Children and adults live rich emotional lives. In the span of a few moments, a child can shift from feeling excited to go to school, sad to say goodbye to his mom, frustrated at not being able to find his shoes, and then excited again to play a game with a friend. Similarly, a teacher may shift from feeling worried about her supervisor’s evaluation of her classroom to proud of the child who demonstrates proficiency with a new math skill to anxious about a difficult meeting with a parent. Developing an understanding of emotions and the skills required to effectively manage them is critical for social competence, self-regulation, and academic success (McClelland et al., 2010; Spinrad et al., 2006).

In this article we present the theoretical foundation of RULER, a comprehensive, systematic approach for developing emotional intelligence in children in kindergarten through grade eight and the key adults in their lives including their parents and teachers. We then describe how we adapted the existing approach for early childhood education settings. Preschool RULER integrates best practices learned from field tests and randomised control trials of RULER and modifies key features to suit the needs of our youngest learners and those who educate them.

What is RULER?
‘RULER’ is the acronym for describing the five emotional intelligence skills developed in our approach. These skills are recognising emotions in oneself and in others, understanding the causes and consequences of emotions, labelling emotions using a sophisticated vocabulary, expressing emotions in socially appropriate ways, and regulating emotions in a manner that is conscious, controlled, and oriented toward a personal or social goal (Brackett et al., 2012). These skills relate to numerous pro-social outcomes, including the development of sympathy and empathy (Eggum et al., 2011), and have been connected to integral learning processes, including attention, engagement, and motivation in classroom activities (Fabes et al., 1999; Raver et al., 2007). Emotional skills also predict classroom behaviours (e.g. productivity) and academic scores in kindergarten and elementary school even after controlling for variables such as IQ and family background.

Preschool RULER is a theoretically-based approach for developing emotional intelligence in preschool children and the key adults involved in their education (i.e. teachers, preschool administrators, parents). Preschool RULER is an adaptation of the empirically tested RULER, currently available for kindergarten through grade eight. In this article we describe the iterative process for developing Preschool RULER and how we modified the existing approach to meet the unique needs of early childhood education settings. Preschool RULER includes a whole-school approach for full integration of the work including professional development, instructional tools and curricular elements grounded in developmentally appropriate practices, and methods for fostering home-school connections.
Children with poor emotional skills exhibit more externalising behaviours than their peers (Eisenberg et al., 2001), and may have trouble adjusting to school (Calkins & Hill, 2007).

RULER emerged from the theoretical foundation of emotional intelligence which posits that developing emotional skills lays the foundation for having positive interactions with others, building healthy relationships, preventing problematic behaviours, and achieving academic success (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The model underlying RULER specifies that children and adults will be more effective when they are able to: (a) recognise, understand, label, express, and regulate emotions; and (b) acknowledge the significance of these skills and apply them in their daily lives (Brackett et al., 2011). RULER also is informed by ecological systems theory that specifies that myriad and interrelated aspects of settings (such as schools) influence student development, especially the adults in these settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Accordingly, RULER both integrates the teaching of emotional skills into the academic curriculum and provides opportunities for students and all adult stakeholders (school leaders, teachers, staff, and family members) to learn and then apply these skills in daily interactions. RULER integrates into the classroom and school system in ways that sustain it (Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2003).

RULER integrates the teaching of emotional skills into regular practice including the classroom curriculum, professional development for adults, and interactions between children and adults. For example, RULER includes a set of 'anchor tools' which all stakeholders and children use daily. Among the tools are the Mood Meter, which helps to build an awareness of emotions in the self and in others; the Blueprint, which is used for developing and applying problem-solving strategies that are prosocial in orientation and integrate others' perspectives; and the Meta-Moment, which promotes the selection of proactive versus reactive responses to strong emotional experiences. These tools create a shared language for talking about and using emotions to create a positive environment for learning. Children and adults alike learn how emotions impact academic and work performance (e.g. attention and decision making), foster the formation of quality relationships, and can facilitate effective behaviour management. Each component of RULER is designed to be social in nature, including sharing between students and teachers, discussions about books, and social problem solving that occurs through group brainstorming and collaborative learning. RULER activities also support perspective taking and empathy, conflict resolution, decision making, and critical thinking (Rivers & Brackett, 2011).

The integration into existing curriculum and training of both children and adults is the cornerstone of RULER. RULER is also unique in its focus on both shifting the attitudes and developing the skills of the adults who create learning environments in addition to training them how to adopt the approach. Pre-service and in-service training for teachers and administrators rarely address the role of emotions in teaching and learning (Hargreaves, 1998). RULER's approach results in positive climate shifts in classrooms and schools (Hagelskamp et al., 2013; Rivers et al., 2013), as well as improved outcomes for children (Brackett et al., 2012).

The need for Preschool RULER
Despite the growing societal awareness that early education is critical for later success, not all early childhood education programmes are equipped to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of children because they range drastically in terms of setting and quality (Pianta et al., 2009). High preschool expulsion rates indicate that many teachers do not have effective strategies for helping children develop their emotional
Developing emotional skills in early childhood settings using Preschool RULER

skills, the lack of which often underlies problem behaviours (Gillian & Shabar, 2006). Extending RULER to preschool provides the adult stakeholders in these settings with an approach for promoting children's emotional skills during an important period of development and is a critical step toward ensuring that all children receive high-quality early childhood education.

There are a number of other programmes currently available that include a focus on emotional skills. For example, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) is a curriculum targeting the development of emotion regulation skills, self-control, social competence, and problem solving (Greenberg, Kusché & Mihalic, 1998). Positive outcomes associated with the use of PATHS include improved social behaviour and academic engagement, as well as reduced conduct problems (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2010; Domitrovich, Cortes & Greenberg, 2007). Another programme, the Incredible Years Training Series, includes training components for parents, teachers, and children, and also focuses on social skills, problem solving, conflict management, and positive classroom behaviour (Webster-Stratton, 2000). Evaluation outcomes for the Incredible Years include improved social competence and reduced conduct problems for students, and an increase in teachers' use of positive classroom management strategies (Webster-Stratton, Reid & Stoolmiller, 2008). Additionally, Tools of the Mind is a curriculum that supports self-regulated learning and has been shown to reduce conduct problems and improve academic behaviours and climate (Barnett et al., 2008).

Preschool RULER differs from these and other programmes in several important ways. First, Preschool RULER is adapted from an existing programme with a strong theoretical foundation that has been empirically studied and shown to be effective in later grades (e.g. Brackett et al., 2012; Rivers et al., 2013). Second, given that RULER's feasibility and effectiveness have already been established for later grades, Preschool RULER will contribute to a comprehensive programme designed to provide continuity and promote emotional skills from preschool to high school. Finally, Preschool RULER targets not only the emotional skills of children, but also the emotional skills of the key adults in their lives.

Developing Preschool RULER using an iterative process

Funded by a grant from the Institute of Education Sciences (#R305A120172), we enacted a three-year iterative development process to adapt RULER for early childhood education settings. Our partner is a nonprofit organisation providing multi-site early childhood education programmes to children and families from underserved, low-income populations. Our team spent one year working collaboratively with the teachers and administrators, and with the children and their families in eight classrooms at one site to develop and field test all components of Preschool RULER.

Across this development phase, we systematically collected feedback from teachers and administrators about four Preschool RULER professional development trainings as well as 24 classroom lessons. Each lesson included a group time activity and set of center time activities. We used anonymous evaluation forms as well as one-on-one coaching sessions for feedback. Four coaches, who were each paired with classroom teachers following best coaching practices (Gupta & Daniels, 2012), modelled group time lessons and implemented small-group center activities during their twice weekly visits. Teachers observed each lesson and completed fidelity checklists where they provided feedback about how well the coaches achieved the specified lesson goals, coaches' use of a specified set of best practices, as well as teachers' own reactions to the lesson and the response of the children. Each coach-teacher pair then debriefed together to identify opportunities to
improve the lessons and identify how each lesson imparted the teaching and modelling of emotional skills. The coaches compiled their feedback and their own self-reflections to improve upon each lesson. The lessons were intentionally staggered across classrooms so that coaches collectively had the opportunity to revise lessons and implement each lesson again in other classrooms at a later date. Following this method, each lesson was tested in four classrooms with four different coaches, then revised and field tested again in four new classrooms by each coach.

The Preschool RULER professional development and classroom materials developed and tested during the first year will be field tested again for feasibility both at the first site and in one new site. In this testing phase, the teachers now will lead the implementation efforts, rather than observing the coaches who led the efforts during the development year. We also will conduct a pilot test that will include a comparison site not implementing the approach in order to examine student, teacher, and classroom outcomes using a pre-test/post-test design.

Modifying RULER for early childhood education

To best meet the needs of the early childhood education setting, we needed to modify critical features of RULER. Here we highlight four of these.

Appropriate professional development. The educational requirements for early childhood educators vary widely and are less standardised than those for primary educators, which include having a degree and student teaching experience, successfully passing standardised exams, and obtaining teacher certification (e.g. Pianta et al., 2009). Early childhood professionals often have limited educational backgrounds, thus we faced the challenge of designing professional development experiences that would be accessible and meaningful to diverse groups of participants. To meet this challenge, we used multi-sensory teaching techniques during professional development trainings, including video clips, opportunities to role-play, hands-on workshops, and small group discussions. Evaluations of the training showed that this approach was successful in promoting engagement and buy-in for the adoption of Preschool RULER.

Developmentally appropriate instruction. Our partnering site included mixed-aged classrooms with children ranging in age from 2 years and 9 months to 5 years and represented diverse developmental levels and skills sets. To address the needs of the multi-age classroom, we incorporated elements of group time activities that have been shown to foster engagement in diverse groups of children, such as music and movement (Tominey & McClelland, 2013). These instructional strategies were integrated fully into the key features of the early childhood classroom, including group or circle time, learning centres, transitions, and music. Moreover, each lesson included questions appropriate for children at multiple developmental levels so that all could participate. We further differentiated lesson concepts during small group and learning center activities.

We also needed to meet the learning needs of the large number of children who were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including English language learners (ELLs). Accordingly, we embedded best practices for teaching ELLs into all Preschool RULER lessons including using multiple sensory modalities when teaching such as pairing oral information with visual cues (Goldenberg, 2008), incorporating native language use (Zepeda, Castro & Cronin, 2011), and providing multiple opportunities to review and practice new vocabulary (August et al., 2005).

Effective instruction for early childhood classrooms. To ensure Preschool RULER activities were effective, our relationships and conversations with the teachers and aides were
invaluable. Our mutually established feedback process promoted a strong sense of collaboration and lead to the development of a strong approach. The feedback process also was designed to support teachers in advancing their teaching practice using the methods imparted by Preschool RULER in ways that would lead to full integration of the approach. These coaching sessions embedded conversations about pedagogy, reflection, and planning. A significant challenge in early childhood settings, however, is fitting the coaching sessions into an already packed day. Unlike primary school teachers who have planning periods or time spent in the classroom where children are participating in independent activities, early childhood teachers are required to engage with individual children or groups of children throughout the entirety of the day. Identifying and testing new methods for coaching will be a focus of the next phase of this work.

**Home-school partnerships.** Engaging family members and promoting home-school partnerships is a key feature of RULER. Children have the greatest opportunity to practice and develop key emotional skills when there is synchronisation between school and home (Albright, Weissberg & Dusenbury, 2011). In order to involve families, we integrated Preschool RULER activities and discussions into orientation meetings, luncheons, and newsletters. We helped teachers embed Preschool RULER activities into the daily drop-off routine so that parents had the opportunity to use the tools with their children, for example, helping children ‘check-in’ with their feelings. Teachers also sent home activities that would promote interactions about emotional skills. These efforts demonstrated effectiveness. Parents shared that children were bringing home what they had learned at school, and reported that children were sharing their feelings using RULER language, pointing out feelings of family members, and suggesting emotion regulation strategies (e.g. ‘Mom, you look angry. Maybe you should take three deep breaths.’). We will expand upon these efforts to engage more parents by providing more options for workshops, communicating with parents more frequently using different channels, and creating fun ways for children to share their learning with their families (e.g. providing CDs of RULER songs).

**Conclusion**

Theoretically grounded and evidence-based approaches for promoting emotional skills in children and the key adults in their lives are critical for ensuring that children develop and practice skills they need to create and maintain positive relationships and lay the foundation for academic success. Understanding the unique needs of the populations that will implement the approach is essential to be able to anticipate and thoughtfully address challenges that have the potential to impact successful implementation. By partnering with the educators, administrators, and families at an early childhood education programme in the development and testing of Preschool RULER we are able to create a comprehensive and appropriate approach for developing the emotional skills of children and the adults who educate them.

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