COUNSELING SKILLS FOR TEACHERS

by

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ABSTRACT
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Special Education teachers are required to perform many different roles in a given day. It is well documented that students with disabilities often have social and emotional challenges which make it more difficult for them to learn. These challenges can come in many forms such as self-esteem, peer relations, home life, mental illness, social competency, and various other types of inter/intrapersonal difficulties, making teaching especially demanding for Special Education teachers. Effective social skills programs, whole school unifying approaches, mediation, and counseling type interventions have proven to aid in student success. However, in California it is not required for Special Education teachers to complete a counseling or mediation course. This study asks Special Education teachers through an online survey, with both qualitative and quantitative questions, what types of trainings they had, how often they were required to mediate non-academic issues, what those issues commonly were, what techniques they used, what supports they had, and if they felt that they were in need of further training. Specific challenges that teachers commonly faced and were required to deal with in order for students to learn are also explored. Special Education teachers have very diverse responsibilities that require them to be knowledgeable and skilled in many different areas. This study focuses on
the supports necessary for teachers to learn how to effectively deal with students’ social and emotional challenges so they are able to learn.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Going back to school to complete my Master’s was an endeavor that took the support of many people. It was a feat which required my personal life, for the most part, to be put on hold, and at times my profession had to come second. The people in my life helped to support me and gave me encouragement, and were understanding of my absence at times.

My inspiration for entering into the Master’s program to finish my remaining coursework is largely due to my co-worker, Alyse Eckenrode. She was in the midst of working on her Master’s coursework and assured me that it was possible to finish your Master’s while working full-time. She led by example, making it look effortless. Throughout my remaining coursework, she offered priceless advice, extensive encouragement, and exercise companionship that pushed me through every road block. Thank you, Alyse.

Upon re-entering the program, I was fortunate enough to take my first class with Professor Ann Diver-Stamnes. She made an incredibly overwhelming academic writing class seem uncomplicated and achievable. Since then, I have been inspired by her teaching practices and am continually amazed by her ability to effectively deal with people and situations. She has gone above and beyond in assisting me with this thesis. I always felt invigorated and assured when walking out of her office. Thank you, Ann, for being a stellar example to all teachers.
I would also like to thank my mother, Cindi Falk, who has tirelessly supported and listened to me unconditionally with constant encouragement. Also, my friends and co-workers have been an incredible support through all of this. Many thanks are owed to my family, friends, and colleagues. The wonderful people in my life assisted in making this possible.

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Elaine Falk, who passed away two weeks prior to my defense date. She instilled the value and importance of education in me, and is now with me everywhere.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The field of Special Education has transformed over the years to better accommodate the various needs of students. The growing number of students diagnosed with a disability has forced schools to find more effective ways to serve this population. California passed the No Child Left Behind Act which has schools leaning towards implementing an inclusion model in which students with special needs are mainstreamed into the general education classrooms for all or part of their day with certain accommodations and modifications. This has made the roles of Special Education teachers and General Education teachers more complex, as it raises many new obstacles and issues. Students with disabilities are often at a greater risk for having social and emotional issues, and it is the teachers’ responsibility to assist their students by teaching social skills, mediating conflicts, and counseling students in regard to the many issues that may arise. Special Education teachers are not adequately trained in their credential programs to recognize, mediate, and counsel these types of issues, yet these responsibilities represent a large part of their jobs in order for the students perform academically.

For the purpose of this study, only students with Specific Learning Disabilities and Special Education teachers in California were studied. Special Education teachers are not required to take any mediation or basic counseling
courses, despite the compelling research behind the various social and emotional challenges that students with special needs face. Social and emotional challenges include such areas as effective communication, cooperative work, self-control, empathy, problem solving, conflict resolution, self-awareness, and the like.

Students who face these challenges are in need of extra support beyond just academics. In order to be successful in the classroom, students’ social and emotional functioning are key components of how they view themselves, perform, and relate to the world around them. Teachers have a significant impact on their students’ social and emotional functioning, and without proper training, they can run the risk of having a lasting negative effect on their students.

In the eight years that I have been teaching Special Education, I have watched many teachers struggle with their students’ social and emotional challenges. Dealing with these issues has been a large part of my job, and I have always wished that I had more training in this area. Despite the lack of training, other teachers and I have intuitively been using a variety of mediation and counseling techniques in our classrooms. This inspired me to learn about the experiences of other Special Education teachers, the training they have had, and the techniques they may use and led to the central question of this study: What types of counseling training do teachers feel they need in order to deal with the social and emotional issues which commonly arise in their classrooms?
The literature review in the following chapter takes an in-depth look into the field of Special Education. It covers what the qualifying conditions are and the various types of educational settings. The main Special Education laws since 1975 in California are reviewed and explained. I offer a discussion of the link between Specific Learning Disabilities and social and emotional challenges, and the impact they have on students’ academic performance. Teacher preparedness to meet these challenges is examined, and the final section of the literature review looks at various mediation and counseling techniques that have shown to be effective.

Chapter Three explores the methodology by which I conducted the research into the experiences other Special Education Teachers encounter in their classrooms, the training they have had (if any), and the ways in which they have dealt with these issues. The instrument used to gather these data was a mixed method survey, using both qualitative and quantitative questions. The survey was sent out using an on-line survey tool, and it was also hand delivered with a mail-in option. This chapter also touches upon the methods used to collect and analyze the data.

A summary of the participants’ responses is presented in the Results chapter. The responses included demographics, types of training, teacher roles, common issues encountered in the classroom, the effects on learning, support, and interests in further training. In the Analysis chapter, the results are separated into basic counseling skills for teachers and the interest in further counseling and mediation training sections. This chapter offers a review of common trends across responses.
Further recommended research and final deductions are reviewed in the Conclusion chapter. The data gathered from this study answered my central question and provided insight into the various roles that Special Education Teachers are required to fill.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review of literature aims at evaluating the social and emotional functioning of students with learning disabilities and methods by which to mediate and enhance those skills. The first section highlights the main components of special education and the significant special education laws that have impacted and changed education in California since 1975. For the purpose of this study, the research only addresses students who are in the special education program with a diagnosis of having a specific learning disability. The next section reviews the link between social and emotional challenges and students with learning disabilities and the ways this affects their social and school functioning. Teacher preparedness and social and emotional mediation and counseling techniques are discussed in the final section.

Special Education

In August of 2006, there were 6.6 million students who were diagnosed with a disability in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). A child who has been evaluated by a professional and is classified as having a disability in one or more of the federally recognized qualifying categories is eligible for special education services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). The
federally recognized categories include mental retardation, hearing impairment, speech or language impairment, visual impairment, emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, and/or a specific learning disability (IDEA, 2004). School professionals are required to identify and provide services to students who have a disability, nationally known as Child Find (Keppel-Jones & Booth, 2001). These services are determined and agreed upon by a group of professionals and the student’s legal guardian, who together make up the Individualized Educational Program team (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, n.d.). If the IEP team agrees that special educational services are needed, then the program placement and services are decided upon to ensure a free and appropriate public education which aims to meet the child’s specialized needs (IDEA, 2004).

Special Education is defined as instruction that is specifically designed to meet the varying needs of the student in the classroom, at home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings, with no cost to the family (IDEA, 2004). Specially designed instruction is intended to create and deliver an educational program that meets the unique needs of the student in the least restrictive environment (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, n.d.). Students with disabilities are required to have access to the general education classroom, otherwise known as inclusion or mainstreaming, to the fullest extent possible with supplementary aids and services (IDEA, 2004). The educational placement must include research-based practices that are scientifically proven to ensure academic success (Yell, Shriner, &
Katsiyannis, 2006). Special Education was created as a response to the one million students who were secluded from the general education classrooms, and its laws have changed significantly over the years (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, n.d.).

*Laws impacting Special Education.*

Special Education laws have continually changed over the years to meet the growing number of children in need of an alternative educational placement and specialized academic instruction in order to be successful. Prior to these laws, students were secluded from the general education classroom and disabilities were being undiagnosed due to the insufficient amount of resources and training, therefore, resulting in an inadequate educational program (IDEA, 2004). In response to these rising predicaments, Public Law 94-142, Education for all Handicapped Children’s Act of 1975, was created to integrate special education children into the general education classroom, provide children with a free and appropriate public education, and ensure that their rights are protected (Kuper & Redhorn, n.d.; U.S. Office of Special Education, n.d.). This law was amended and expanded in 1983 and again in 1986 to include funding for infants birth through two years of age, transition services for sixteen years of age or older, services for three to five year olds, and legal protection and compensation to families who were not served adequately (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006; Kupper & Redhorn, n.d.). This law changed the structure, environment, and services of schools to meet a wider variety
of needs using a more inclusive model. However, over time, the number of students in the special education program grew as did the field, practice, and study.

To address the new awareness, defy negative labels, and adopt the current and changing diagnoses, the laws were required to change with the times. In 1990, the law was reauthorized and the name was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to recognize the new amendments and create a more positive identification (Kupper & Redhorn, n.d.). The IDEA amended the qualifying conditions to include Traumatic Brain Injury and Autism, along with including additional transition services for students 16 years or older (Kupper & Redhorn, n.d.; Yell, Shriner, Katsiyannis, & Antonis, 2006). This broadened the scope of services offered and made Special Education more accessible by all those who were in need during this time.

On the other side of the spectrum, in 2001, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (California State Board of Education, 2006). This law was created to ensure that all students will be performing at or above grade level in reading and math by the year 2014 which is to be monitored by yearly standardized testing (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The act holds districts responsible for academic proficiency and yearly progress.

As a result of the increasing pressure to meet these demands, the California State Board of Education expanded the NCLB act in 2003 to include the initiative that students are to be taught by highly qualified teachers (California State Board of Education, 2006). This increased the necessary qualifications that teachers needed in
the core subject matter they are teaching (California State Board of Education, 2006). Secondary level special education teachers must demonstrate subject matter proficiency in all single subject areas they are teaching and elementary teachers must demonstrate competencies in all elementary subject matter (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2007). The No Child Left Behind Act has made a significant impact on the magnitude and consequence of standardized testing, district and schools accountability, teacher preparedness and qualifications, curriculum selection and deliverance, and students’ ability to keep up with it all.

To align the NCLB with the IDEA, President Bush reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004, to ensure that academic progress and high standards are met by students in the Special Education program as well (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). IDEIA’s purpose is to lessen the achievement gap by using scientifically research based educational programs and interventions to enhance academic performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Another objective is to provide early identification and intervention for students in need of additional academic support at the general education level to decrease the number of students entering special education programs (IDEA, 2004). If early intervention strategies are ineffective, and students are referred for special education services, assessments are conducted to determine a diagnosis and proper educational placement.
Diagnoses and placement in special education.

Students who are in the special education program are in need of having their educational program altered in some way due to cognitive, communication, learning, sensory, behavioral, or physical differences. These modifications and accommodations are a part of an Individualized Educational Plan that is created by a team of required individuals which is based on the students’ qualifying condition as a result of the assessment (Keppel-Jones & Booth, 2001). Under the IDEA law, students can qualify for special education services in the following disabling areas: Autism, Deaf and Blindness, Deafness, Developmental Delay, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Impairment, Mental Retardation, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, or Visual Impairment Including Blindness (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, n.d.). For the purpose of this study, the focus is on students who have a Specific Learning Disability.

During the 1998-99 school year, there were 2,800,000 students in the U.S. school systems who were diagnosed with learning disabilities, the most frequently used diagnosis which increased 40% during the 1990s (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). There are over four million students with special needs which mean one out of every ten students has some kind of specific need (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). A student with a learning disability is one who has difficulty learning and utilizing a specific skill in the areas of reading, comprehension, writing,
listening, speaking, reasoning, and math (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, n.d.). There is a variety of diagnoses within the learning disability category, including a learning deficit in one academic area or even possibly a combination of deficits in multiple areas (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, n.d.). Intelligence is not a factor or cause, and students who are diagnosed with a learning disability are usually functioning within an average intellectual range (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, n.d.). However, these students are usually found to process information differently than the norm which directly affects their ability to learn and use new information. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) defines students with learning disabilities as possessing academic challenges due to a discrepancy between their potential (intelligence) and their abilities (academic performance) (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, n.d.). Therefore, these students are in need of a modified educational program to meet their unique needs which is a significant piece of their Individualized Educational Plan.

Program placement is an integral section of the Individualized Educational Plan which focuses on determining the programs that the school offers and deciding what is the most appropriate placement for students (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, n.d.). The IDEA law requires that a free and appropriate education be offered to every student and that students must be included within the general education classroom to the fullest extent possible in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2004). Other possible program placements are in the
Resource Specialist Program in which students attend the class for additional support in the academic areas needed (Kirk, Gallagher, & Anastasiow, 2003). This model can have a variety of formats which may include the Resource Teacher providing support within the general education classroom to the Resource Teacher pulling students out of the general education classroom to work in a smaller, more targeted skills class. Students with more severe disabling conditions may be placed in a Special Day Program where they receive the greater part of their education (Keppel-Jones & Booth, 2001). Due to the mandates of IDEA, students are being further mainstreamed within the general education.

Inclusion is the act of incorporating students with special needs within the general education classroom with special education support as needed (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). Inclusion and provision of the least restrictive environment placement are now educational policy adopted by schools nationwide to ensure that students are mainstreamed to the fullest extent possible (IDEA, 2004). However, it is also largely debated whether or not general education teachers are well enough prepared or supported by the special education team to meet the needs of those students (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). Social development and peer relationships seem to be the biggest concern of people involved in the process of full inclusion (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). There is evidence to support that inclusion can cause a greater understanding and create a more accepting atmosphere between students with and without learning disabilities (Estell, Jones, Pearl, Acker, Farmer, & Rodkin, 2008). Inclusion offers a more realistic view of the
world in that we are all very different and must learn how to effectively relate to others. When comparing educational placements and social status, students who are in the general education classroom may be more widely accepted by peers (Estell, Jones, Pearl, Acker, Farmer, & Rodkin, 2008). In contrast, students with mild disabilities, who are not mainstreamed, are at risk for greater isolation and less peer acceptance (Elias, 2004). Students with Learning Disabilities have also shown evidence of feelings of isolation due to peer rejection which demonstrates that inclusion can create more social complications with integration and acceptance between peers (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). Therefore, schools are responsible for providing students with the necessary skills to not only excel academically, but to excel in their own lives. Both social intelligence and academic intelligence are interconnected and have a direct impact on students’ success in life (Zins & Elias, 2006). This puts the pressure on teachers to understand the social and emotional challenges of these students and the methods by which to mediate them.

Specific Social and Emotional Challenges for Students Served in Special Education

Students who are able to display sound social and emotional skills are more likely to be accepted by their peers, be academically successful, and have more self-confidence (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2004). Conversely, students who lack these skills may experience peer rejection and academic challenges, be at-risk for dropping out, and exhibit emotional instability (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2004). This has become a central area of concern for everyone involved in the process of inclusion, due to the magnitude of social and emotional issues that are arising as a result (Csoti, 2001).
Social, emotional, and behavioral challenges occur more frequently with students who have learning difficulties than students who are functioning within average academic range (Csoti, 2001; Schnitzer, Andries, & Lebeer, 2007). In the United States, 13 to 22% of the youth have serious enough social and emotional challenges to need intervention, and a large majority of these students have learning disabilities (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2004). The link between social and emotional challenges and students with learning disabilities is becoming stronger, with more evidence to support the claim and possibly more explanations as to what the causes are.

*Cogntive functioning and social skills.*

Emotional intelligence involves knowing one’s emotions, managing those emotions, being motivated, having empathy for others, and effectively managing relationships (Goleman, 1995). Emotions affect how well we relate to others, resolve issues, and learn new information (Elias, 2004). Cognitive functioning can directly impact people’s social and emotional development (Csoti, 2001). People who have a diagnosed cognitive processing deficit may demonstrate a greater challenge in their ability to learn new academic concepts and develop social and emotional skills (Weissberg, Resnik, Payton, & O’Brien, 2003). A learning disability is a direct result of a cognitive processing deficit in one or more areas (attention, visual, auditory, memory, sensory motor skills, and cognitive abilities) (Keppel-Jones & Booth, 2001). Having difficulty with executive functioning and cognitive strategies make the process of selecting, recognizing, and executing problem solving strategies a challenge (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). This part of cognition which is
social has many implications for students with learning disabilities because they
demonstrate significant differences from their general education classmates in all
areas of social information processing (Tur-Kaspa, 1994). Social information
processing involves interpreting and evaluating social cues as well as having a sense
of self, social strategies, and social responses, all of which has been generalized and
labeled as social skills (Tur-Kaspa, 1994). Seventy five percent of students with
learning disabilities demonstrate a below average level of social skills (Elksnin &
Elksnin, 2004). Social and emotional skills can be defined as

1) communicating effectively; 2) ability to work cooperatively with others;
3) emotional self-control and appropriate expression; 4) empathy and
perspective taking; 5) optimism, humor, and self-awareness, including
strengths; 6) ability to plan and set goals; 7) solving problems and
resolving conflicts thoughtfully and nonviolently; and 8) bringing a
reflective, learning-to-learn approach to all domains of life. (Elias &
Weissberg, 2000, p. 187)

Students with learning disabilities are considered at a higher risk for developing
social relationship problems and exhibit deficits in social problem-solving skills
(Tur-Kaspa, 1994).

The link between social and emotional issues and cognitive functioning has
been established, but there seems to lack sufficient evidence and support as to what
those social and emotional issues are (Elias, 2004). The strong correlation between
social and cognitive abilities is found in students who have difficulty being present at
school, processing information and remembering new concepts, and controlling emotions (Thompson, 2006). Based on the Social-Emotional Learning theory, a student with a learning disorder often exhibits social and emotional difficulties in three skill areas of “recognizing emotions in self and others, regulating and managing strong emotions (positive and negative), and recognizing strengths and areas of need” (Elias, 2004, pp. 56-59). These skills can affect their ability to communicate effectively, identify problems, resolve conflicts, rationalize situations, and establish meaningful friendships (Elias, 2004). Social perceptions and comprehending social situations may be more challenging for students whose cognitive abilities are below an age-appropriate level (Elias, 2004). Students with learning deficits often have limited vocabulary in the area of emotions, making the process of distinguishing and expressing those feelings a challenge (Elias, 2004). These emotions can become strong which can inhibit the learning process and affect their ability to endure challenges in the classroom as well as their ability to effectively manage those emotions (Elias, 2004). These social challenges can have a severe impact on a student’s ability to be successful academically and socially within the general education classroom. As a result, students being mainstreamed may feel less skilled than their peers or have difficulty finding their strengths when compared to them (Elias, 2004). Students who are mainstreamed need guidance and facilitated peer acceptance and mediation for it to be a positive experience (Elias, 2004). Cognitive deficits can greatly impact students’ ability to function academically and socially within average range when compared to their peers (Thompson, 2006).
These skills often need to be taught explicitly within the general education classroom in order for the students to develop positive peer and school experiences (Thompson, 2006).

Social and/or peer relationship challenges.

Social challenges for students with learning disabilities have been attributed to a low self-esteem or sense of self-worth and the inability of the students to engage in simultaneous processing when socially interacting (Tur-Kaspa & Bryan, 1993). Simultaneous processing makes it possible to input, process, and make sense of social situations (Estell, Jones, Pearl, Acker, Farmer, & Rodkin, 2008). In terms of emotional development, the theory of the mind refers to the process by which students become conscious of others and their feelings, developing empathy (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). This can impact students’ ability to adapt and adjust to new social situations which involves affective functioning, including self-concept and self-worth (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006; Wiener, 2002). They also may have difficulty controlling their emotional reactions during certain situations which results in extreme behaviors and outcomes (Csoti, 2001). This can be a direct influence on the ways in which they are perceived and treated by their peers (Csoti, 2001; Wiener, 2002) and their ability to establish and maintain friendships (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006). Challenges with establishing positive relationships may be due to years of negative social interactions which can directly affect individuals’ perception of social relationships (Tur-Kaspa & Bryan, 1993).
The rising pressures for inclusion and the greater awareness of resulting social and emotional issues have generated many possible inferences and outcomes. Students with learning disabilities who are mainstreamed are viewed significantly lower by their peers in terms of social status, social acceptance, and lower self esteem (Estell, Jones, Pearl, Acker, Farmer, & Rodkin, 2008; Pearl, 2002; Tur-Kaspa & Bryan, 1993). People’s self-concept is their evaluation of themselves in various areas of functioning which can determine whether they are well-adjusted, happy, satisfied, or troubled, in need, and depressed (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002). This can be a significant factor in how students relate to their life. Self concept can be influenced by many factors such as achievement, age, self perception, and self awareness (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002). Students who are functioning below the average academic range may also demonstrate lower academic self-concepts (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002).

Peer acceptance is a leading factor in students’ self-concept (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002). Being accepted by peers can affect individuals’ ability to transition from school to life, effectively cope, feel confident, and sustain psychosocial well-being in their everyday life (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002). Peer rejection is a known and direct result of underdeveloped social and emotional skills (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2004). Adolescents report that peer rejection is significant enough be considered a traumatic event and can lead to possible causes of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression (Lev-Wiesel, Nuttman-Shwartz, & Sternberg, 2006). Students who are rejected and less accepted in school can often be more susceptible to negative
peer influence, peer group choices and affiliations, and overall social interactions 
(Pearl, 2002). Students who think poorly of their peers and school experiences and 
who have a general aversion to school are more likely to be less successful in their 
aademic and social endeavors (Csoti, 2001). How students view themselves 
corresponds to how they are treated by others and the messages they are sent in 
response to their output (Csoti, 2001). Inclusion may have compounded these social 
challenges, but it can also aid in creating a variety of opportunities for practicing 
social interactions, acceptance, empathy, and self-development (Estell, Jones, Pearl, 
Acker, Farmer, & Rodkin, 2008). Educational programs that incorporate both social 
and emotional development and academics simultaneously may be effective in 
meeting the holistic needs of students (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002). Social skills 
intervention programs may help to lessen the discrepancy within the general 
education classroom (Estell, Jones, Pearl, Acker, Farmer, & Rodkin, 2008).

Possible outcomes of social and emotional challenges.

Students with social skills deficits often experience feelings of rejection, 
isolation, and lack of acceptance and friendship from peers (Csoti, 2001). Often, 
students come to school with already pre-established social and performance deficits, 
making it difficult to form positive interpersonal relationships with their peers and 
teachers (Barton-Arwood, Morrow, Lane, & Jolivette, 2005). They can become 
isolated and rejected or become the subject of bullying due to their peers’ lacking 
understanding or simply not wanting or knowing how to interact (Csoti, 2001). 
Students with learning difficulties often have certain social challenges in relation to
misinterpreting social cues, understanding what is socially appropriate, and learning what is an appropriate response to certain situations (Csoti, 2001; Schnitzer, Andries, & Lebeer, 2007). These social and academic difficulties can have a lasting impact on students’ self-esteem, self efficacy, relationships with peers and teachers, and emotional stability (Csoti, 2001).

The failure to learn new information and be successful in school can have a lasting effect that results in depression, school failure, lack of motivation, low self-esteem, and defiant behaviors (Kirk, Gallagher & Annastasiow, 2003). Students with emotional or behavioral challenges are more likely to drop out of school, be absent, have lower grade point averages, remain unemployed, and have a greater challenge of establishing and maintaining successful relationships (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; Csoti, 2001; Estell, Jones, Acker, Farmer, & Rodkin, 2008; Marthur, 2007; Schnitzer, Andries, & Lebeer, 2007). Student with emotional and behavioral disorders had a dropout rate of 50 to 55% in 2005 and have been directly correlated to difficulties in the areas of anger, anxiety, and depression (Mayer, Lochman, & Acker, 2005). Students with disabilities may be less likely to ask for support with learning how to navigate through problems and develop interpersonal relationships than their peer who do not have disabilities (Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2001). The result is students possibly disliking school, acting out, having depressive feelings, becoming socially withdrawn, and not attending school (Csoti, 2001). They may be less accepted by peers, have fewer social skills, experience more loneliness, display lower academic self-concepts, and have more depressive symptoms than
students without learning disabilities (Wiener, 2002). This can lead to problems later in life with intimate relationships, employment, and emotional disorders (Csoti, 2001). Student may get in trouble frequently, be isolated from their peers, and perform below average. It has become the teacher’s responsibility to teach this population of students how to cope with these challenges in order to increase their academic performance (Barton-Arwood, Morrow, Lane, & Jolivette, 2005). Building self esteem and social skills helps prevent negative attention seeking behaviors from peers and teachers, increases academic confidence, and can establish a foundation for building positive peer relations (Gartrell, 2004). Helping teachers build the necessary skills needed to foster and enhance their students social and emotional development is discussed in the following section.

Counseling Skills for Teachers

Professional counseling is defined by the American Counseling Association as “the application of mental health, psychological, or human development principles, through cognitive, affective, behavioral or systematic intervention strategies, that address wellness, personal growth, or career development, as well as pathology” (American Counseling Association, 1997, ¶ 1). Counseling works towards establishing a trusting relationship that facilitates one’s self-discovery, understanding, and actualization, and offers guidance for exercising appropriate replacement behaviors (Thompson, 2006). Teachers are given the unique opportunity to be influential and significant people in children’s lives. With the education field focusing primarily on academics, teachers often lack training in
social and emotional developmental challenges, mediation of those challenges, and methods to counsel students in those areas.

*Teachers as first resource in working with students’ social and emotional issues.*

The classroom teachers’ role has become increasingly multifaceted, involving their need for expertise in being able to address students’ wide ranges of abilities, both academically and socially (Scott, Park, Swain-Broadway, & Landers, 2007). Students come to school with a variety of issues, such as academic challenges, family complications, and negative peer experiences, which are often overlooked but play a significant role in how they perform in class (Christner, Forrest, Morely, & Weinstein, 2007). Students usually spend six hours a day at school, making it an essential place to observe and to provide guidance, support in creating positive interactions between classmates, and a safe learning environment (Estell, Jones, Pearl, Acker, Farmer, & Rodkin, 2008; National Association of School Psychologists, n.d.). Teachers are responsible for creating a safe, respectful, and caring school climate in which the students can be academically and socially successful (Elias & Weissberg, 2000).

Teachers are required to communicate on a regular basis with other teachers, specialists, principals, counselors, parents, and students. They are required to provide accurate feedback about students’ progress, formulate predictions and evaluate students’ needs, and make recommendations that are based on what is best for their students (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). Teachers’ roles also entail the ability to
effectively mediate classroom disputes, misbehaviors, and daily life stresses of the students, all the while meeting the needs of all students within the classroom (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). Teachers must assess students’ academic abilities, strengths and weaknesses, past and present experiences that directly affect their social and emotional functioning, and stresses and challenges, and they are then required to create a safe and trusting environment to meet all of those needs (Kottler & Kottler, 1993). Teachers are also required to assess, diagnose, classify, place, plan, and monitor students according to test results, observations, and classroom performance (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). These strategies can be limiting, and teachers are often taught only to recognize physical, academic, and severe emotional performance deficits (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). Students are multi-dimensional and need to be evaluated holistically in order to provide them with the support they need to be successful in life (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003).

Teachers are becoming more aware of the increasing need to provide students with necessary social and emotional skills, such as problem solving, communication, responsibility, and empathy so that they can be academically successful (Elias & Weissberg, 2000). School is often the only other place, outside the home, that students have the opportunity to gain social support and guidance which makes teachers an essential resource for students (Kline & Silver, 2004). Teachers are in the position to model appropriate behaviors, design the structure and lessons for the day, and create a positive and safe environment (Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2001).
Preventative interventions early on in children’s lives are essential for healthy social and emotional development, as it gets more difficult to make an impact when they get older (Lane, Gresham, & O’Shaughnessy, 2002). Inconsequential social problems early on can translate into more concerning, life altering issues later on in life (Lane, Gresham, & O’Shaughnessy, 2002). Early academic and social intervention can assist students with learning disabilities in becoming more socially successful and decrease deficits (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003).

Many families are unable or unwilling, due to financial or other reasons, to seek counseling outside of school, making schools a vital source of support and guidance (Wong, Rosemond, Stein, Langley, Kataoka, & Nadeem, 2007). Teachers are in the position to build dynamic relationships with students and their families but often need professional training to provide sound counseling support and guidance (Berry, 1987). Families who have children with a disability are frequently in need of a person who is empathetic and can deal with a range of emotions (Berry, 1987). Teachers at any grade should have an explicit plan to aide students in this process (Elias & Weissberg, 2000).

*Presence or lack of counseling skills in teacher education programs.*

Special education teachers claim that they spend a significant portion of their day addressing the social and emotional needs of their students (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006). A gap exists between what the teachers are taught in a credentialing program and what actually occurs in the classroom (Ashman, 2003). Beginning teachers often feel underprepared when entering the profession and assert a need for
mentoring and feedback for at least their first year of teaching (Hemmeter, Santos, & Ostrosky, 2008). Many teachers also claim that their university teaching program did not prepare them to meet the social and emotional needs of these students (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006). Teachers often learn more in their in-service training after becoming a teacher than they did within their pre-service preparatory programs in regard to social and emotional mediation, due to recognizing the strong need once they have entered into the classroom (Schnitzer, Andries, & Lebeer, 2007). Teachers are often underprepared to deal with the diverse learning and behavioral needs of the students when first entering the field (Schnitzer, Andries, & Lebeer, 2007) and are expected to recognize and report any signs of abuse, yet the majority of teachers are underprepared in recognizing what those signs would be (Kottler & Kottler, 1993; Pirtle & Perez, 2003). Teacher preparation programs need to provide teachers with strategies and skills in order to be able to deal with challenging social problems (Hemmeter, Santos, & Ostrosky, 2008). Future teachers in pre-service credentialing programs need a holistic education that provides them with multiple opportunities to address the social and emotional needs of the students in order to effectively intervene and enhance students’ social development (Hemmeter, Santos, & Ostrosky, 2008). Both general and special education teachers are in need of more resources and training to meet the various needs of their students (Mathur, 2007).

School staffs are under pressure to meet academic goals and standards and have limited resources in being able to provide strong social intervention strategies that are systematic and sustained over a significant amount of time that can be
monitored and evaluated (Greenberg, Weissberg, O’Brien, Zins, Fredricks, Resnik, & Elias, 2003). Many teachers are not prepared to address the diverse needs of their students because they are not fully aware of the students’ challenges and have not had the appropriate mediation training to address their unique situations (Ashman, 2003). Due to the increasing pressure to meet academic requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act, teachers are often under significant demands and time constraints to meet these standards (Mayer, Lochman, & Van Acker, 2005). Funding and a lack of resources can also be a significant restraint in providing teachers with adequate mediation and social and emotional training (Weissber, Resnik, Payton, & O’Brien, 2003). Teachers are under pressure to teach to the standards and often do not have any available time in the day to incorporate cognitive strategies or social skills (Ashman, 2003). Teachers need greater support, training, and resources for meeting the social and emotional needs of at-risk youth (Christensen, Young, & Marchant, 2007).

For mild-moderate special education teachers, a student with a mild learning disability is not recognized as needing social and emotional support or intervention (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2004). It has not been mandated to provide social and emotional support for students with mild disabilities; only those who are diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance are required to receive behavioral and social support (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2004). Even though the connection between learning disabilities and social competence has been made, it has not been federally recognized (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2004). There is a need for teacher standards in special educators’
preparation program to include specific knowledge and skills in dealing with the scope of social and emotional challenges of students with disabilities (Bay, 2002). This may include social cognition, competence, assessment, and intervention (Bay, 2002). The majority of teachers view themselves as having a significant impact on students’ social and emotional development and often claim that they do not have sufficient time or training to implement any types of social skills training (Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2001). It is suggested that special educators be provided with assistance, guidance, and additional training immediately following the credential program (Bay, 2002).

It has been under review and questioned whether or not the teaching standards for special education in California, which were created in 1996, still reflect current educational practices (Wadsworth, n.d.). California Standards for Special Education Teachers in the Preliminary Level I Education Specialist Credential Program require candidates to take a single course in Positive Behavior Support (Standard 24). The standards require a practicing teacher in the Level II program to take one course in Advanced Behavioral, Emotional, and Environmental Supports (Standard 14) (Special Education Advisory Committee, 1996). These standards reflect a teacher’s ability to create a positive learning environment, to meet diverse academic needs, to promote self reflected activities, and to facilitate positive classroom management skills (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing & California Department of Education, 1997).
These are critical aspects of becoming a successful teacher, but they do not cover the rising social and emotional demands of the students as a result of inclusion, greater awareness, and increasing academic pressures. Providing students with essential social skills and critical interpersonal skills has a lasting impact that can positively affect students’ academic and cognitive functioning, along with their relationships and dealings with difficult situations (Thompson, 2006). There is a shortage of knowledgeable professionals who are able to meet students’ social and emotional needs (Mayer, Lochman, & Van Acker, 2005). School psychologists are expected to perform a number of duties other than providing social and emotional interventions (Mayer, Lochman, & Van Acker, 2005). This leaves teachers as the primary resource for teaching and guiding the students in developing strong social and emotional skills to assist them in their academic and everyday lives. Social skill curricula often touch upon one aspect of social skills development, and in order for an intervention program to be effective, it must cover the wide range of social and emotional aspects encountered within a classroom and in life (Goleman, 1994).

Methods by which counseling skills can be taught.

Social skills acquisition deficits are defined as the unawareness and lack of understanding of the skills that are needed to act appropriately even in the most pleasant social situations (Lane, Gresham, O’Shaughnessy, 2002). Social skills performance deficits are the awareness of a particular social skill but the inability to act on it in a given situation (Lane, Gresham, O’Shaughnessy, 2002). Often, students do not understand what appropriate responses to certain circumstances are,
or they are just simply unable to follow through with those actions due to the variety of possible reasons previously discussed. Many students also come to the classroom with a wide array of past experiences that directly impact their school functioning (Pirtle & Perez, 2003). This places the responsibility on teachers to know how to facilitate and create a healthy social and educational environment. It requires teachers to assist students in developing acceptance, empathy, and consistency (Pirtle & Perez, 2003). Teachers should create an atmosphere in which everyone is responsible for each individual’s welfare in the classroom by providing opportunities for solving disputes using mediation and addressing all issues which arise in the classroom that are disrespectful or harmful towards others (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). Teachers need to establish a positive and trusting relationship within a safe environment with the students prior to implementing any type of counseling techniques (Pirtle & Perez, 2003).

Counseling skill guidelines should be understood and addressed by teachers to include the knowledge that reading about counseling skills is not as effective as actually practicing those skills, and the problems that arise are not the responsibility of the teachers to solve (Kottler & Kottler, 1993). Teachers should also to refrain from giving advice and from taking on too much (Kottler & Kottler, 1993). A holistic emotional literacy curriculum is one that incorporates the following components: “self-awareness, decision making, managing feelings, self-concept, handling stress, communications, group dynamics, and conflict resolution” (Goleman, 1994, pp. 7-8). Students often have a challenging time looking at their
own behaviors (Kottler & Kottler, 1993). When directing students towards self awareness, it is necessary for educators to demonstrate acceptance and patience (Kottler & Kottler, 1993). This allows the students space and opportunities to explore themselves and alternative options (Kottler & Kottler, 1993). When teachers place judgments on students, it inhibits them from finding their true selves and prevents the educators from learning about who the students really are (Gilhooley & Scheuch, 2000). Teachers must model respect, without judgment and with compassion, in order to reach out and be heard (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). When hearing a child’s truth, it is important for teachers to take time to be present, centered, inquisitive, non-judgmental, and understanding, and for them to look at the situation from the child’s point of view (Ungar, 2006). Once these foundations have been established and practiced, there are a variety of methods which teachers can use to implement basic counseling techniques.

Social and emotional learning involves giving the students tools that promote their ability to manage their emotions, develop empathy, learn responsibility, build positive relationships, and manage challenging situations (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2008; Weissber, Resnik, Payton, & O’Brien, 2003; Zins & Elias, 2006). The key components of learning social and emotional skills are:

*Self-Awareness:* identifying and recognizing emotions; accurate self-perception; recognizing strengths, needs, and values; self-efficacy. *Self-Management:* impulse control and stress management; self-motivation and
discipline; goal setting and organizational skills. *Social Awareness:* perspective taking; empathy; difference recognition; respect for others. *Relationship Skills:* communication, social engagement, and relationship building; working cooperatively; negotiation, refusal, and conflict management; help seeking. *Responsible Decision-making:* problem identification and situation analysis; problem solving; evaluation and reflection; personal, social, and ethical responsibility. (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d., p. 1)

The goal is to teach students how to understand, handle, and communicate the social and emotional facets of their lives (Schnitzer, Andries, & Lebeer, 2007). Structured lessons within the schools should aim to first identify skills and their application to the students’ lives, and then teach the components of those skills while providing students’ opportunities to practice, engage, and acquire feedback as well as the knowledge of how to apply them outside of school within their own lives (Elias & Weissberg, 2000). Students learn these social skills very similar to the ways in which they learn and put into practice new academic concepts (Zins & Elias, 2006). The concentration is on how to cultivate and maintain positive social and emotional competence (Zins & Elias, 2006).

Social and emotional learning can have a positive effect on academic achievement, relationships, self-esteem, sense of self-worth, and overall physical health (Elias & Weissberg, 2000; Schnitzer, Andries, & Lebeer, 2007; Zins & Elias, 2006). Direct outcomes of social and emotional intervention show that it can
promote a variety of positive responses, such as increased motivation, ethical attitudes, stronger values, increased social interactions, greater classroom participation, and a greater trust in others (Elias & Weissberg, 2000). It is effective when taught in a systematic style, over an extended period of time, combined with academics, and within a positive and safe environment (Elias & Weissberg, 2000). The delivery of this type of program should be embedded within the academic curriculum in order to meet time and academic performance pressures (Zins & Elias, 2006). Social and emotional learning programs should be a whole school approach incorporating the students, teachers, and families (Greenberg et al., 2003). If facilitated in this manner, it can positively affect students’ academic performance, social relationships, and interpersonal skills and lessen disruptive behaviors (Greenberg et al., 2003). For students with behavioral and social problems, it can be effective in building self-esteem and positive relationships and in reducing disruptive or inappropriate behaviors (Greenberg et al., 2003). When the interventions have been used with students who exhibit antisocial behaviors, drug use problems, or poor school attendance, the counseling and mentoring can reduce drop-out rates, increase self-control, and increase attendance (Greenberg et al., 2003). Social, emotional, and academic learning is based on the strong amount of evidence to support that social and emotional functioning directly impacts academic performance (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Student with learning disabilities often have greater social challenges, due to social stigmas and feelings of indifference, than those without learning disabilities
This can impact their emotional functioning, creating lower self-concept and esteem, which in turn creates less desirable social and academic functioning (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002). In order to address these differences between students and build self-worth, teachers need to cultivate these attributes (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2004). Students’ growth should begin with activities that foster self-reflection and self-worth. Often, students will come to a classroom with multiple negative experiences over a significant amount of time that has negatively impacted how they view themselves (Gilhooley & Scheuch, 2000). Teachers are in the unique position to provide opportunities for students to work towards discovering what their strengths are in looking at various aspects of their lives, allowing students to look at themselves and their environment more positively (Smith, 2006). Strength based counseling is based on a blend of many counseling theories, including positive psychology and prevention (Ungar, 2006). It allows students to build self-esteem, resistance, self-actualization, and conflict management skills (Smith, 2006). Educators guide youth in hearing their own voices and looking at their own needs and strengths, and then facilitate opportunities that match those needs (Smith, 2006). Teachers who strive to teach optimism and resilience to adverse situations may help to prevent depression and anxiety in their students (Ungar, 2006). Providing students the opportunity to discover their strengths and self-worth can have a lasting impact on how they view themselves and how others perceive them (Elias & Weissberg, 2000).
An additional intervention to aid in building self-worth and strength is providing students with the opportunity to belong and feel important (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). These interventions can be implemented as a whole school or classroom endeavor to support community building and give students a voice, making them feel important. Building self-worth can be established by creating a sense of belonging and importance in students (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). Students who are mainstreamed into the general education for a portion of the day often have feelings of not belonging or that of an outsider (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). They also may be treated or seen differently by their peers which can create feelings of isolation or rejection (Csoti, 2001). In order to create an environment of understanding, purpose, and belonging, teachers can reinforce cooperative learning which involves learning how to work as team, building trust and reliance, and learning how to share personal matters (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). Schools can implement successful social and emotional programs such as process orientation/groups and tribes to build these strengths (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). Process orientation gives students the opportunity to develop the classroom rules, vote, and share their feeling about them (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). This type of method focuses on giving the students a safe space to share their concerns and feelings, where the conversation remains constructive and free of complaints or unnecessary banter (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). Process groups have been shown to be effective in building self-esteem, trust, mutual understanding, positive peer interactions and social situations, and can also help to facilitate a trusting space for
students to gain feedback from their peers, much like the tribes movement (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). Tribe members are chosen, given a name, and include multi-grades and can meet daily before school to establish the tone for the day. Tribal guidelines are established during a process in which the tribe creates a system that revolves around mutual respect, confidentiality, and staying away from negative discourse about others (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). This method allows students to take responsibility, voice their concerns, create a community of belonging, and build friendships (Kottler & Kottler, 2007).

Often, students with processing deficits have greater difficulty understanding and reflecting on themselves and their behaviors (Kirk, Gallagher & Annastasiow, 2003). These students need to be explicitly taught how to recognize certain attributes in themselves and others (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). Individualized social and emotional interventions that have been successful in classrooms are bibliotherapy and journal writing which can guide students in reflecting on their own behaviors and learn how to create alternative responses (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002). Bibliotherapy is a method in which the academic skills, such as comprehension and reading, are combined with self esteem, self concept, and self awareness (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002). This is conducted with the use of literature that revolves around life skills, personal challenges, and a sense of character relatedness in which students can relate to specific characteristics and their outcomes (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002). Activities that follow these readings allow for students to express, relate, problem solve, and engage (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002). Many students find it easier to sort out
problems and evaluate themselves through art, literature, and drama (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002). Journaling involves academic writing skills and can be used as an independent intervention tool in aiding the process of self-reflection and monitoring behaviors (Elias & Weissberg, 2000). Students can use journaling similar to how they would use a diary, for which teachers provide specific prompts, and students reflect and express their own personal thoughts (Elias & Weissberg, 2000). Bibliotherapy and journaling provide students with the opportunity to look at themselves as individuals, embracing differences and learning about similarities, while building a sense of self (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2002).

Poor self-esteem and self-worth can create greater social and emotional challenges which can negatively impact peer relationships (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). Inclusion has created a more dynamic classroom environment with a wide range of social and academic abilities (Pirtle & Perez, 2003). This makes it a priority to create an environment that promotes equal academic and social success for everyone (Ungar, 2006). Peer acceptance, rejection, and social status are of significant concern in regards to students with learning disabilities (Csoti, 2002). Educators are able to offer students opportunities for positive social interactions and alternatives to problematic situations in order to help guide them from suppression and towards communication and action (Ungar, 2006). When facilitated in a group, students have the opportunity to build relationships, trust, empathy, and a sense of belonging (Smith, 2006). A popular means of facilitating students self discovery and growth that involves group dynamics is using peer mediation techniques, such as
group therapy, personal construct counseling, reality therapy, and circle of friends. These methods of intervention have shown to be successful in developing positive peer relations, increasing academic performance, and developing problem solving skills (Ashman, 2003).

Peer mediation is a term that is widely used and can also be referred to as co-operative learning, peer learning, and student team learning (Ashman, 2003). Its focus is to enhance students’ academic and social development through teacher-guided activities (Christensen, Young, & Marchant, 2007). It can be effective with students of lower academic abilities who have been mainstreamed into the general education classroom in developing greater peer acceptance and understanding (Ashman, 2003). Peers can have a greater influence than teachers and are able to interact more frequently with students in various settings (Christensen, Young, & Marchant, 2007). Peers are able to provide academic tutoring, mediation, reinforcement, and social skills support within the general education and in other contexts (Ashman, 2003). This involves teaching students the necessary skills required in order to be an effective peer support, identify potential problems, and facilitate mediation skills (Christensen, Young, & Marchant, 2007). Group therapy is also especially useful when dealing with students who have difficulty understanding and interpreting social cues (Kline & Silver, 2004). Students are given the opportunity to interact and practice social situations with other students and be given feedback and insight as to what is an appropriate social interaction (Kline & Silver,
The idea is that practicing social situations with peers will then eventually transfer the behavior to real life social interactions (Kline & Silver, 2004).

Practicing real life situations can better equip a student when learning how to respond to various social interactions and can be implemented through personal construct counseling, reality therapy, or circle of friends. Personal construct counseling has been used in schools as an intervention for at-risk youth and involves the process of finding meaning to specific behaviors and situations (Truneckova & Viney, 2007). It attempts to allow a space for students to explore the purpose of social interactions and to develop a sense of self (Truneckova & Viney, 2007). Building reasoning abilities can decrease misbehaviors and increase more positive interpersonal experiences (Truneckova & Viney, 2007). This technique is parallel to how reality therapy looks at real life situations and has students work together in responding to those real life scenarios and discussing what their reactions would be (Pirtle & Perez, 2003). These types of peer groups are a means to effectively reaching a large number of students with a limited amount of time which makes it more feasible for teachers to implement (Kottler & Kottler, 1993). It provides a space that allows for constructive feedback, trust building, and enhancement of an individual’s self-confidence, while developing positive peer relations (Kottler & Kottler, 1993). Similarly, the circle of friends’ activity involves the students and teacher discussing differences and similarities between all the different students to increase awareness and gain understanding (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). The goal is to assist students who experience feelings of inequality, rejection, or
isolation to be more understood and accepted by their peers, and for the other students to learn about the similarities that exist between themselves and someone they perceived as being very different from them (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003).

It seems that the root of all social and emotional issues traces back to the cognitive functioning and the ways in which people process information. The successful social and emotional intervention methods usually have a metacognitive piece to connect, make sense of, and reflect on the self in relation to the material being taught (Ashman, 2003). The correlation between learning disabilities, cognitive functioning, and social skills has been established, making it essential to teach social and emotional skills that enhance social processing abilities on a cognitive level (Thompson, 2006). Methods that tailor specifically to developing those cognitive processing abilities involve cognitive education, cognitive-behavioral management, ABCs, fishbowl, role playing, and conflict resolution. Students who have difficulty being present at school, processing information, remembering new concepts, and controlling emotions can benefit from these types of cognitive intervention strategies (Thompson, 2006). Cognitive strategies are designed to improve executive functions, metacognition, and organizational skills through teaching students to examine how they attempt and complete a task (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). Cognitive education involves students learning about how they think and provides the students with opportunities to reflect and explore (Ashman, 2003). It involves teaching students to self-monitor as they do a task,
reflecting along the way, and with the teacher evaluating its effectiveness (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). On a social and emotional level, cognitive-behavioral modification involves a variety of techniques used to modify behavior by teaching students to engage in learning about their own behaviors and ways to alter them (Mayer, Lochman, Van Acker, 2005). The theory behind cognitive-behavioral management is based on the notion that inner thoughts control emotions and actions, so, instead of focusing on outward actions, the focus should begin within (Mayer, Lochman, & Van Acker, 2005). It aims to have the individuals observe their interpretations, perceptions, beliefs, and problem solving thoughts (Mayer, Lochman, & Van Acker, 2005). The facilitator first looks at understanding the students and what triggers their thoughts, then identifies their response to those thoughts, and will then guide the students through an exploration of alternative thoughts and reactions (Mayer, Lochman, & Van Acker, 2005). Similarly, cognitive behavior therapy intends to help students become more aware of themselves and others, while learning how to have appropriate and positive relationships and interactions with others (Christner, Forrest, Morely, & Weinstein, 2007; Kline & Silver, 2004). One way to facilitate this is through the ABC activity where teachers and students look at social problems in terms of what activated the event, what was the belief behind the behavior, and what was the consequence. This is based on the Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy principles of figuring out what the belief behind the action or thought is (Pirtle & Perez, 2003). These cognitive methods can be an essential
building block in students’ process of constructing healthy social and emotional functioning.

Class meetings, fishbowl, and role playing are other successful intervention tools that use cognitive strategies to build self-awareness, reflection skills, and social competence. Class meetings are designed to respond to issues that arise within the classroom that can be used as a lesson for everyone to be involved and to feel they have a voice (Gartrell, 2004). Students are encouraged to respect others’ perspectives, speak one at a time, speak honestly without blame, and utilize active listening skills (Gartrell, 2004). These meeting can be used hourly, daily, or weekly for the purpose of resolving conflicts, discussing life challenges, or communicating about educational topics (Gartrell, 2004). The outcome gives students social skills, supports their emotional well-being and development, and gives them a sense of belonging (Gartrell, 2004).

The fishbowl activity is another group process in which the teacher works in the middle of the room with a smaller group of students that is circled around by the rest of the students (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). The observers are on the outside while the students in the center are discussing a topic. Afterwards, the observers are able to provide feedback, using reflective cognitive reasoning (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). This allows students on the outside to observe various types of social interactions and construct feedback, and allows student who are directly involved to hear other perspectives (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). Classroom discussions allow students to hear each other’s point of view and hold students accountable for their
actions as a group, while building trust, acceptance, and tolerance (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). This can be especially helpful for students who struggle with processing social cues and interactions (Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003). Having the students’ role play these social scenarios is also helpful in learning a new social skill and reading social cues and provides the students with the opportunity to practice those skills in a safe environment (Elias & Weissberg, 2000; Kline & Silver, 2004). Class meetings, fishbowl, and role play are effective mediation tools when students are able to feel comfortable volunteering in front of their peers; when they are clear on their roles; and when the participants are able to have fun, use prompts, and use their own natural language (Kottler & Kottler, 2007). These types of mediation techniques are most effective when based on respect, are voluntary, support expression and cooperation, inspect others’ point of view, and provide everyone with a sense of accomplishment in the end (Kline & Silver, 2004).

When isolated problems arise between peers, teachers are required to help students resolve the issue. Conflict resolution education aims at resolving interpersonal conflicts through mediation and is usually a single component of a broader social skills curriculum (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). It is typically taught directly by modeling, using guided practice, within the curriculum, or peer mediation (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). During mediation, which involves a third party to help resolve a conflict, the mediator must remain neutral and encouraging, utilizing active listening skills, using words of guidance (Gartrell, 2004). When mediating a conflict that has risen, it is imperative to make sure that all parties involved have had time to
cool off (Gartrell, 2004). Then the problem can be identified and discussed by all 
parties involved (Gartrell, 2004). The teacher and students can then brainstorm 
possible solutions, agree upon a solution, attempt the resolution, and monitor its 
effectiveness over time (Gartrell, 2004).

This mediation technique reinforces positive behavioral support by first 
understanding what the problem is, why it is occurring, and how to prevent it (Scott, 
Park, Swain-Broadway, & Landres, 2007). It then aims to prevent the reoccurrence 
by providing specific guidelines and routines, along with modifying the physical 
environment if needed (Scott, Park, Swain-Broadway, & Landres, 2007). It also 
involves implementing these strategies and being consistent, with structure and 
feedback, and monitoring progress over a period of time to measure effectiveness 
(Scott, Park, Swain-Broadway, & Landres, 2007).

Incorporating counseling skills into a classroom can help teachers enhance 
their interpersonal relationships, gain respect from their students and co-workers, 
sustain inspiration and create bonds more quickly, and manage students’ important 
life challenges in an effective and productive manner (Kottler & Kottler, 1993). 
These activities are just a small piece of the many techniques that can be used to aid 
in developing social and emotional skills, interpersonal skills, and a healthy 
classroom environment.

Conclusion

With the rising demands on teachers to meet state standards, serve 
mainstreamed students, and comply with the No Child Left Behind Act and
Individuals With Disabilities Educational Act, it is evident that teachers are in need of greater preparation to meet students’ diverse needs. Children who have learning disabilities and are being mainstreamed into the general education classroom for the majority of their day are at-risk for being exposed to a variety of social challenges. Those students with processing deficits have difficulty recognizing and interpreting social cues, interactions, and emotions. This poses a greater pressure on the teachers to create a safe and productive space where learning can take place. However, many teacher credentialing programs in California provide only a single course in classroom management. Often, teachers enter the field and are in need of additional training in the social and emotional challenges they discover in the classroom. This leads to the central question for this project: What types of counseling training do teachers feel they need in order to deal with the social and emotional issues which commonly arise in their classroom?

The next chapter will investigate the methodology used in determining the need for teachers to be trained in basic counseling and mediation skills.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Special Education teachers are continually faced with bigger challenges than meeting the state standards. Teachers play a variety of roles throughout the day which often include developing rapport with families, facilitating classroom management, diverting crises, mediating between peers, and guiding the children to be able to learn. Academics are only a portion of the bigger picture. Children with disabilities are at a greater risk for social and emotional problems. Special Education teachers are inadequately prepared to deal with these issues (Ashman, 2003; Hemmeter, Santos, & Ostrosky, 2008; Kirk, Gallagher, & Annastasiow, 2003; Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006; Schnitzer, Andries, & Lebeer, 2007). My own personal teaching experience concurs with current research, and thus, I wanted to investigate the kinds of issues other special education teachers are facing in their classrooms and the ways in which they have been trained to deal with them.

This chapter will describe the participants in this study and the ways in which they were selected. It will also focus on the development and implementation of a mixed method survey used to solicit information about teachers’ experiences in their classrooms, the methods they employ to handle with them, the frequency with which they encounter them, and the qualifications and trainings that they have had to
support their practice. The closing of this chapter will describe the methods used to collect, organize, and analyze the data.

*Pilot Study*

The pilot study was originally conducted as part of the requirements for a graduate-level qualitative research course. This pilot study included both employed Special Education and General Education teachers in Humboldt County as participants. Participants included three Special Education teachers and three General Education teachers from Mattole Unified School District. It was a backyard study in that it was conducted at my place of employment. The qualitative survey asked teachers to discuss the various issues that they encounter in the classroom, the ways in which they deal with those issues, the frequency, the types of training they have had, and the types of support or training they have had. The study provided feedback on the qualitative questions that were too broad and insight on other questions that needed to be asked. Also, some questions that were open ended were left blank, and one returned survey had the comment “too broad.” The feedback from the survey aided in dropping those vague questions and discovering which questions were seemingly too broad as qualitative questions. Those questions were either removed from the final survey or made into quantitative questions.

Because Special Education teachers and General Education teachers deal with very different classroom settings, populations, and subjects, the responses from the pilot survey were very broad which made it challenging to find similarities. This aided in the decision to survey only Resource Specialist and Special Day Class
teachers of all grade levels. The pilot study was essential in determining the types of questions to ask in order to obtain the most utilizable answers and in choosing who the participants should be. The next section describes the methodology used in the research conducted for this thesis.

*Methodology*

The actual study began shortly after analyzing the pilot study results, making the necessary changes, and receiving IRB approval. The participants in this study were both Resource Specialist and Special Day Class teachers for all grade levels. The teachers were selected using the Humboldt County District websites, obtaining a list of all the Special Education teachers in the area and their email addresses. A mixed method survey was designed and participants had the option of completing the survey online or filling it out and mailing it in. The study was conducted over a three month period of time.

*Mixed method survey design.*

The survey was first created as a Word document using open ended questions, closed multiple choice responses, and yes or no questions. The questions were designed to obtain information about the teacher’ demographics as well as to learn about what they felt their roles are as teachers in relation to all that they have to accomplish besides academics. It asked questions to ascertain how teachers would define counseling and social and emotional mediation. The survey also included questions designed to elicit the types of common social and emotional issues they encountered in the classrooms and the frequency they encountered them. Participants
provided information on the ways they dealt with those issues, the types of training they had to deal with them, and the types of training in which they would be interested. (See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.)

Once the survey was completed and reviewed, I signed up for an account on SurveyMonkey. This is an online survey network which assists in uploading and distributing your survey. I transferred the questions to my SurveyMonkey account and included an introductory letter on the first page explaining the purpose the study and its requirements. Participants were informed that their participation in the survey was voluntary and that they could discontinue it at any time. They were assured that their responses would be anonymous as I collected no identifying information about them, and that they were at minimal risk by taking this survey, the only risk being that the questions could elicit an emotional response. Participants were also informed that the benefit to completing this survey is their contribution to the study, and it would only take 10 to 15 minutes. Once everything was uploaded to the SurveyMonkey site, a link was generated so respondents could directly upload to the survey. It was then ready to be sent to the participants.

*Implementing the procedure.*

I retrieved 61 Special Education teachers’ email addresses from Humboldt County District websites. I created an email message to give a brief and general introduction to the survey, including the SurveyMonkey link which I sent out to all 61 potential participants with a deadline of one week to respond. Within that time, 23% responded to the survey. Two days prior to the deadline, I sent a thank you
email to all the participants and reminded those that hadn’t completed it yet of the deadline. During those two days, four more people completed the survey. I sent a follow-up email to thank the study participants.

A total of 18 surveys were completed out of 61 sent out. Although this was a 30% response rate, I was interested in garnering feedback from an even larger percentage of the local Special Education teachers. I noted that because this study was conducted during the last three weeks of school, and that many teachers do not routinely check their email, it seemed reasonable to make a second attempt to gather additional participants. I signed up for SurveyMonkey again right before the academic school year began and made hard copies of the introductory letter and survey. I stamped and addressed 40 envelopes and attached a very brief cover letter, the consent letter, and the survey to each one. The 40 surveys were hand delivered to 22 local schools in an effort to make the survey more accessible, especially to those individuals who were less comfortable with responding online. The letter included the option to use the online link to complete the survey or fill out the hard copy and mail it back to me. Participants were again given a week to respond.

The second survey collecting method yielded three more online responses and eight more mailed in responses, totaling 29 responses from participants.

I downloaded the survey results from SurveyMonkey and printed them. The results were presented as responses to each question and the percentage of people that marked each multiple choice and yes or no answer. Qualitative and quantitative data were separated so that I could analyze frequency and correlation. I then used
this information to look at the various relationships and similarities between and among responses. I organized the data according to question, coded them so I could look for patterns, and then cross-referenced them. The major themes and connections that emerged will be the topic of Chapter Four.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

Introduction

The following chapter consists of a summary of the participants’ responses regarding their demographics, including the grades they teach, years they have taught, subjects, and educational backgrounds. It outlines the information obtained about whether or not the teachers had basic counseling skills training and, if so, what types of training they received. A description of what teachers felt their roles were, the common issues encountered in their classrooms, and the effect that these issues had on learning are then outlined. Next, the counseling techniques that teachers reported using are described as well as staff members or administrators to whom they could go if they needed support and the time spent per week dealing with non-academic issues. Finally, the teachers’ interests in types of further training are reported.

Participant Demographics

Twenty-nine Special Education teachers in a small rural county in Northern California participated in this survey, either through completing it online or completing a hard copy and mailing it to me. The participants included teachers of all grades (K through 12) and both Resource Specialist and Special Day Class teachers.
Twenty-eight percent of the teachers surveyed reported working with elementary aged students (K-5). Fourteen percent taught Kindergarten through the 8th grade, and 28% taught only junior high school classes (6-8). Ten percent taught all grades (K-12), and 20% reported teaching solely high school students. When asked which subjects they taught, all the teachers claimed to teach the basic core academics, and some specified reading, writing, and math or study skills. The types of teaching assignments that were reported were all within the special education field, ranging from participating within the general education classes, providing support with core academics to students, to working with more severe needs in a special day class setting where students are pulled out and in a specialized, remedial class for their core academics. Ninety percent of the participants had taught for more than five years, with a mean of 14 years teaching experience. Out of those teachers, 65% had a Bachelor of Arts, and 41% had a Master’s degree. All of the teachers surveyed were employed within the same rural county in Northern California.

Basic Counseling Skills for Teachers

The main part of the survey included questions that solicited information on the topic of counseling and mediation in schools. Teachers were asked to give their definition of counseling and of social and emotional mediation. The next section of the survey asked teachers if they had any counseling or mediation training and, if so, which types of training they had received. Types of common social and emotional issues were listed, and teachers were asked to report which types they dealt with in
their classroom and how often they dealt with them. Teachers were then given the opportunity to describe the types of counseling and mediation techniques they used to deal with these issues. The following sections are an overview of the results from these questions.

*Defining counseling and mediation.*

All of the participants were asked to define counseling and social and emotional mediation. When asked how they would define counseling, 100% of participants gave a clear definition which demonstrated their understanding of the communication skills involved in the counseling process. Many definitions included terms such as listening, guiding, offering solutions, giving feedback, intervening, making referrals, and offering tools. One teacher offered this definition of counseling: “On a school level, I see counseling as talking with students and parents to help them find solutions to their problems. This could be conflict mediation, family issues, or guidance on the next steps in education.” Another teacher described counseling as “intervention/direction for logistics of life choices and identification of feelings/needs to guide in personal development and healing.”

When asked how they would define social and emotional mediation, participants’ responses were more varied, but all made mention of it involving more than one person. Some definitions made reference to the student and the facilitator as “a person to assist or facilitate a social or emotion filled situation using healthy, research problem solving skills.” Forty-one percent discussed that there were at least
two or more people involved, along with a mediator to facilitate. One teacher defined mediation as “facilitating understanding (empathy) between two or more people who are having difficulty with each other.” Another teacher simply stated that mediation was “working with the student to work through social and emotional upsets or immediate concerns that are affecting the student’s academic progress.” Some responses gave more detailed types of mediation such as “intervening with social skills, social stories, classes, workshops, groups, buddies to help develop social norms and emotional health and well being.”

The data in the following sections are separated into the types of training teachers have had, the need for counseling in schools, and the types of techniques used by teachers.

*Training.*

When asked if they had any counseling training, 72% of the participants responded no. Those who had gone through counseling training were then afforded the opportunity to note whether it was during undergraduate coursework, a workshop, graduate coursework or other with the option to specify. Of those teachers who had previous counseling training, 41% reported that they have received some type of counseling training through professional workshops, 33% through undergraduate coursework, and 16% through graduate work. The other 41% of the participants who had counseling training checked “other” and specified that their
training was through taking psychology courses, being a college dorm resident, or taking a course in parent effectiveness training.

Need.

Teachers were then given the opportunity to express what they felt their role was as teachers in relation to social and emotional counseling and mediation. One hundred percent of the participants expressed that social and emotional counseling and mediation were aspects of their professional role. However, 10% reported that even though counseling and mediation were a part of their daily encounters, they felt inadequately prepared to handle such situations, preferring to refer them to outside sources and to continue teaching to the standards. As one of those teachers emphasized, “I can do accurate reporting and make notes to remind administrators of needs, but I do not feel I have skills to deal with really emotional issues. We usually refer to the counselor in order to concentrate on learning issues and achievement standards.” The other 90% of participants felt it was a major part of their jobs, and 58% made mention that it was essential in order for students to be ready and able to learn. As one teacher summarized, “It really isn’t a teacher’s role, but we are thrown into it, and if we want to teach, we must deal with these situations.”

Eighty-three percent of the participants discussed at least one of the following topics: needing mediation within the classroom, teaching social skills, referring for more serious problems, being the first responder for crisis situations, teaching coping
strategies, and/or creating a safe and secure environment. A middle school teacher explained,

I feel that whatever my students needs, in all areas of their lives, is what I have to be looking at. The social and emotional counseling/mediation in middle school is just crucial to our kids’ success at this age and developmental level. Not only can we help them sort things out in a peaceful, non-threatening manner but we also can use these opportunities as fantastic teaching moments. We cannot teach our children without social/counseling and mediation…it’s part of our lives.

Participants were given a list of issues and asked to mark which ones they most frequently encountered that required social and emotional counseling and mediation. The list of commonly reported issues was derived from the pilot study I conducted in which teachers were asked an open-ended question about the common issues they encountered in the classroom. From those data, I compiled the most frequently reported issues. Teachers had the option to choose from peer relationships, bullying, family problems, self-esteem, health, school/academic, and other to allow them the opportunity to specify. Ninety-seven percent of the teachers reported dealing with family problems, and 97% viewed self-esteem as an issue that was commonly encountered and in need of counseling and mediation. Ninety-three percent of the participants reported having to frequently deal with peer issues at school. Ninety percent marked that they deal with school/academic issues, and 83%
checked that they encountered bullying as an issue that required counseling and mediation. Seventy-two percent reported dealing with health issues in the classroom, and 28% marked other. Of those who marked “other,” they specified issues such as anger management, gangs, drugs and alcohol, and homelessness.

When teachers were asked how these issues affected their students’ learning, 97% of the teachers expressed that they had a large impact on students’ learning.

**Techniques.**

The next section of the survey asked participants the ways in which they dealt with these issues. Participants were given the option of choosing one or more of the following responses: referred students to a counselor, referred students to the nurse, called students’ families, referred students to peer counseling, dealt with the issues themselves without referral, and other with the option to specify. Ninety-seven percent of the participants reported dealing with the issue themselves without a referral. Ninety-three percent referred to a counselor, and 79% called the students’ families. As one teacher claimed, “Calling parents is usually a last resort.” Fifty-five percent marked that they had to refer to the school nurse, and 38% had referred to peer counseling. Twenty-four percent marked “other” and gave specifics such as creating student study teams, consulting with other teachers, referring to social workers or Indian Action, teaching social skills, using rewards, and role playing.

Teachers were then asked to describe what types of counseling or mediation techniques they used in their classroom. Ninety-seven percent of the participants
responded to this question. Of those who responded, the most frequently discussed technique was various types of social skills activities. One teacher reported using the Second Step program which is a social skills curriculum, and another teacher used social skills activities as “modeling, role playing, direct instruction, reflection, reading social stories, and environmental structure for problem solving and chilling (special areas and visual prompts).” Sixty-nine percent of the teachers discussed at least one type of social skills activity, including role playing, modeling behaviors, teaching a unit on bullying, journaling, telling social stories, and engaging in conflict management activities. Thirty-six percent discussed that active listening was a type of counseling and mediation technique they used, as one teacher defined it: “active listening with feedback, note taking and follow up questions and support.” Twenty-five percent of the teachers reported giving students a quiet space to take a break or time after school. Class meetings were reported as a technique used by 18% of the teachers. One teacher said she used class meetings,

…if it is something that affects the entire group—I use instructional time for this because I want to let the kids know it is just as valuable as academic subjects, if not more. Our class can’t function unless everyone feels safe and respected.

Eighteen percent of the teachers discussed using peer mediation as a technique in their classrooms. A teacher expressed using “peer mediation if only a few students are dealing with something. This usually happens on break, unless it is something
that makes it impossible for the students to learn.” Eleven percent of the teachers reported not using any counseling or mediation techniques in their classroom. As one teacher noted that she had “no formal techniques; never had training.”

Teachers were then asked to account for, on average, the amount of time per week that they spent counseling students on non-academic topics. They were given the option to choose between 30 minutes or fewer, one hour, one to two hours, two to three hours, three to five hours, or more than five hours. Twenty-four percent reported spending fewer than 30 minutes counseling students per week. Twenty percent of teachers claimed to spend between one and two hours per week. Another 20% of the participants marked they spent one hour per week counseling students, and 14% claimed to spend between three and five hours per week. The remaining 14% reported that they spent more than five hours per week counseling students on non-academic topics.

The next section asked teachers what types of support they have within their school when an issue arises. Forty-five percent of the teachers reported receiving support from their school psychologist. Of that group, 35% reported that their school psychologist had limited availability. Forty-one percent expressed receiving support from their administrative staff, and one teacher explained, “Our principal is very supportive and will readily deal with a student who is having difficulty.” Forty percent expressed calling upon a counselor which included the school counselor, crisis counselor, drug counselors, and counseling student interns, to deal with an
issue. Thirty-one percent of the teachers reported collaborating with colleagues when an issue arose with which they needed extra support. As one teacher stated, “We have a supportive staff that problem solves together, and we usually have time to talk with each other about issues.” Twenty-one percent of the teachers reported going to the school nurse for support, and 14% discussed using peer mediation support. One support discussed by a teacher included using “tribal leaders” who are high school students trained in mediation skills and explained, “When students have issues, we often turn to the tribal leaders for mediation.” Another teacher expressed using peer groups as a means to resolve an issue. Seventeen percent of the teachers reported using the special education staff as a support with whom to process issues. “Our RST offers insight on students and their needs, and can often help students solve their social/emotional issues when we have given up,” a teacher explained. Twenty-one percent of the teachers surveyed conveyed that they had little or no support when an issue arose. One teacher reported not having any support in the area, and two other teachers spoke about the limited availability of the support staff.

Interest in Further Training

The final section of the survey asked teachers to mark which types of further training or support they would be interested in pursuing to help deal with the issues that arose when working with their students. Teachers had the option of marking one or more of the following trainings: communication skills, questioning skills, reflective listening skills, problem-solving skills, conflict management skills, and
other. Ninety-seven percent of the teachers responded to this question. Seventy-nine percent of those responding reported an interest in conflict management skills training and 78% in problem-solving skills. Fifty-seven percent of the teachers selected questioning skills as a training they would be interested in pursuing, and 46% would consider training in communication skills. Forty-three percent would seek further training in reflective listening skills. Fourteen percent of participants marked other and specified the need for an in-service for the whole staff and empathy training for students. One teacher expressed interest in “current resources for the students at the fingertips, a counsel-friendly room or area in the school setting, opportunities to do hands-on projects that bring out issues with minimum invasiveness or probing, such as cooking or transplanting plants.” One hundred percent of participants who responded to this question expressed interest in further training of some kind.

Summary

One hundred percent of the teachers surveyed claimed to have dealt with issues themselves without a referral. Seventy-one percent of those teachers never had any counseling training. Of the teachers who reported having a Bachelor’s degree, 57% had no formal counseling training. Fifty-two percent of the teachers with Master’s degrees had no counseling training. Yet, out of the teachers who had not had any counseling training, 91% claimed that they dealt with peer relationship issues. One hundred percent of the teachers dealt with self esteem issues, and 95%
dealt with students who had family problems. Eighty-one percent reported dealing with bullying, and 71% marked dealing with health issues. Ninety-five percent of the teachers without any counseling training claimed that these issues had a large impact on students’ learning. Seventy-one percent of the teachers reporting to not have any counseling training claimed to spend more than one hour per week counseling and mediating non-academic issues.

The responses from the participants yielded many insights to the various roles that teachers must fill and the significant challenges that our students face. The following chapter is an analysis of those results.
CHAPTER FIVE
ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the types of issues that Special Education teachers face in their classrooms; the kinds of training they receive, if any, to adequately deal with those issues; and an assessment of the need for counseling and social and emotional mediation. The question that guided the central focus of this study was: What types of counseling training do teachers feel they need in order to deal with the social and emotional issues which commonly arise in their classrooms?

The subsequent sections of this chapter provide an analysis of the results and are divided into basic counseling skills for teachers (which combines the types of training teachers have had, the types of issues with which they commonly deal, and the techniques they’ve used), and interest in further counseling and mediation training.

Basic Counseling Skills for Teachers

The results from this survey indicated that although teachers are required to deal with very significant non-academic issues, the majority of them are not properly trained to do so. Of the teachers who had not received training, 95% of them used counseling and mediation strategies within their classrooms daily. They all felt that it
was an important part of their job. Every single participant reported dealing with at least three of the common issues discussed. Out of the teachers who claimed to have some counseling training, the majority reported having training independent of their credentialing program. Teacher responses made it clear that they were usually the first ones to deal with the many issues that arose in the classroom, and they were in need of acquiring the necessary tools in order to be able to deal more effectively with them.

When asked to define counseling, all of the teachers demonstrated a clear understanding of what the term means. All the respondents’ definitions included some aspect of the relationship between the counselor and the counselee. When asked to define social and emotional mediation, however, teachers seemed to be less clear as to what exactly it means. One teacher reported not really understanding the term. A large majority of the respondents related these terms to their classrooms making it clear that mediation and counseling were a significant part of their jobs. Of the teachers surveyed, the majority understood the basic concept of what counseling is and demonstrated a lesser understanding of what social and emotional mediation is.

The information gathered from the survey made it clear that the majority of Special Education teachers who participated were not adequately trained in basic counseling skills that could be used in their classrooms. However, all of the teachers who reported not having any formal counseling training also reported dealing with
significant social and emotional issues within their classrooms on a daily basis. Thus, they were confronted with the real dilemma of having to attempt to assist students in dealing with personal issues without benefit of the training in counseling and mediation that would prepare them to do so effectively. Teachers were, in essence, the first line of assistance to students confronting social and personal issues, and, because of their lack of training, could be considered not well equipped to assist them. Having teachers involved in counseling and mediation with students absent such training can possibly place teachers at risk of making errors in their assistance to students and as a result could place students at risk as well.

Of the teachers who reported having some counseling training, the majority had received it from taking professional workshops outside of their teacher preparation programs. Teacher education programs currently do not include counseling and mediation as part of the state-mandated curriculum, although teachers routinely are called upon to intervene in students’ personal, emotional, and social issues and would surely benefit from the knowledge of how to do so successfully and effectively.

The results revealed the major issues that teachers face and must deal with in their classrooms. Of the six broad categories to choose from (peer relationships, bullying, family problems, self-esteem, health, and social/academic issues), all of the teachers reported dealing with at least three, with the majority of teachers marking every single one. This demonstrates the reality that teachers face on a daily basis,
dealing with profoundly difficult, nonacademic issues with students without the
necessary training and on-going support. Ninety-seven percent of the teacher claimed
that these issues had a large impact on students’ ability to learn.

Even without formal training, the majority of teachers reported using some
type of social skills activity or strategy when issues arose. It is clear from their
responses that despite the lack of counseling and mediation training, the teachers
were required to figure out some methods for handling a wide variety of situations.
Although they had not received any counseling or mediation training, they had
learned how to manage and remediate very difficult situations on a daily basis. Their
interest in receiving additional training may indicate that they recognized
deficiencies in their intuitive approach to these situations. It is important to note
that this study did not examine the effectiveness of the intervention strategies the
teachers utilized in their assistance to students and so relied on teachers’ verbal
report only.

All of the teachers surveyed reported spending a substantial amount of time
dealing with nonacademic issues. A large part of this group reported spending more
than five hours per week on average. Every teacher reported spending at least 30
minutes per week counseling and mediating and dealing with many different non-
academic issues within the classroom. This is strong evidence for the need for
teachers to be formally trained in how to most effectively deal with these situations
during this time spent per week. These findings provide evidence that students are in
need of counseling and mediation support in order to be successful academically and that the teachers who are untrained are the ones spending a significant amount of time dealing with these issues. The next section justifies the need and interest that teachers have in counseling and mediation training.

Interest in Further Training

Teachers expressed strong interest in the various trainings suggested in the survey. Every teacher indicated an interest in at least two different types of trainings, with the majority marking four out of the five options. Fourteen percent marked other and elaborated on the specifics of the types of trainings they would find beneficial. The participants, all experienced teachers, were well aware of the limitations of their own abilities to intervene in their students’ life issues and indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to learn more and increase their skills. Since counseling and mediation are such a large part of teachers’ jobs but are not included in credentialing programs, the participants’ interest demonstrates an obvious need for further support and training.

Summary

With 97% of the teachers reporting that they dealt with students’ issues themselves, it was commonly expressed that little outside support was available to assist them in helping their students. Despite this lack of external support and of appropriate pre-service training, counseling and mediation were a large part of the teachers’ daily role. As the teachers noted, students’ life issues impacted their ability
to learn, and as a result the teachers were in need of learning how to effectively handle issues that arose on a daily basis. Many of their interventions were intuitive rather than based on best practices in counseling and mediation. Teachers may have realized this and sought out additional training on their own.

When teachers are underprepared to productively deal with the many social and emotional issues that arise in the classroom, children can be impacted. Having teachers well prepared to successfully counsel and mediate the many issues they encounter on a daily basis could pave the way for increased learning, better relationships, effective communication, and increased self esteem.

The next chapter offers an examination of the limitations of the study, conclusions, and implications for future research.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

This project was chosen to explore the daily classroom challenges beyond those of meeting the state standards with which teachers deal in the field of Special Education. Its purpose was to demonstrate the significant need for Special Education teachers to be trained in basic counseling and mediation techniques. The literature review provided evidence of the various and more extreme social and emotional challenges that students with special needs face and described a variety of effective counseling techniques. A mixed methods survey was created to collect further information from Special Education teachers. Teachers reported being underprepared to deal with the social and emotional issues that arose in their classrooms and having an absence of any formal counseling training in their credentialing program.

The majority of teachers surveyed claimed to have no formal counseling or mediation training, despite their assertion that they are important and substantial aspects of their job. Even though they had little or no training, all of the teachers reported having intervened with some type of counseling or mediation strategy in their classrooms. The teachers reported having dealt with a variety of students’ difficult social and emotional issues, and they noted their students’ inability to learn when they were coping with these issues. Due to the lack of support within schools, all of the teachers reported dealing with these issues on their own.
Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted over two separate time periods: at the end of the school year and at the beginning of the following school year. Both represent very busy and stressful times for teachers. The middle of the school year would have been a more ideal time to conduct this study. The study was also limited in that it only involved a mixed method survey to collect responses from teachers. The two blocks of time that surveys were open were for only two weeks at a time. Three teachers completed the survey after the closing deadline, and as a result, their responses were not used.

The Special Education teachers who participated in this study were all from a single county. It would be beneficial to include a larger population and pull from a wider geographic setting. Also, only Special Education teachers were selected to participate.

The study focused solely on teacher’s written reports of their work with students and did not include any observations or interviews. My personal experiences also helped to guide the topic of this study and the questions that were derived in the survey.

Conclusions

Teachers need training in counseling and mediation. Students with special needs are at a higher risk for social and emotional challenges that impede their ability to learn. Due to the huge need for teachers to have the appropriate tools to deal with the social and emotional issues in their classrooms and the amount of time
they spend dealing with these issues, it seems imperative that these skills be learned in the pre-service credentialing programs. Since this is not currently the case, it is recommended that the counseling and mediation training be implemented school-wide. A yearly school or district wide training would keep teachers informed, give them sufficient tools to handle various situations, keep their practice fresh, and create a community of educators who are both comfortable and skilled in such interventions.

Prior to any type of counseling or mediation techniques being implemented, it is crucial that teachers create a trusting bond with their students in a safe environment. Students also benefit from feeling a sense of belonging and importance. Teachers are in need of learning active listening skills and nonjudgmental responses in order to be fully receptive to the students and situations. It is also recommended that any type of program be taught systematically, over an extended period of time, and combined with academics. This helps to increase the effectiveness of the strategies used and ensures that they do not take away from academics.

Implications for Future Research

In order to gain a greater understanding of the need for teachers to be trained in counseling skills, further research is needed. It would be more conclusive if the study were to include a representative sample of California’s Special Education teachers. Additionally, it would be helpful to analyze pre-service credential programs across the country, including those that reside in undergraduate degree
programs and those that are post-baccalaureate, as in California. With inclusion being a more widely accepted model in schools, it would be useful to survey general education teachers as participants as well. Also, information could be solicited not only through a mixed method survey, but using interview and observation techniques to emphasize and demonstrate further understanding of teacher roles and techniques used in the classroom. This should be done in the middle of the school year, as opposed to the beginning or end of the school year, to increase the response rate.

Because the research was based on verbal report as data from the teacher-participants, I have no objective measure of how accurate teachers were in their assessments of how often they intervened on personal and social issues with their students. It would be useful to collect more objective data to see if their verbal reports correlate to the actual frequency with which they intervened.

Further research is needed on various types of counseling techniques and types of counseling and mediation training programs for teachers. Additional questions that could be asked are: What are the differences in students’ experiences in a classroom in which the teacher uses social and emotional mediation and counseling techniques and a classroom in which the teacher does not? What are the outcomes of a classroom that has incorporated social and emotional mediation and counseling for one year? What are the outcomes of a selected number of counseling and mediation techniques? What is the effectiveness of the counseling and mediation strategies used by teachers absent of any formal training? What would be the content
of a training geared towards teaching counseling and mediation to Special Education teachers?

This topic is one that is a daily part of every Special Educators’ job. With budget cuts and a state in financial crisis, it seems unlikely that the teacher preparatory programs will add any additional requirements at this point. However, researchers and educators can continue to confirm the need for counseling and mediation to be incorporated in our classrooms, in hopes of future change. In order to meet students’ ever-changing and varied needs, teachers must learn how to holistically deal with all aspects of their students’ lives.
APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

Counseling Skills for Teachers

1. What grades do you teach?
   ________________________________________________

2. What subjects do you teach?
   ________________________________________________

3. For how many years have you taught?
   ________________________________________________

4. What is your educational background? (Choose one.)
   □ B.A. □ M.A. □ Ed.D./Ph.D.

5. Have you had any counseling training? Yes □ No □

6. If so, what kind?
   □ Undergraduate coursework
   □ Workshop
   □ Graduate coursework
   □ Other: _______________________________________

7. How would you define counseling?
   ________________________________________________

8. How would you define social and emotional mediation?
   ________________________________________________

9. What do you feel is your role as a teacher in relation to social and emotional counseling and mediation?
   ________________________________________________

10. What types of issues do you encounter in your classroom that requires counseling or mediation?
11. Peer relationships (i.e., friendship issues, romantic relationship issues, etc.)
   - Bullying
   - Family problems
   - Self-esteem
   - Health
   - School/academic
   - Other

12. How do these issues affect your students’ learning?
   - They have a large impact.
   - They have some impact.
   - They have little or no impact.

13. How have you dealt with those issues?
   - Referred students to a counselor
   - Referred students to the nurse
   - Called students’ families
   - Referred students to peer counseling
   - Dealt with the issues myself without referral
   - Other

14. What types of counseling or mediation techniques do you use in your classroom? Please describe.

15. On average, how much time do you spend counseling students on non-academic topics per week?
   - 30 minutes or fewer
   - 1 hour
   - 1 to 2 hours
   - 2 to 3 hours
   - 3 to 5 hours
   - More than 5 hours

16. What types of support do you have within your school for when an issue arises?
17. If you had the opportunity, what types of further training or support would you like to help you work with students on social and emotional issues that arise in your work with them?

☐ Communication skills (student and teacher)
☐ Questioning skills
☐ Reflective listening skills
☐ Problem-solving skills
☐ Conflict management skills
☐ Other

__________________________________________________________

Thank you for your participation!


