

The SELf Project: A Yoga-Based SEL Program for Neurodivergent Adults

Sydney Ostroff, Occupational Therapy Doctorate

FACULTY MENTOR: Teresa Ludwig, OTD, OTR/L, ASDCS

INDUSTRY PARTNER: Grace Denfeld, OTR/L



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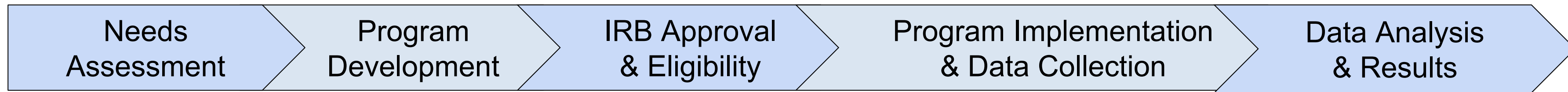
Introduction

Social and emotional learning (SEL) supports the development of emotional regulation, self-awareness, social communication, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2023). Most SEL programming has been designed for children in school settings, leaving a gap in interventions tailored to neurodivergent adults. Neurodivergent adults often face barriers related to emotional regulation, executive functioning, and social communication, which may impact community participation as well as employment opportunities (Bishop-Fitzpatrick, Minshew, & Eack, 2013). Studies are needed to develop SEL programing for this population, as current interventions are targeted towards the pediatric population (Todd, Miodrag, Colgate Bougher, & Zambom, 2019).

This study aims to:

- Explore the impact of a yoga-based SEL intervention.
- Implement a six-week structured program integrating SEL strategies.
- Evaluate participant experiences through audio transcriptions.
- Adapt yoga-based social stories to adult-centered SEL scenarios

Approach



- **Design:** This project uses a qualitative participatory design to examine how neurodivergent adults engage with and find meaning in a six-week, yoga-based SEL intervention.
- **Participants & Setting:** Neurodivergent adults aged 18+ enrolled at AFYA where the program was implemented.

SEL Topics

The Overload Inbox

A yoga story about recognizing signs of stress and using mindfulness to cope

Communication Beyond Words

A yoga story about nonverbal cues and reciprocal responding in shared spaces

The Emotions Backpack

A yoga story exploring the coexistence of multiple emotions at the same time

Screen Time

A yoga story exploring how nighttime screen exposure can affect sleep quality

The City of Many Colors

A yoga story about adult friendships, boundaries, and belonging

Taming the Brain Bully

A yoga story about noticing and addressing negative self talk

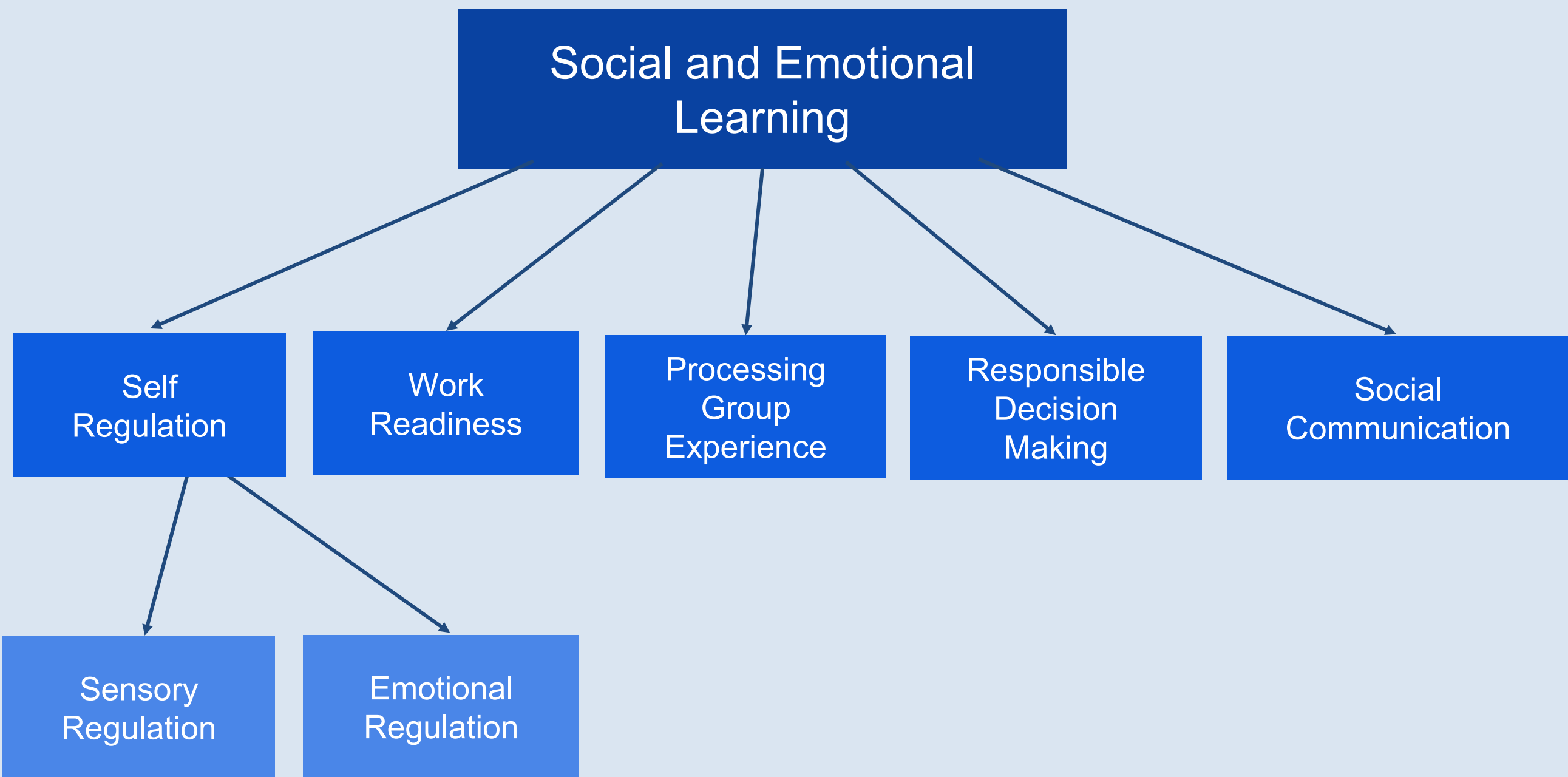
Findings & Outcomes

Thematic analysis revealed four key domains of social-emotional learning in neurodivergent adults:

- self-regulation
- social communication
- work readiness
- responsible decision-making

Participants demonstrated growing awareness of emotional and sensory regulation strategies.

SEL Themes



Sample Quotes

Sample Quote	Theme
"I think I process things internally. Whenever I get upset or frustrated, I go to my room and talk to myself, and that is something I like to do. Also, when I get upset, I relax and try to watch my favorite pirate videos on YouTube and the videos make me happy"	Self-Regulation (emotional)
"The deep breathing helped me take my stress down, sometimes I get overwhelmed early in the morning."	Self-Regulation (sensory)
"Several years ago, I went to Six Flags. I wanted to ride, like, a roller. Like a big roller coaster. When I saw it in person, I was like, oh, yeah, this is scary. I don't know if I really want to do it. And it's like, it depends on the situation. Is it, like, necessary or is it, like, optional?"	Responsible Decision Making
"I'm having trouble balancing friendships and relationships. I want to learn how to balance it out."	Social Communication
"In order to manage my time for a big event like an interview, I like to prepare ahead of time."	Work Readiness

Conclusions

- Findings from this project highlight a clear and ongoing need for SEL programming within the neurodivergent adult population
- Adult-adapted social stories show promise as an intervention approach for neurodivergent adults.
- Social stories are effective in adult populations to promote the contextually relevant application of social-emotional learning skills to real-life situations.

Limitations

- Variability in sample size across sessions
- Minor audio recording challenges during Week 1

Recommendations

- Continued development and refinement of adult-centered social stories that reflect real-world contexts and experiences
- Integration of quantitative outcome measures to evaluate changes in social-emotional functioning
- Expansion of programming across settings to assess scalability and broader clinical impact

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References

