THESIS

EFFECTS OF AN INTERVENTION TO PROMOTE PARENTS' EMOTION COACHING

SKILLS AND THEIR CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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Research has suggested that parents' effective coaching of their children's emotions

(helping them label and effectively regulate their emotions) is associated with children's greater

development of emotional competence, which in turn is related to positive peer relationships and

better school readiness. Yet, research suggests that some parents dismiss their children's

emotions, rather than coaching them, and dismissing emotions is associated with negative

outcomes for the children. For this reason, the goal of the study was to implement and evaluate a

new emotion coaching curriculum for parents. The 15 parents of 21children ages 3-5 years

participated in the intervention and measures of emotional competence on these children were

compared to the same measures on 30 same-aged children whose parents did not participate in

the intervention. Results provided only weak support for the effectiveness of the intervention.

The intervention did not make a significant difference in parental dismissal and validation of

their children's emotions. However, there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-

test scores for the intervention group in level of children's emotional understanding that was not

found for the control group. This would suggest the effectiveness of the emotion coaching

intervention. Also, there are some limitations to the current study. First of all, there was no

control group for the parent measures. It would result in low internal validity for results about the

parent measure in this study. Another issue was that a low participation rate in the emotion

coaching intervention (only seven parents from one site and eight from the other). This may have

contributed to the inability to find significant findings in the study.

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INTRODUCTION

Emotions play significant roles in the development of young children (Eisenberg et al., 2001; Saarni,1990; Trentacosta et.al, 2006). Specifically, how to recognize and interpret emotions in a given situation is important for positive interactions and relationships with others (Halberstadt, Denham, & Dunsmore, 2001). Moreover, the way parents respond to their children's emotions is crucial for shaping the children's understanding of, regulation of, and fundamental attitudes about emotions (Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007).

Even though many studies have demonstrated the importance of parents' roles in emotional development of young children, this research has not been directly applied to the parenting education field. Although there have been some interventions aimed at helping early childhood teachers teach their students how to understand and appropriately regulate emotion (e.g., Izard, King, Trentacosta, Morgan, Laurenceau, Krauthamer-Ewing, & Finlon, 2008), parenting interventions typically focus on relationship building and dealing with negative behavior, rather than on helping young children understand and appropriately regulate their emotions.

Accordingly, this study piloted and evaluated a brief parent education program about emotion coaching. This intervention focused on increasing emotion understanding and emotion regulation in children aged from 3-5 by teaching parents to facilitate these skills in their children. It was hypothesized that the intervention would be associated with increases in these child emotional competencies, and that these increases would be predicted by increases in parents' validation of their children's emotions and decreases in parents' dismissing of their children's emotions. Parents of children aged 3 to 5 years participated because during this age period, there is important development in effective emotion regulation and emotional understanding, which is affected by parental socialization processes (Denham, 1986).

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The intervention implemented and evaluated for this study was designed to promote parents' understanding that emotions are useful and functional when dealt with appropriately, but can contribute to difficulties when they are not understood, are poorly regulated, and/or when maladaptive responses to them are selected. In addition, it was aimed at helping parents to recognize and validate their children's emotions, as well as helping their children to understand and regulate their emotions and those of others. Understanding emotions is imperative for successful interaction with other people. Parents play a pivotal role in helping their children learn about emotions. The ways parents express and regulate their own emotions in the home environment become important models for their children (Denham, 1998; Halberstadt, & Eator, 2003). Moreover, their reactions to their children's emotions and coaching of their children's understanding and regulation of emotions are crucial (Gottman et al., 1996). However, many parents have difficulty knowing how to deal with their young children's emotions, especially their negative emotions (Chen, Lin, & Li, 2012). They may believe that all negative emotions are bad and that they should teach their children not to have or express those emotions. However, research has suggested that invalidating children's emotions or teaching them to suppress their emotions may lead to negative outcomes for those children (Eisenberg et al., 1998).

An approach to understanding the functional and dysfunctional effects of emotions is functionalism. Functionalists take the perspective that each emotion helps promote adaptive functioning (Barrett, 1995; Saarni, Campos, Camras, & Witherington, 2006; Witherington & Crichton, 2007). They believe that all emotions play significant roles in behavior regulation, social regulation, and internal state regulation, and that no emotion is "all bad" or "all good;"rather, each emotion can be helpful or harmful, depending on the specifics of the situation and how the

individual responds to the emotion.

First, it is important to explain what functionalists mean by "behavior regulation," "social regulation," and "internal regulation." According to the functionalist approach, each type of emotion (such as sadness, anger, happiness, shame) is associated with a propensity to behave in a particular way in relation to the environment (the behavior regulatory function). For example, fear impels the person to withdraw, freeze, or avoid the fearful or dangerous situation. With respect to the fearful situation, this usually is an adaptive response, in that it reduces the danger. However, at times this withdrawal creates difficulties with respect to other tasks the child needs to do. For example, the child's withdrawal may keep him/her from interacting with other children or from engaging in useful activities. The parent should not ignore or force the child to ignore or suppress the fear; it is a real emotion, promoting behaviors (and other processes; see below) that are, in some ways, adaptive. However, the parent may need to help the child to connect with safe people and activities despite the child's inclination to withdraw.

Similarly, each emotion regulates internal processes (cognitive processes and feelings) that are functional in relation to the emotion, but may not always be functional in relation to other goals and activities. For example, a child who had a fight with his friend may feel mad at the friend, and may focus his attention on the things his friend said or did to him. This focus may help him in remembering what happened, thinking of what elicited the anger, and so on, but it also may distract him from the fun science activity he is supposed to be doing in his preschool classroom. The cognitive process that was enhanced by the emotion was functional with respect to the child's understanding and memory of what makes him angry; however, it is counterproductive with respect to the ongoing preschool activity.

Third, the social regulatory function involves how the emotion impels the person to

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interact with other people. For instance, a child feels pride about herself because she has just tied her shoe lace by herself for the first time. The pride makes her eager to show parents what she did. Another example is social regulation by shame. If a child feels shameful about himself, he is likely to avoid making eye contact with others, lower his head, and otherwise communicate a small or inadequate self to others. From this perspective, emotions serve an important social communicative function, telling others certain things about the self and/or what has occurred. This is an important influence on interaction. In these examples, shame and pride tell others that children understand what is valued in their culture and accomplish or failed to accomplish socially sanctioned goals.

Thus, according to functionalist theory, emotions, including negative ones, serve important functions for the person. It is not desirable to ignore or suppress emotions. This theory also highlights the role emotions play in social interaction. Emotions communicate important information to others. By doing so, they facilitate others' understanding of the person and the development of relationships with the person. To the extent that parents are sensitive to these communications, for example, this may help them respond appropriately to their child's needs. The important role of responding appropriately and sensitively to children's signals in the development of a secure relationship between parent and child is a cornerstone of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment theory predicts that parents' sensitivity to their children's emotion signals greatly influences the security of the attachment relationship children form to them, and the security of their attachment relationship with their parents, in turn, has a large impact on the relationships children form for the rest of their lives, as well as on virtually every other part of their development (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby (1969) hypothesized that how parents treat their children has overarching impact on the child's personality and emotional development.

Bowlby (1969) elucidated this idea with the concept of the internal working model. He stated,

> Every situation we meet with in life is construed in terms of the representational models we have of the world about us and of ourselves. Information reaching us through our sense organs is selected and interpreted in terms of those models; its significance for us and those we care for is evaluated in terms of them, and plans of action executed with those models in mind. On how we interpret and evaluate each situation, moreover, turns also how we feel (Bowlby, 1980, p. 229).

Bowlby (1980) assumed that children's initial attachment is formed with a primary caregiver, and this attachment serves as the basis for an internal working model of self and other that is the prototype for all future relationships for the rest of the child's life. Although this working model can be modified, it is not easy to do so because all future relationships are viewed through the lens of this working model. Moreover, as the child grows older and additional support is garnered for the working model, it becomes increasingly difficult to change. Numerous studies have been done to support this theory (Gorrese, & Ruggieri, 2012; Grossmann, Grossmann, & Kindler, 2005; Mayseless, & Sharf, 2007). For instance, Gorrese and Ruggieri (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of the relationship between parent attachment and peer attachment. The meta-analysis indicated that secure attachment to mothers was associated with positive peer attachment. Verschueren and his colleagues (1999) also conducted a study to investigate how attachment to a primary caregiver influences peer relationships and behavior problems in kindergarten. The results from the research showed that children with secure attachment to their parents tend to adapt well to school life, have more positive relationships with peers, and better self-image.

Attachment theory also highlights the importance of emotion communication and of parents' appropriate responses to it. If a parent with an infant does not respond well to his/her infant's emotions, this could adversely affect the infant's working model of self and others and, thus, the infant's peer relations and self-development later in life. This suggests that parents'

validation of their children's emotions and appropriate responses to their emotions at early ages are important. Through socialization of emotions by their own parents, children learn that emotions are important, and what each emotion is about. Furthermore, young children learn how to deal with those emotions within a given situation through emotional interaction with their parents. In other words, parents' validation of, labeling of, and responses to their children's emotions teach children about emotions and how to respond to them, and foster healthy socioemotional development (Cicchetti, 1990; Shipman, Zeman, Penza, &Champion, 2000).

Another approach to understanding parental influences on children's emotional development is Gottman's concept of parental emotion coaching, which is a part of his more general concept of "meta-emotion." Gottman (1996, 1997) defined meta-emotion as, "an organized set of feelings and cognitions about one's own emotions and the emotions of others" (Gottman et al., 1997, p.7). Meta-emotion theory elaborates that children mirror the ways parents think and feel about their own and others' emotions. Each parent takes a somewhat distinct approach to emotions. Moreover, parents who have a good understanding of emotions show different parenting practices from parents with insufficient emotional knowledge (Chen, Lin, & Li, 2012). This difference is related to the characteristics of "emotion coaching" and "emotion dismissal" (Lagacé-Séguin, & d' Entremont, 2006).

Emotion coaching is more common in parents who are conscious of their own emotions and their children's emotions. This emotion recognition helps the parents to talk about their own and their children's emotions and feelings with open attitudes. In addition, it helps parents validate their children's emotions and assist their children in dealing with the emotions. Consequently, parents who act as emotion coaches are more responsive and nurturing to their children's emotions. Those parents who support their children to adapt to emotional challenges, moreover,

encourage their children to develop effective and socially acceptable coping strategies about emotions (Gottman et al., 1996, 1997; Lagacé-Séguin et al., 2006). Emotion coaching also can be related to attachment theory, which emphasizes sensitive and nurturing parental reactions to their young children's emotional needs (Cassidy, 1994). Moreover, some research suggests that such proper and timely parental responses to their children's emotions increase possibilities of successful skills in emotion regulation later in life (Contreras et al., 2000). The way parents respond to their children's emotions influences young children's strategies toward emotion (Thompson, 1994).

To the contrary, emotion dismissal is defined as a lack of understanding and validation of emotional expression. These attitudes lead to comments and behaviors that foster their children's suppression of their children's emotions. These parents struggle to suppress negative emotion rather than talking with their children to solve the emotional challenges. A child who has a parent with an emotion dismissal parenting style tends to think that any negative emotions in appropriate. As a consequence, the child will try to suppress negative emotions rather than coping with them (Lagacé-Séguin et al., 2006).

Many studies suggest that parental emotion coaching is related to their children's socio- emotional competence (e.g., Hops, Davis, Leve, & Sheerber, 2003; Katz & Hunter, 2007). Emotional competence is defined as both being aware of and also properly regulating emotions in emotionally arousing situations (Halberstadt, Denham, & Dunsmore, 2001; Katz, Hessler, & Annest, 2007; Saarni, 1999; Thompson, 1994). In other words, emotional competence mainly lies in two abilities: emotion understanding and emotion regulation (Kidwell,Young, Hinkle, Ratliff, Marcum, & Martin, 2010). These two skills are related to

positive developmental outcomes of preschoolers such as positive peer relationships and

positive social behaviors (Izard, Fine, Mostow, Trentacosta, & Campbell, 2002).

EMOTION UNDERSTANDING

The ability to understand others' emotions is crucial in the development of positive social relationships. A plethora of research has shown that comprehension of others' emotions is associated with increasing prosocial behavior. Children who have skills in understanding emotion are more likely to be good at perspective taking, which is closely related to high social competence (Denham, McKinley, Couchoud, & Holt, 1990; Laible & Thompson, 1998).

One focus of the proposed intervention and its evaluation is on enhancing preschoolers' understanding of emotions. Young children's ability to understand emotions develops rapidly during the first 5 years in life (Hala, 1997). As early as during the first year of life, infants can discriminate among at least some facial expressions of diverse emotions (Field & Walden, 1982; Hala, 1997), and are even able to act on the different functional implications of emotions (e.g., a parent's anger or fear indicates that one should avoid the referent of the anger or fear; a parent's happiness means one can approach the referent (e.g., Barrett, Campos, & Emde, 1996; Feinman, & Lewis,1983; Flom & Johnson, 2011; Klinnert, Emde, Butterfield, & Campos, 1986).

From around 2 years of age, young children start expressing their emotions verbally (Bretherton & Beeghly, 1982). Verbal understanding of emotion progresses throughout the preschool years. At first, children seem to best understand happiness, followed by sadness, anger, and fear, about which children have a basic understanding by around 3 years (Harter, 1982). Moreover, children have a basic understanding of which situations elicit each emotion by about the same age (Hala, 1997).

Young children aged 3 to 5 also begin to understand that emotional responses are more closely related to a person's own interpretation of the context, rather than simply resulting from the situation (Hala, 1997). Wellman et al. (1995) examined how preschoolers' understanding of

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emotion is conveyed in their natural language from age 2 to 5. They found that even the youngest children evidenced some understanding that different children could differently express their emotions in the same situations. These children's verbal statement about emotions shows us they were beginning to understand the distinct differences among individuals in reactions to the same situation. For instance, "I was happy, but he was sad." reminds us that different children respond to the same situation in a different way (Wellman et al., 1995). Children of this age period also begin to learn when they can show their emotions in public. In Banerjee's research (1996), the results showed that children between 3 and 5 years old could tell the differences between when they could show their emotions and when they should not display their emotions in public. This point is related to emotion regulation (Cole, Michel, & Teti, 1994; Hala, 1997), which I will discuss shortly. However, as indicated earlier, this understanding develops gradually during early childhood. This is why interaction between parents and children is important in the development of emotional competence; parents can aid children in developing these skills.

Understanding emotions is important because if a child has difficulty understanding and empathizing with others' emotions, the child is less likely to be cooperative and more likely to act aggressively toward peers. Findings from Trentacosta and Fine (2010) support how lack of understanding of emotion could be a cause of negative social behavior and behavior problems (see also Hughes, Dunn, & White, 1998). Other research supports the important role of emotion understanding in peer relationships and positive social behaviors (Denham et al., 2002; Trentacosta, & Izard, 2007). For instance, when children can understand other people's emotions, they can understand and feel empathy about their classmate's sadness about not being a member of a game, and they might be more likely to

help the friend to participate in the activity. This example shows how emotional

understanding leads to positive social behaviors toward peers and better peer relationships

(see Halberstadt, Denham, & Dunsmore, 2001).

EMOTION REGULATION

Another focus of the parenting intervention in this study will be effective emotion regulation. Emotion regulation has been variously defined. At times, researchers have defined "well regulated" as more positive emotion relative to negative emotion. For example, Denham (1986) argued that keeping a balance between positive and negative emotion could be critical in peers' likeability. However, negative emotions serve important functions, as indicated by more recent research. As alluded to earlier, there is substantial evidence that suppression of negative emotions is associated with negative outcomes (e.g., Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010). In addition, negative emotions themselves can promote adaptive behavior. For example, in a learning/extinction paradigm, as infants displayed anger during a partial reinforcement or extinction phase, their instrumental behaviors also increased (e.g., Lewis, Alessandri, & Sullivan, 1990; Lewis & Ramsay, 2005; Lewis, Ramsay, & Sullivan, 2006; Sullivan & Lewis, 2003). Another study of 6-, 12-, and 18-month-old infants revealed that avoidance, when promoted by fear, was associated with a diminishing of that fear (Buss & Goldsmith, 1998), as did a study of 18- and 24-month olds (Diener & Mangelsdorf, 1999).

One of the greatest difficulties in defining emotion regulation has been in distinguishing emotion regulation from emotionality. Functionalist approaches to emotions and emotional development have highlighted the important functions served by both positive and negative emotions in everyday life. All emotions help people in monitoring and realizing goals, coping with concerns, and dealing with other people. Thus, all emotions, themselves, serve regulatory functions. As mentioned earlier by Barrett (e.g., Barrett, 1998; Barrett & Campos, 1987), for example, each emotion serves three types of functions: (1) social regulatory functions (communication of needed information to others), (2) internal regulatory functions (e.g., feelings

that alert one about the importance of what has happened; effects on cognitive processes, such as narrowing focus to relevant information), and (3) behavior regulatory functions (action tendencies that impel one toward engaging in behaviors that serve a particular function, such as withdrawal in sadness or overcoming a barrier in anger). Given that emotions themselves regulate individuals' thoughts and both social and nonsocial behaviors, which may actually lead to reduction of the emotion that prompted them, some argue that it is impossible and undesirable to distinguish emotionality from emotion regulation (e.g., Campos, Frankel, & Camras, 2004). Others find it useful to distinguish emotionality from emotion regulation, but note that the two overlap greatly (e.g., Barrett, 2013; Thompson & Meyer, 2007). For the purposes of this study, we will be using the following definition of emotion regulation, which is inclusive of both regulations by emotion and regulation of emotion:

> Emotion regulation entails volitional and nonvolitional processes, both intrinsic to the emotion and extrinsic to it that modulates, promote, or otherwise control or alter an ongoing emotion process. Regulation may involve preventing or disrupting the emotion process, decreasing or increasing its intensity, devising plans or actions to cope with the emotion and/or context, launching another emotion to replace or modulate the ongoing emotion, eliciting the help of others, or many other processes (Barrett, 2012, pp. 61-78).

Numerous studies have documented the important role of emotion regulation in emotion competence (see Denham & Burton, 2003; Saarni, 1999). Moreover, insufficient skill in emotion regulation is associated with increased risk of behavior problems and psychopathological symptoms (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010; Greenberg, 2002; Sher, & Grekin, 2007). Accordingly, emotion regulation is a key factor to include in an intervention to help parents promote the socioemotional development of their children (e.g., Cicchetti, Ganiban, & Barnett, 1991; Cole, Martin, & Dennis, 2004; Thompson & Calkins, 1996). Emotion regulation during early childhood provides basic skills needed for two crucial areas of development:

successful transition to elementary school/school readiness, and prevention of challenging behaviors and/or behavior problems.

      Emotion regulation and social competence. First of all, several findings support that emotion regulation is associated with having better friendships, and promoting enhanced school performance (Blair, 2002; Calkins, Gill, Johnson, & Smith, 1999; Contreras, Kerns, Weimer, Gentzler, &Tomich, 2000). In other words, poor emotion regulation skills can be self-perpetuating, influencing later academic adjustment to school. A child with poor skills in emotion regulation might withdraw from stressful situations and/or peer interactions, or may be rejected by peers because of aggressive behavior, and as a result, might have fewer opportunities to practice regulatory behaviors in the future. Accordingly, a shortage of emotion regulation skill at early ages could be related to problems in regulatory behaviors later in life. Howse and his colleagues (2003) carried out a study concerning the relation between emotion regulation and academic adjustment at school. In particular, the finding supports that if young children at preschool ages do not have skills in emotion regulation, they have trouble in achieving academic success at kindergarten ages as well. It shows the importance of skills in emotion regulation at preschool ages for the positive developmental outcomes in the future.

      Further, Ladd and colleagues (2000) supported that young children's positive early experiences in school set the stage for better school performance and peer relationships in the future. The researchers explained that good peer relationships and school performance are important factors in successful adjustment to the school environment. The findings of Shields and colleagues (2001) also indicate that high-risk children who have skills in regulating their own emotions show better adaptation to the new classroom environment, such as having positive relationships with teachers. Thus, skills in emotion regulation may help at-risk children to acquire

a developmental asset such as a good teacher-student relationship in the future. As Belsky and MacKinnon (1994) noted, preschool children are asked to follow classroom rules for the first time in their lives and to initiate interaction with other peers for the first time in their lives. To navigate the preschool classroom successfully, they must learn how to share toys, take turns, and so on. These challenging peer contexts require successful regulation of the emotions, such as frustration, anger, and sadness, that are provoked (Denham, 1998). Fabes and his colleagues (2002) indicated that the strategies children use to regulate negative emotions influence their peer relationships. If children have a problem in regulating their negative emotions and scream or behave aggressively, peers in the classroom are likely to avoid playing with them. This pattern of behavior, therefore, could lead to negative peer relationships (see also Denham et al., 2003).

Emotion regulation and behavior problems/psychopathology. Another important reason for focusing on emotion regulation is the positive relation between behavior problems or psychopathology and poor emotion regulation (e.g., Calkins & Dedmon, 2000; Cole & Hall, 2008; Cole, Luby, & Sullivan, 2008; Eisenberg, et al., 2001). Aldao and Nolen-Hoeksema (2012) found that dysregulated emotion was predictive of psychopathology in the future. Poor emotion regulation is associated with later clinical depression (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010; Nolen-Hoeksema, Sisco, & Lyuboomirsky, 2008; Cole, & Hall, 2008). Furthermore, Cole and her colleagues (2008) showed that dysregulation of emotions is associated with higher levels of aggression and antisocial behavior. In addition, McCoy and Raver (2011) found that level of emotion regulation was negatively correlated with internalizing and externalizing behavior problems.

As alluded to earlier, research suggests that some ways of regulating emotions are more effective than others. In particular, suppression of emotion is associated with increased risk of

concurrent and later psychopathology (Aldao,Nolen-Hoeksema, &Schweizer, 2010).

Many studies demonstrate that suppressing or avoiding emotions could have negative

effects on developmental outcomes (Gross, & Levenson, 1997; Hayes et al., 1999;

Hughes, & Gullone,

2010). Substance abuse or a deficiency in problem-solving could be consequences of

emotion avoidance (Hayes et al., 2004; Wenzlaff, &Weger, 2000).

Age of onset of emotion regulation. It is possible for children as young as one year

of age to manifest some capability in nonvolitional emotion regulation (Rothbart, Ziaie, &

O'Boyle,

1992). In other words, although infants may not consciously decide to regulate their

emotions, they show some emotion regulation capabilities by the end of the first year of life,

although much development will still occur in these skills (Buss & Goldsmith, 1998). There

is evidence that by 3 years of age, children are capable of at least some conscious, volitional

emotion regulation. From this period onward, young children gradually learn how different

the internal mind is from their behaviors (Cole, Dennis, Smith-Simon, & Cohen, 2009;

Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001). Parents play a crucial role in this process. Some studies

have also delineated that the relationship between parents and their children influences skills

in emotion regulation (Parke, & Ladd, 1992).

Cole and her colleagues (2008) found that different parents have different

strategies for responding to their children's emotions. One approach is to validate their

children's emotions and to teach them how to deal with them; accordingly, the parents try

to teach their children to recognize and deal with negative and positive emotions.

Therefore, parents encourage them to cope with emotional challenges and, thus, to

develop skills in self-regulation of emotions. Conversely, another type of parent is likely

to only focus on down-regulating or controlling their negative emotions without accepting negative emotions as valid reactions, or helping children to understand their feelings. The children with these parents tend to have limited skill in understanding emotions and skills in coping with emotional situations.

POSITIVE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND SOCIAL COMPETENCE

The term "positive social behavior" as a synonym for social competence was used by Epps and his colleagues (2005). They stated that maintaining a good relationship with peers, recognizing other people's feelings, and knowing other people's perceptions about situations could be defined as social competence. Young children who have good social competence positively interact with grown-ups and with their friends (Katz & McClellan, 1997). This is why social competence is considered important for developing and maintaining good social relationships (Izard et al., 2008).

Besides its importance for developing and maintaining healthy relationships with other people, some studies have shown that social competence is a predictor of success in school as well. Children's positive relationships in school are associated with more active participation in classes and extracurricular activities, probably because these relationships make children more interested in school. In the end, children who are more socially competent have better future performance in school (Shields et al., 2001). In addition, preschool social competence is predictive of later positive relationships. Denham and Holt (1983) explained when preschoolers were preferred by peers during the preschool years, those preschoolers tended to have a higher possibility of keeping a good peer relationship for the elementary school years.

SOCIOEMOTIONAL INTERVENTIONS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

As indicated earlier, there is much evidence that early socioemotional competence is stable over the life course (e.g., Denham, et al., 2003). Thus, it is apparent that early intervention, to prevent the development of behavior problems and to facilitate the development of socioemotional competence, is desirable. Although more socioemotional interventions have been devised for school-aged children than for preschoolers, several preschool intervention approaches have been developed and found to be effective. The parenting intervention implemented and evaluated in this study was based primarily on the Pyramid approach to intervention and on a relatively new intervention called SORT it out (Stop Observe Relax and Think) that has been found to be effective in preliminary research. In this section, I will review the best known parent intervention for this age group—the Incredible Years (Blok, Fukkink, Gebhardt, & Leseman, 2005; Fox, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003; Webster-Stratton, 2006), as well as these approaches and evidence of their effectiveness.

Intervention programs can be classified into three groups: home-based programs, center-based programs, and combined programs that have elements of both. Most home-based socioemotional intervention programs focus on either teaching parents best practices for dealing with "challenging behavior" and disciplining their children, promoting secure relationships with their children, or both. Research documents the effectiveness of home-based programs in decreasing the likelihood of later behavior problems (de Graaf, Speetjens, Smit, de Wolff, & Tavecchio, 2008). Numerous studies have already demonstrated that programs targeting parents positively change parents' attitudes and strategies for raising their children. In addition, they support that those changes result in improved socioemotional development and school performance (Smolkowski, Biglan, Barrera, Taylor, Black, & Blair, 2005). In particular, many

intervention programs have been delivered to parents with young children to promote positive social behavior at early ages. One of the best known programs is the Incredible Years (Webster-Stratton, 2006).

Incredible Years. The Incredible Years Parenting Training Program is one of the most thoroughly researched evidence-based socioemotional intervention programs for parents of children from 3 years old to 8 years old (Webster-Stratton, 2007). The Incredible Years is a "secondary intervention;" that is, it is not delivered specifically to a target group with identified behavior problems but to a population group that is at increased risk (e.g., due to low socioeconomic status). The goals of this program are to increase parenting knowledge and parenting skills and to help parents to develop healthy and positive relationships with their children and to help promote their children's positive social behavior. The Incredible Years focuses on general parenting knowledge and skill development, rather than specifically on emotion coaching or facilitating children's emotional competence. Evaluations of this program indicate that changes in parenting knowledge and strategies have a great impact on positive social competence (Reedtz, Handegård, & Mørch, 2011). Specifically, the program reduced the rate of behavioral problems in the future. However, given the previously described research supporting the importance of children's emotional competence, it would seem desirable to go beyond the Incredible Years' focus on general parenting strategies and to help parents specifically to foster their children's development of emotional competence.

SORT It Out (Stop Observe Relax & Think). In contrast to the Incredible Years, the SORT It Out intervention focuses specifically on helping children develop emotional competence (Barrett, Reimer, Walker, & Troyer, 2010). SORT It Out focuses on the development of emotional competencies, including emotion regulation and emotion knowledge, in children aged

3-5 years. The concept of this program originated from the research findings indicating that emotional competence has great impact on children's positive peer relationships and school readiness. In this intervention, teachers are provided a curriculum and trained to teach preschoolers how to recognize happiness, sadness, fear, and anger in themselves and others, as well as how to problem solve about responding to and regulating these emotions. As a part of this curriculum, teachers use puppet activities, storybook activities, circle time activities, and art activities. In addition, teachers coach children on emotion regulation techniques (such as taking deep breaths, going to a quiet area, listening to music, and "being a turtle") to teach children causes, facial expressions, functions, and consequences of each emotion, as well as how to problem solve about and regulate these emotions by Stopping, Observing, Relaxing, and Thinking (SORT).

One limitation of this program to date, however, is that parents are not involved in promoting the changes. Numerous studies indicate the importance of parental influences on their children's emotional development (Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, & Prior, 2009). Thus, the present intervention is designed to address this limitation of SORT it Out.

The Pyramid Model. The third approach to facilitating preschoolers' socioemotional development that will be utilized is the Pyramid Model (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003). This really is a model of how to promote socioemotional competence, rather than a specific curriculum. However, a website that promotes this model has many resources for teachers to use, as well as for trainers to use in training parents and teachers. Although it does incorporate information about the importance of emotion understanding and anger regulation, it places more emphasis on supporting good relationships with parents and peers and problem solving about social difficulties rather than on helping children problem-solve about and regulate a variety of

emotions. The approach consists of three-layered frameworks (Fox et al., 2003). The first layer of this program takes a universal approach for all children, similarly to Incredible Years and SORT it Out. This first layer actually is composed of two different levels. The objective of the first level of this layer is to set up healthy relationships young children and their caregivers. In the next level, the cooperative relationships between a family member and an outside supporter, such as a preschool teacher, are an important factor for forming a fundamental stepping stone for social and emotional development. From these strong collaborative relationships, parents and preschool teachers facilitate the young children's socioemotional development. In conclusion, the goal of this level is to set up a supportive environment to encourage young children to be socially and emotionally developed.

As suggested by the pyramid metaphor, the second layer is narrower, focusing on children who are experiencing risk or challenges with respect to their socioemotional development. The aim of this level is to provide young children at risk with more targeted supportive guidance for their social and emotional development. If given more directed coaching about social skills such as how to interact with peers, how to express their emotions in socially acceptable ways, and how to deal with each emotion, the children targeted at this level should reach their social and emotional growth potential (Denham et al., 2003).

The last layer is for children who need more intensive interventions to address more long-term challenging behaviors. As broad and universal intervention plans sometimes do not meet the needs of children with more challenging environments and behaviors, more personalized approaches are needed. In particular, a positive behavior support plan is a main part of this level. It focuses on pinpointing the functions served by children's challenging behaviors, and working to modify the environmental supports for the undesirable behaviors and to replace the challenging

behaviors with more adaptive responses. In the end, it encourages young children in this category to move toward a constructive track of social and emotional development. In conclusion, the first level in this program provides a solid foundation for all children's social and emotional development. On top of that, the rest of the steps focus on young children at risk, for whom early intervention could promote healthy social and emotional development. This approach will serve as a conceptual model for the intervention proposed for this study.

Tuning in to Kids (TIK). The goal of this program is to teach parents how to develop supportive responses toward their child's emotional reactions (to be an "emotion coach" for their child) (Havighurst & Harley, 2007). The program is delivered through activities, role-playing, and informational materials. In detail, this program has five goals: (1) to help parents to recognize their children's emotions; (2) to let parents know that emotion arousing situations are "teachable moments" for their child; (3) to help parents learn to accept their children's emotions; (4) to help parents to teach their children to express their emotions with words; and (5) to help parents help their children solve problems in emotionally arousing situations. Two facilitators meet with parents for 2 hours every week for 6 weeks, and fidelity checks are done every session. The first three sessions are to help parents to be aware and label their children's low intensity emotions. The objective of the fourth one is to teach parents how to deal with their children's anxiety and how to help their children solve problems caused by emotions. The final two sessions teach parents how to deal with their children's intense emotions, especially anger. The program teaches parents to understand their own emotions and how to regulate them. However, the intervention program does not teach parents how to help their children to understand causes, responses, consequences, and regulation of different emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear; it focused on labeling emotions, parental recognition of anxiety, and regulation of anger. The need

for regulation of extreme positive emotion or for negative emotions other than anger was not

highlighted, nor was emotion regulation strategies provided for these other emotions.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Only a small number of studies have focused on the effects of changes in parents' socialization of the emotional competence of young children, and to my knowledge, only the one study of TIK was directed at changing parents of preschoolers' socialization of their children's emotional competence. However, there is evidence that understanding and regulating other emotions is important as well. Accordingly, this study piloted an intervention to help parents coach their children's understanding and regulation of the emotions that preschoolers are best able to understand: happiness, anger, sadness, and fear. It investigated the relation of this intervention to children's emotional competence. In summary, this study examined the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Positive relationships exist between children's emotion understanding, understanding of emotion regulation strategies, and positive social behavior.

Hypothesis 2. Parents who complete the emotion coaching intervention will show a significant decrease in dismissal of their children's emotions and an increase in their validation of their children's emotions.

Hypothesis 3. Children of parents who complete the intervention will significantly improve in (a) understanding of emotion and (b) understanding of emotion regulation strategies.

Hypothesis 4. Parental validation after the intervention will be positively related to children's levels of understanding of emotions and understanding of emotion regulation strategies after the intervention. Parental dismissal after the intervention will be negatively related to children's levels of understanding of emotions and understanding of emotion regulation strategies after the intervention.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 51 children from an early childhood laboratory school at a public university and a community childcare center serving families from a range of SES groups, and 15 of their parents, participated in this study. Data were obtained from 21 children whose parents participated in the parenting intervention (described shortly) and their 15 parents (because some parents had more than one child), as well as from 30 children whose parents did not participate in the intervention group. The participants primarily self-identified as European Americans (64.7%), with 7.8% identifying as Hispanic, 2.0% as Asian, 11.8% as mixed ethnicity, 3.9% as "other", and 9.8% declining to indicate ethnicity.

The means for parental SES, using Entwisle and Astone's (1994) Socioeconomic Index (S.E.I) were 79.21 (*SD*=9.44) at the laboratory school, and 62.56 (*SD*=12.74) at the community childcare facility S.E. I. scores on this measure range from 0 to 100, and are based on the occupational codes from the 1980 census (Entwisle, & Astone, 1994), with higher scores indicating higher SES. All children at both sites received the universal Pyramid socioemotional intervention at their schools; the only difference between intervention and nonintervention groups was the additional parent emotion-coaching intervention (see below). Unfortunately, none of the parents from the control group provided data at the time of the post-test, so comparisons between intervention and control groups could not be made for parent-report measures. Participants were excluded if informed consent was not given or if the child did not speak or understand English well enough to understand the puppet assessments (see next section).

Measures

      Emotion understanding and emotion regulation. For this study, the first two sections of Denham's (1986) Affect Knowledge Test (AKT), a puppet measure of emotion understanding was used to measure child emotion understanding. The AKT is a widely used measure of emotion knowledge, with established reliability and validity (e.g., Denham, et al., 2003 found subscale alphas ranging from .69 for equivocal negative emotion (which will not be assessed in this study) to .79 for unequivocal emotion). Alphas were not calculated for the present sample because it was quite similar to the Denham et al. sample, and was small in number. The test examines young children's understanding of happiness, sadness, anger, and fear in relation to different facial expressions and situations. It was assessed on a scale from 0 (the opposite valence of the expected emotion) to 2 (correct emotion). An aggregate of mean scores across all four emotions was used to test hypotheses.

    To assess preschool-age children's awareness of emotion regulatory strategies, another puppet procedure, adapted from Cole, Dennis, Smith-Simon, and Cohen (2008) was used. Puppets enacted vignettes portraying happiness, anger, and sadness. In each story, the reasons for the puppets' emotions and for needing to 'stop' acting so happy, angry or sad were enacted and then the child was asked what the puppet should do to stop acting so happy, angry or sad. Each vignette consists of two types of questions: one open-ended question and three forced-choice questions. The child was first asked to make suggestions to the puppets; from these spontaneous suggestions, we coded strategy generation. In this open-ended query, the score of 0 was given when the answers were socially undesirable (e.g., hitting a friend, taking a toy away from a friend.). "One" was scored when a child provided a strategy, which was not social undesirable but was less effective than optimal (e.g., dwelling on a problem when one cannot do anything about

it). The score of 2 was given when a child provided an effective strategy (e.g., taking a deep breath, going to a cozy corner). Next, each puppet verbalized two strategies, one effective and appropriate strategy derived from the literature on emotion regulation and one parallel strategy that is regarded, under ordinary circumstances, as socially undesirable (e.g., hitting). For these forced-choice questions, a score of 0 for not effective was assigned and 2 for effective was given. All of the 0-2 scores for answers to open- and closed-ended questions were averaged for each vignette, and then these were averaged across vignettes to create the score, on a 0-2 scale that was used to test the hypotheses.

   Positive social behavior. The teacher-report version of the social competence scale (SCS; CPPRG, 1995) developed for the Fast Track Project was used for measuring positive social behavior. This assessment was being used as a part of the overall Pyramid intervention and was only completed very soon after the parent intervention for the present study had been conducted, so data were not available immediately before the parenting intervention or at the end of the intervention period on this measure. Children's prosocial/communication skills and emotion regulation skills were evaluated on 25 items, using a five-point Likert scale (from 0 = *not at all*; to 4 = *very well*). The alpha coefficients reported by CPPRG for the normative sample were quite high:

	Alpha coefficient
Prosocial/Communication Skills Subscale	0.96
Emotional Regulation Skills Subscale	0.96
Prosocial Com./Emotional Reg. Subscales Combined	0.98

   Parents' own strategies about emotions. The meta-emotion interview (Gottman et al., 1997) is usually used to assess the way parents respond to children's emotions according to Gottman's meta-emotion theory. However, the interview is one hour long. In addition, an

intensive training is required to code the interview for research. Accordingly, a short self-report questionnaire, Emotion Related Parenting Styles Self-Test (ERPSST-Likert; Lee, Hakim-Larson, & Voelker, 2000) was used to measure how the parents interact with their children. This questionnaire consists of 81 statements in Likert scale format (from 1 = *always false* to 5 = *always true*). All of the items in the questionnaire represent one of four parenting styles regarding emotions: emotion coaching, laissez-faire, dismissing, and disapproving. The alpha coefficients reported by Hakim-Larson et al. (2006) were good (Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranged from .72 to .91). These figures show that the items comprising each subscale reliably assess the same dimension as one another.

Procedure

In advance of the emotion coaching intervention, participant parents and teachers from both the intervention and control groups completed a consent form. Along with it, information about confidentiality and parental emotion coaching training schedules was briefly provided. Prior to and several weeks following this emotion coaching intervention, each parent was asked to complete the following questionnaires: Emotion Related Parenting Styles Self- Test (ERPSST-Likert). Teachers were asked to complete the Social Competence Scale (SCS) for the children at one time point, soon after the intervention parent training meeting. Furthermore, trained experimenters administered the AKT and the emotion regulation puppet assessment before and after the intervention program. Parents' questionnaire completion took approximately 30 minutes, and teachers' questionnaire completion took approximately 10 minutes per child.

Intervention program

The intervention program consisted of two parts. One part was a training presenting information to parents at the beginning of the intervention period. The goals of the training

session, along with the materials and activities parents were given at the training, were: (1) to help parents understand both the positive functions of emotions and the need to guide children's understanding of, regulation of, and adaptive responses to emotions, and (2) to help parents see the value in validating their children's emotions instead of dismissing them. The second part of the intervention consisted of at-home activities that parents were asked to do with their children, using materials provided by the program. Materials were provided to support parents in helping their children to understand emotions, problem solve about how to respond when they feel emotions, and learn how to regulate emotions appropriately. First, a set of children's books was given to parents, along with guidelines for reading the books interactively at home. Four of the books presented the four target emotions—happiness, sadness, fear, and anger — in a way that gave parents and children a chance to talk about the presented emotion and how to recognize, understand, and respond to it, as discussed in the book. In addition, a book on the "turtle" technique for reducing emotional arousal and a book on building positive peer relationships were provided, along with reading guides. The turtle story teaches the parents and their children how to regulate their emotions following four steps: 1. Stopping; 2. Taking three big breaths while "being like a turtle" tucked inside its shell; 3. Thinking about solutions and which one would bring the best outcome; and 4. Then "coming out of their shell" and trying out the best solution. The parents were asked to practice this process with their children at least once a day. This strategy helps their children to deal with emotionally arousing situations. Parents also were asked to read at least one book every week with their child, making sure to read books representing each of the four emotions at least once.

Along with the books, cards with facial expressions of the four emotions were given to the parents. After parents and children read each emotion book, they were to choose one card from

the collection of cards that represents the emotion presented in the book. Further, as a weekly activity, the parents and children were asked to write an emotion diary together using the same cards. Before the child went to bed, the child and parent were asked to talk about what the child felt at the school that day. Then the parent was asked to write down a short emotion diary entry (with the child's help) and to pick one illustration presenting that emotion. This provided the child with more experience thinking and talking about emotions.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

In order to determine whether there were site differences in levels of emotion understanding and understanding emotion regulation strategies, independent *t* tests were computed with site as the independent variable. The results showed that there was not a significant site difference in the levels of emotion understanding and understanding emotion regulation strategies. Also, independent *t* tests were computed to examine whether there were differences between males and females with regard to emotional understanding and understanding of emotion regulation strategies. No differences in emotional understanding and emotion regulation were observed by gender. Similar *t* tests were not done for the other outcome measures because the sample size was too small. Also, Pearson correlations were computed to look at associations between parental S.E.I. (socioeconomic index), children's emotion understanding, and understanding of emotion regulation strategies. The results indicated no significant correlations between these variables.

Hypotheses Testing

Pearson correlations were computed to test the first hypothesis that positive relationships exist between children's emotion understanding as measured on the Denham's puppet test, understanding of emotion regulation strategies as assessed by the Cole's puppet tests, and positive social behavior on the Social Competence Scale (SCS). There were no significant relationships between the puppet emotion knowledge and emotion regulation knowledge tests and any of the Social Competence Scale scores (SCS prosocial/communication, SCS emotion regulation, and SCS overall Social Competence scores). However, there were significant positive correlations between Denham's emotion understanding puppet test and Cole's emotion regulation

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understanding puppet test at both pretest and posttest (see Table 1).

Table 1

Correlations between Measures

Measure	SCS prosocial/ communication (N)	SCS emotion regulation (N)	SCS overall Social Competence (N)	AKT (Affect Knowledge Pre-Test) (N)	Emotion Regulation Knowledge Pre-Test (N)	AKT (Affect Knowledge Post-Test) (N)	Emotion Regulation Knowledge Post-Test (N)
SCS prosocial/ communication (N)	1						
SCS emotion regulation (N)	.91** (36)	1					
SCS overall Social Competence (N)	.96** (36)	.98**(36)	1				
AKT (Affect Knowledge Pre-Test) (N)	.21(36)	.09(36)	.14(36)	1			
Emotion Regulation Knowledge Pre-Test (N)	.18(36)	.14(36)	.19(36)	.34** (72)	1		
AKT (Affect Knowledge Post-Test) (N)	.19(27)	.14(27)	.19(27)	.36* (51)	.05(51)	1	
Emotion Regulation Knowledge Post-Test (N)	.17(27)	.22(27)	.23(27)	-.01(51)	.14(51)	.40** (51)	1

**p<.01

Note. (N) represents number of participants for each correlation.

A paired samples *t* test was conducted to test the second hypothesis that parents who complete the emotion coaching intervention show a significant decrease in dismissal of their children's emotions and an increase in their validation of their children's emotions. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for these measures, along with measures of effects size for this analysis. Results indicated that the emotion coaching intervention was not associated with a significant change in the overall level of dismissal by the participant parents, $t(14) = 1.24$. Also, a paired samples *t* test indicated that the emotion coaching intervention did not yield changes in parents' validation of their children's emotions, $t(14) = -.79$. Thus, the second hypothesis was not supported.

Table 2

Total descriptive statistics for parent questionnaire

Variables		Pre test		Post test	Effect Size (d)
	N	*M(SD)*	*N*	*M(SD)*	
Parental Dismissal	15	2.31(0.35)	15	2.14(0.45)	-.32
Parental validation	15	3.89(0.42)	15	3.98(0.33)	.21

Note: Cohen's *d* in this table indicates the strength of the change from pre-test to post-test for each item.

A mixed MANOVA with parents' participation in the emotion coaching intervention versus the control group as the between-subjects factor, the two assessments (pretest vs. posttest) as the within-subjects factor, and the overall scores on the emotion understanding task (AKT puppet measure) and the emotion regulation knowledge measure (ER puppet measure) indicated a significant Multivariate main effect for the interaction between intervention group (intervention vs. control) and Time (pre-intervention vs. post-intervention), $F(2,48) = 3.28$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$, indicating that change from pretest to posttest was greater for the intervention group. Follow-up ANOVAs indicated that this interaction was significant for level of emotion understanding $F(1, 49) = 6.68$, $p = .013$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$, but not for understanding of emotion regulation strategies, $F(1, 49) = 2.05$, $p = .158$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.04$. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for emotion understanding and emotion regulation understanding at pretest and posttest for intervention and control groups.

Table 3

Overall descriptive statistics for child assessments

Measures	Pretest		Post-test		Effect size
	N	M(SD)	N	M(SD)	Cohen's d
AKT (Affect Knowledge Test)					
Intervention	21	1.78(.17)	21	1.90(.10)	.86
Control	30	1.87(.12)	30	1.88(.16)	.07
Emotion Regulation Knowledge					
Intervention	21	1.68(.27)	21	1.81(.16)	.59
Control	30	1.72(.24)	30	1.72(.28)	0

Note: Cohen's *d* in this table indicates the strength of the changes from pre-test to post-test for each group.

Examination of the means indicated that there was no change in emotion understanding from pretest to posttest for the control group, but there was an increase in emotion understanding from pretest to posttest for the intervention group.

Multiple regressions were conducted to examine parent predictors of the levels of children's emotional understanding and understanding of emotion regulation strategies after the emotion coaching intervention. The parent predictors included their levels of validation and dismissal after the intervention. The first regression was not significant, indicating that the levels of parents' validation and dismissal did not predict their children's understanding of emotion, $F(2, 12) = .81$. The second regression, examining whether parental validation and parental dismissal predicted the level of children's understanding of emotion regulation strategies after the emotion coaching intervention, also was nonsignificant, $F(2, 12) = .15$. Thus, the fourth hypothesis was not supported.

Table 4

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis

Variable	AKT (Affect Knowledge Post-Test)					Emotion Regulation Knowledge Post-Test				
	B	*SEB*	β	t	Sig.(p)	B	*SEB*	β	t	Sig.(p)
Parental Dismissal posttest	-.03	.07	-.11	-.40	.70	.01	.08	.04	.16	.88
Parental Validation posttest	.11	.09	.33	1.22	.25	.06	.11	.15	.52	.61

Note: the analyses without including second children in any family, and results did not change.

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to explore the effects of a parent emotion coaching intervention on their preschool-aged children's emotional and social behavior. Overall, there were few significant results; however, as predicted, children in the intervention group showed increased understanding of emotions after the intervention, an effect not seen for the control group. This provides some support for the effectiveness of the intervention. Moreover, the two child measures were correlated significantly both before and after the intervention. This suggests that children whose emotion understanding scores increased due to the intervention also showed increases in scores on understanding of emotion regulation strategies. Inspection of the means for the emotion regulation understanding task does show an increase in the intervention group and not in the control group; however, the difference in change scores was not significant. Thus, although the effect of the intervention on emotion regulation knowledge was not significant, children did show improvement on both measures, and as suggested by the significant correlations between puppet measures, those who improved on one measure were more likely to improve on the other as well. Interestingly, the intervention group has almost no variability on post-test scores for either of these measures; whereas, the no-intervention group had a greater range on post-test scores, particularly on the emotion regulation understanding measure. Thus, it appears that the intervention group children's improvement on these measures may have led to ceiling effects that may have compromised the ability to find significant effects.

The first hypothesis that positive relationships exist between children's emotion understanding and emotion regulation understanding, on the one hand, and positive social behavior on the other, was not supported. The timing of the SCS assessment was such that it could not really be viewed as a way of ascertaining impact of the intervention. It was not completed at

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the time of either of the child assessments (pretest or posttest). Accordingly, the correlations neither assessed the concurrent relations before the intervention nor after sufficient time had passed so that the intervention was able to have impact. However, it was surprising they were not significant; the absence of relationship is inconsistent with the extant literature. An important limitation of the study was the small sample size, which may have compromised the ability to demonstrate significance when there are small to moderate effect sizes.

The second hypothesis was not supported, that parents who completed the emotion coaching intervention would show a significant decrease in dismissal of their children's emotions and an increase in their validation of their children's emotions. The results provided no evidence that the intervention made a difference in parental responses to the meta-emotion questionnaire. There are several factors that may contribute to these null findings. First, as indicated before, an important limitation of the study was the small sample size, and this was particularly true for parent measures. It is very likely that the small sample size seriously impacted power. The effect sizes were small to medium, suggesting that a relatively large sample would be needed to achieve significance. Moreover, it also is important to note that the intervention was not implemented fully for a number of reasons, which probably contributed to the relatively small effect sizes.

First, because of a number of practical considerations, the intervention was not introduced until more than halfway through the semester, and most children were no longer available once the semester ended. The original intent had been to have a semester-long intervention, but the training could not be conducted until late in the semester, so parents only were able to implement the intervention for about one month. Second, a single training session was used for the intervention, followed by a request that parents engage in activities at home. The original intent had been to have a "booster" training at midpoint in the semester; however, because the

intervention did not begin until after midterm, this booster was not implemented. Further, because of serious technical difficulties, the PowerPoint presentation for the one training session could not be presented and it was not possible to hear the trainer very well. Parents eventually got printed copies of the PowerPoint slides, but the session started late and was abbreviated as a result. Finally, it was not possible to follow up with parents to make sure that they actually carried out the activities requested of them, and it is likely that some or many of them did not engage in the activities frequently, if at all. Given these weaknesses of the intervention, it is not surprising that effects were not strong. There is evidence that multiple sessions of a parent intervention, over a longer period of time, with fidelity checks would be much more effective than a single session with technical difficulties (Wilson, Havighurst, & Harley, 2012).

As an example, Wilson, Havighurst, and Harley (2012) evaluated the effectiveness of changes in parenting practices on a child's emotional development in the "Tuning in to Kids" intervention. Their research suggests that multiple sessions over a more extended period of time produced better results. Their program was delivered in six sessions over the preschool years, and two follow-ups as the booster sessions were implemented after 6 months. Results of the evaluation indicated that the parents participating in the program showed an improvement in emotion socialization practices; in addition, the children acquired better emotion knowledge after their parents participated in this program (Wilson, Havighurst, & Harley, 2012). As this article would imply, a longer time period in the intervention and the multiple sessions might have a higher possibility of bringing positive results.

Secondly, anecdotal information suggests that the short time period between pre- and post-intervention/post-program assessments in the present study led to a lower response rate for the parent's questionnaire (ERPSST) in the post-program assessments. Parents, particularly those in

the nonintervention group, remarked that they had just filled out the questionnaire. Moreover,

because of my desire to have the intervention last as long as possible, posttests were not requested

until the very end of the semester. As a result, soon after the first request for parents to complete

the posttest assessment, the two preschools went into the summer session and many children and

parents were no longer available to participate. Thus, it was not possible to follow up to obtain the

questionnaires. This influenced the lower response rate in the parents' questionnaires (ERPSST),

and resulted in the failure of getting any questionnaires back from the parents in the comparison

group. Again, a proper and well-planned timeline could be key to enhanced results with this

intervention program.

Interestingly, the parental S.E.I. (socioeconomic index) was not correlated with levels of

emotional understanding or understanding of emotion regulation in this study, despite evidence in

the literature that it may be. Numerous articles indicated that parents of lower socioeconomic

status are likely to have fewer opportunities to provide effective parenting for promoting prosocial

behavior and emotional development in early childhood (Brooks –Gunn et.al., 1993; Garner, 2006;

Mokrue, Chen, & Elias, 2012). For this reason, low parental S.E.I was expected to be associated

with lower levels of emotional understanding, emotion regulation and social competence in

preschoolers (see also Blair & Razza, 2007; Lengua, Honorado, & Bush, 2007; Li-Grining, 2012).

Moreover, these findings were not due to lack of variability in SEI, in that these scores ranged

from 22.7 to 71.1.

A possible explanation for the lack of relationship between SEI and the two emotion

understanding measures is the school-based Pyramid intervention program at both sites. Both

schools participating in this intervention have implemented a classroom-based social and

emotional development intervention program for preschoolers. As plentiful research has indicated,

good school- based intervention programs for promoting social and emotional development can foster positive social and emotional development in preschoolers (Catalano et al., 2002; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins et al., 2004). Therefore, the school- based intervention program in the two preschools might have played a role in offsetting the influence of parental S.E.I on development of understanding of emotion and emotion regulation.

Also, there were no significant differences between boys and girls in level of understanding of emotions and emotion regulation. In contrast, numerous existing studies have found substantial differences in levels of emotional understanding and emotion regulation by gender (Calvete, & Orue, 2012; Cunningham, Kliewer, & Garner, 2009; Eschenbeck, Kohlmann, & Lohaus, 2007; Murphy & Eisenberg, 2002). However, a possible explanation as to why the current study did not find gender differences might be the school-based social and emotional prevention program. The program encourages teachers to help their children emotionally and socially and to be gender neutral. Accordingly, it might minimize the gender effect on emotional and social development of preschoolers.

There are some limitations to the current study. The first limitation is that there was no control group for the parent measures, which resulted in low internal validity for results regarding those measures in this study. Without such a comparison group, it is not possible to know whether any changes in the parent measures from pre-test to post-test are due to the parental intervention or another source, such as the Pyramid classroom intervention program for social and emotional development in early childhood. Also, a very small number of parents (seven from one program and eight from the other) participated in the emotion coaching intervention. This may have contributed to the lack of strong results supporting the hypotheses in this study because of reduced power. In addition, it is possible that this small set of parents did not accurately represent the

population of parents of children in these centers. Perhaps parents who were more or less skilled in promoting positive social and emotional development in their children, or who had children with lower emotional competence were more likely to attend the parent training. Available data do not support this inference, however. Examination of pretest data that were available suggests little difference between the parents who volunteered to participate in the emotion coaching intervention and those who did not, with no significant pretest differences between groups for children's scores on the emotion knowledge or emotion regulation knowledge test, nor between groups for parents' dismissing/disapproving or validation at pretest. Nor were there differences between the intervention and non-intervention groups in SEI scores. So, it appears that the intervention group was reasonably representative of the larger sample.

Another issue that may have contributed to the weak findings of the study was that the parent subscales seemed to have a restricted range. In detail, participants scored only from 1.96 to 2.66 at pretest and from 1.69 to 2.59 on posttest for dismissal and from 2.96 to 4.39 on pretest and 3.35 to 4.61 on posttest for validation on a scale potentially ranging from 1 to 5. They also indicated low variance on both parental dismissal of emotion (Variance: .14, SD: .37 at pretest; Variance: .20; SD: .45 at post-test) and validation of emotion (Variance: .17, SD: .41 at pretest; Variance: .11; SD: .33 at post-test), which may have contributed to the inability to find significant results with these measures.

In addition, ethnic diversity, although relative great for the city in which the study was conducted was still quite restricted in the present study, limiting generalizability of results. The sample was predominantly European American. Numerous studies have found that culture influences the way people express and recognize their emotions (Friedlmeier, 2005, 2010; Friedlmeier et al., 2011; Hwang, H., & Matsumoto, 2012; Matsumoto et al., 2008). Accordingly,

examining the effects of ethnicity on the outcome measures and effectiveness of this intervention would be an interesting direction for future research.

Third, there was no tracking of the implementation and fidelity to the curriculum of the at-home activities by the parents in the intervention group. Consequently, it is uncertain how well the parents in the intervention group took actions at home. In addition, there was no feedback provided for the parents in the intervention group. It is possible that low implementation and fidelity contributed to the weak results.

The importance of social and emotional development in young children has been emphasized more and more due to a rise in problems that may be the result of a lack of emotional regulation or understanding (Bierman, et al., 2008). Although this intervention, as implemented, did not produce strong results, it did provide some evidence of impact on children's levels of emotion understanding. Accordingly, it would seem worthwhile to implement an enhanced version of the intervention program with well-planned timelines, longer duration, more sessions, and fidelity checks to assess implementation quality, as well as with a larger sample and both pretest and posttest data on all measures with both the intervention and control group. Also, it would be worthwhile to implement the improved program with more diverse samples and with a delayed intervention control group with no school intervention, to look at the effectiveness of the parental emotion coaching intervention alone. Much research has indicated the benefits of emotional competence during the preschool years, and yet no extant parenting interventions seem to target the range of emotions, emotion socialization, and emotion regulation skills included in the present study. For this reason, further research is needed on this important topic.

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