

While working on this study, I will be holding De-escalation Skill Lessons with you to practice the best ways to remain calm during difficult moments. Throughout my study, you will be assigned journal entries, and take emotional wellbeing tests to track how you feel. These things will not be graded, but are mandatory to do.

This research will take place during part of your quest period from the beginning of September to the beginning of November 2018. I will be collecting and comparing your progress by observing you and your peers, and collecting your journals and test that you have completed. Your name will not appear in my written work, and you are free to stop participating in this research any time you want by submitting a written response of withdrawal. If you choose to stop

participating, I will not use any of the information I have collected from you in my written work.

If you have any questions, you may ask at any time.

I am the student who will be used in this research study, and I have read the consent form and received a copy. Ms. D'Ippolito has my permission to use me in her study.

Signature

Date

Appendix D: Emotional Wellbeing Survey

Emotional Wellbeing Survey

Directions: Read each question thoroughly, then answer how often you feel this way using the scale that follows each question. This survey will not be graded, but please answer each question as honestly as you can.

Section 1: This section will include questions about your school environment.

_____ 1. I feel close to people at this school.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____ 2. I am happy to be at this school.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____ 3. I feel safe at this school.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.

d. NONE of the time.

_____4. I am accepted by my classmates for being myself.

a. ALL the time.

b. MOST of the time.

c. SOME of the time.

d. NONE of the time.

_____5. I like when I get good grades.

a. ALL the time.

b. MOST of the time.

c. SOME of the time.

d. NONE of the time.

_____6. I like when I am praised/recognized for doing a good job.

a. ALL the time.

b. MOST of the time.

c. SOME of the time.

d. NONE of the time.

_____7. I feel as though my classmates miss me when I'm not there.

a. ALL the time.

b. MOST of the time.

c. SOME of the time.

d. NONE of the time.

_____ 8. I follow the rules put in place by the school.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____ 9. I feel successful.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

Section 2: This section will include questions about how you feel about others.

_____ 10. I feel bad when someone gets their feelings hurt.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____ 11. I try to understand how other people feel and think.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____ 12. I help other people.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____ 13. I can work with someone who has different opinions than mine.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____ 14. I put down other people.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

Section 3: This section will include questions about how you feel about yourself.

_____ 15. I understand why I do what I do.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____16. I feel that there is a purpose to my life.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____17. I understand my moods and feelings.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____18. I feel that people care about me.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____19. I get into a lot of trouble.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____20. I feel hopeless..

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____21. I feel restless or fidgety...

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

_____22. I feel as though everything takes extra effort.

- a. ALL the time.
- b. MOST of the time.
- c. SOME of the time.
- d. NONE of the time.

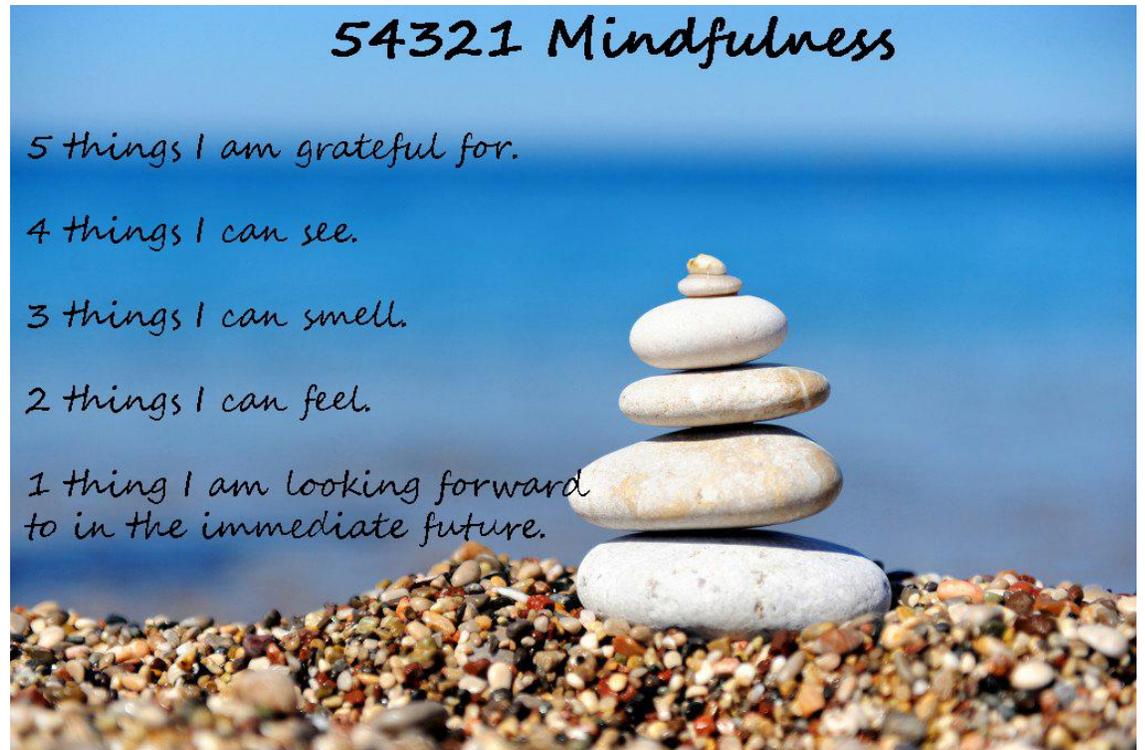
Appendix E: Star Breathing Handout

Star Breathing

Start at any "Breathe in" side, hold your breath at the point, then breathe out.
Keep going until you've gone around the whole star.



Appendix F: 54321 Mindfulness Handout



54321 Mindfulness

5 things I am grateful for.

4 things I can see.

3 things I can smell.

2 things I can feel.

1 thing I am looking forward to in the immediate future.

Appendix G: Coping Menu Handout

Coping Menu!

Coping means learning to deal with a problem in a safe, healthy, and respectful way.

Directions: Choose at least 1 coping skill from the section that fits your escalation level.



Appetizer Angry

- Star Breathing/Take 5 Breathing
- Distraction To-Do List
- 54321 Mindfulness
- Close Eyes



Your "chef" will allow substitutions and custom orders.



Main Course Mad

- Speak To an Adult
- Go For A Walk
- Relaxtion Room Time
- Write About It
- Exercise Time (in Small Gym if Available)



Done Desserts

- Watch YouTube
- Special Snack or Drink
- Game Time
- Listen to Music



I would like to **Custom Order:** _____

↳ _____

Lisbon Elementary School - Trista Ziegelmann 2012

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