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Social Emotional Learning Skill Development And Application

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SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND APPLICATION

by

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"We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future."
- (Roosevelt, 1940)

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

In recent discussions with fellow educators about challenges they face, one of the most common answers is the varying student behaviors displayed throughout the school day. There are some students who exhibit no major behavioral challenges and are ready to learn at school each day. They have supportive home environments where their basic needs are taken care of and their learning development is valued. In contrast, other students have experienced traumatic situations, and come from chaotic home environments that do not allow for their basic needs to be met. These students are the ones who have difficulty setting positive learning goals for themselves or even caring about the content being taught. Instead, they are fighting to survive, not sure where their next meal is coming from, or if they will have a safe place to go home to at the end of the day. Finding ways to engage students and encourage them to take ownership in their learning can be a difficult task.

These also are the students who have difficulty expressing their emotions in healthy ways. They lack positive adult role models who demonstrate healthy problem solving (Cleaver, 2010). This in turn affects their ability to foster strong, positive relationships with other individuals, whether that is with family, friends, or teachers. Having observed firsthand the impact of these factors on students' day to day learning has inspired me to focus my attention on the development of social emotional learning skills. Researching this topic has led me to define my research question: *What social emotional learning skills are most important in a social emotional learning curriculum for elementary age students?* My purpose for this research will be

to explore the topic through an in depth look at the issues surrounding social emotional learning in and out of the classroom. I believe there is a critical need for this type of curriculum implementation in today's schools.

Currently, the main focus in K-12 education is academics (Cleaver, 2010). Teachers focus on preparing students for tests, teaching to the standards, and closing the achievement gap. A child's social and emotional well-being is pushed to the side instead of becoming an essential part of their overall growth and development (Cleaver, 2010). Students are spending more time in academic instruction. In one of my previous settings, we spent over two hours on reading instruction and over an hour on math instruction each day. This is a strong example of how time at school is taken up by academic subjects, leaving little time for addressing students' other needs. These needs include developing nonacademic skills such as expressing emotions, promoting positive relationships, making responsible decisions, having a healthy relationship with self, and being able to set attainable goals and work towards them (Cleaver, 2010).

During my five years of teaching, I have seen and been a part of the strong academic focus in schools, and I have always thought there is something missing, a missing piece of the puzzle. The big questions for me has always been; if students are spending all this time in academic subjects, why are students not making the academic gains they are supposed to? What is holding them back? What need are we as educators failing to address? It is through these questions that my research question was formulated. In my first year of teaching, one of my colleagues shared with me about social emotional learning. This is learning that focuses on the social emotional health of the child. I started researching this topic, and it all connected seamlessly. The focus should not just be on academics. Teachers also need to consider the social

and emotional well-being of a child (Cleaver, 2010). The school I was teaching at did not provide these opportunities throughout the school day even though they were strongly needed. Since then, my interest has only grown. One of my biggest questions is how does social emotional learning connect to overall academic achievement and how does it connect to the well-being and development of the child as a whole? My goal through this research project is to explore the topic of social emotional learning and dig into the issues surrounding social emotional learning. I also want to explore what skills and concepts are most beneficial for elementary age students to focus on in this type of program.

Through my research, I hope to learn more about what skills are most needed and create a social emotional learning curriculum centering around these concepts. Throughout the remainder of this chapter I discuss my teaching experiences that have led me to pursue this topic. I define and discuss the overall basis of a social emotional learning program and how it connects to positive relationship building with students. Additionally, I discuss my plan for my project, providing details about the social emotional curriculum I developed. I believe teaching to the whole child is one of the most important jobs educators have. Yes, reading, math, science and social studies are important. However, so are skills teaching students how to communicate feelings, show empathy towards others, and ultimately have a healthy relationship with oneself.

Teaching Experience

I graduated from a midwestern college with my Bachelors in Elementary Education. Teaching placements were difficult to find the first year out of college, but I did not let that stop me from gaining experience in the educational field. Someone once said to me, "it's not a question of if you will teach, it is only a question of where". I spent my first year out of college

subbing in various schools and districts and providing pull out RTI support. These experiences, while challenging at times and not always what I wanted to be doing, allowed me to experiment with various classroom management and instructional strategies. Finally, in July 2013, I got placed in my first classroom. I began my journey at an urban school in a midwestern city. This school was my home for the next two years.

My first year I taught first grade and my class was a group of all girls. I thought it was going to be a piece of cake. However, that turned out to be an incorrect assumption. What I walked into was a class of girls who had many strong emotional difficulties and were struggling academically. Many came from broken, unsafe, or unstable home conditions. They would come to school just wanting to be loved, and paid attention to. For many, I was their constant. They wanted all of my attention, and when your attention is being demanded from 30 first grade girls, it can be a difficult thing to provide. On a daily basis, I had students who would run out of the classroom, throw temper tantrums, and fight with each other. There was always some underlying issue impacting one or two of the students, it was emotionally exhausting. I would constantly ask myself what I was doing wrong or what I could be doing differently. I knew a piece of the puzzle was missing; they needed something more.

Academically, many of the students struggled because it was difficult to accomplish any learning with their behaviors. The only thing the whole class came together for and showed enjoyment doing was practicing our school songs. Being energetic was their specialty. My first year was tough, but I learned a lot and grew as an educator. I was determined to come back my second year improved from the previous year. My second year was easier in terms of knowing the expectations of the school and feeling more comfortable as an educator. I set high

expectations from the very beginning of the school year and implemented stronger classroom management techniques. These were helpful at first for most of the students. I did have a few students who were more difficult than other students. They would exhibit many of the same behaviors I saw my previous year: defiance, destruction, aggression and disrespectful behaviors to other students and staff. Because of their behavior and the attention, it got them (it could be hard to ignore); other students started to follow their example. As a result of the increase in students exhibiting these behaviors, the culture in my classroom began to change.

I was once again right back where I started my first year. I was back to constantly thinking about what I could be doing differently and how I could better help them as their teacher. I knew they needed explicit instruction focused on understanding emotions and relationship building. They also needed opportunities to apply and practice these skills during the school day. The obstacle was I did not know when I could initiate the teaching of these skills given the high academic focus throughout the school. There was no time in our school day with our whole morning and afternoon occupied with academic learning. This left barely any time to teach science and social studies, let alone talk about character building skills and behaviors. I did the best I could that year doing community building when it would fit into the schedule. Also, when I had the opportunity I would work with small groups or individual students.

The next school year, I moved to a different school in the same midwestern city. In this new setting, I taught third grade, and had a class of all boys. I again ran into many of the same issues that I did in my past school; some of my students lacked the skills needed for peaceful conflict resolution, unable and unwilling to talk about their emotions and many not caring about the impact it had on their learning. I saw the impact though, and knew I needed to make more of

an effort to teach the skills they needed. That year, I tried to have a morning meeting every Friday (when our schedule would allow). I worked on conflict resolution whenever we could. Many of the other educators in my setting were strong advocates for more being done to provide students with this type of learning. There would be discussion about how we cannot expect them to learn reading comprehension strategies if they are blocked by something else, whether that be by home trauma, or a school situation. There were so many skills we needed to be teaching but were not.

I did not understand why this was not seen as more of a priority in schools today since educators have been advocating for this type of learning for at least 5 years. According to a survey conducted by Research Associates, "9 in 10 teachers believe that SEL helps students in school, work, and life" (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 11). If there are teachers advocating for this kind of learning, they must be seeing an issue that needs to be addressed. If students were given the opportunity to learn how to understand and express their emotions, how to peacefully resolve conflicts, how to set learning goals for themselves and ultimately take ownership for their learning, this would allow them to concentrate more fully on the academic content being taught. Teachers would see a positive effect between the development and practice of these skills and students' overall academic success. As educators, one of our jobs is to meet the needs of our students, and in my opinion this type of learning is one way to meet those increasing demands.

Social Emotional Learning

Social Emotional Learning or SEL is defined as "the process through which children acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and

maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015, n.p.). This program encourages a student's social, emotional and academic learning. It also explains how adults and students create relationships in a welcoming and caring learning environment. Through this type of program, students are taught valuable life skills related to self-awareness, self-management, decision making, relationship building and social skills (CASEL, n.d.b). Students are equipped to navigate through some of life's toughest obstacles by developing these skills. Given the content, students are able to make an individual connection to the learning. Additionally, this type of program provides a vehicle for teachers and students to build a healthy, positive relationship built on trust and understanding(CASEL, n.d.b; Denham & Brown, 2010) . Students are better able to learn and grow throughout the school year when they have positive relationships with their teacher and classmates. They receive more instruction and positive feedback from their teacher. They also participate more in learning and feel more comfortable in their classroom communities (Denham & Brown, 2010).

My Research Project

My research focuses on identifying the skills and teaching practices that are most beneficial for elementary age students to learn in a social emotional learning curriculum. I will examine various factors pertaining to social emotional learning and dig into studies that have been conducted. Specifically, I will look at the effectiveness of the skills taught, and methods used in various social emotional learning curriculums. After researching these components, I will develop my own social emotional learning curriculum using the skills and components I find most effective during my research. As with any new curriculum or teaching practice, there is not

a one size fits all for this learning. Taking this into account, I will strive to provide differentiation within the curriculum to allow teachers to have options for accommodations and modifications as needed. From my experience in the classroom, I have learned many students succeed better in small groups, so I want to tailor this curriculum for small group instruction as opposed to a whole group instruction.

Next Steps

These next few chapters will showcase my journey. As I stated above, my literature review will focus on answering my research question: *what concepts and skills are most important in a social emotional learning curriculum for elementary age students*? I will be examining studies that have already been conducted about social emotional learning programs and their effectiveness. I will specifically look at what skills and methods of teaching were included and how effective they were in teaching social emotional skills to students. After I have completed my research, I will develop my own social emotional learning curriculum based on what skills and components I found most successful in my research. My goal through developing this curriculum is to provide a developmentally appropriate program that meets the numerous needs of the students in the classroom, and ultimately supports their overall growth as a whole child.

In the next chapter, I share my research findings through my literature review. The first section will focuses on the development of social emotional skills in early childhood. In this section, I discuss the theory of social competence, which directly connects to the development of social emotional skills. Next, I identify what factors contribute to the development of social emotional skills in early childhood. I then analyze preschool social emotional programs and what

effect those learned skills have on students in elementary school. The second section focuses on the connection between social emotional learning and academic achievement. In this section, I investigate the effect social emotional learning programs has on students' overall academic achievement in the classroom. Explaining and analyzing various factors that have a direct effect on social emotional learning and academic success. These factors include Maslow's hierarchy of needs (McLeod, 2016), the achievement gap, student-teacher relationships, and the recently passed bill ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act, (2016).

The third section focuses on social emotional learning curriculums. I describe the components of a social emotional learning curriculum, discuss factors that impact proper implementation, present the issue of evaluation, and the economic link to social emotional learning. I end the section with an analysis of elementary social emotional learning programs. The goal of the next chapter is to provide solid research that shows the importance of social emotional learning skill development for the well-being of the whole child. Through reviewing both sides of this issue, I am confident that the case for the inclusion of this type of learning in schools will become stronger and also provide a springboard in the development of more social emotional learning curriculums in the future.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

In my past few years of teaching, I have encountered strong emotional and behavioral issues demonstrated by children that I have worked with. I have seen firsthand because of these emotional and behavioral difficulties, the child's academic success suffers. Many of these children do not have the learning and skills needed to understand their emotions, and how to express them in healthy ways, they also lack the skills needed to form healthy and positive relationships with themselves, peers and teachers. I believe that what these children need is more explicit instruction and development in social emotional skills. In the previous chapter, I discussed the background of my research question *what social emotional learning skills are most important in a social emotional learning curriculum for elementary age students?* This chapter details the literature supporting social emotional learning and explaining factors that affect the implementation of social emotional learning in today's schools. This section includes information about early childhood practices in social emotional development, specifically discussing how children develop these skills in early childhood, and how the development of these skills play a factor in classroom behavior and academic achievement in elementary school and beyond.

Early Childhood Development of Social Emotional Learning Skills

An important part of understanding Social Emotional Learning is having the knowledge of how and when students develop these skills. Many children begin to develop these skills when they are younger in age, such as when they are enrolled in early childhood programs (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Temple & Emmett, 2013). When these skills are not practiced in the early

years, the gaps in students' social emotional development become apparent (Poulou, 2013). My research will specifically consider the following questions: How do children develop the skills to build positive relationships, learn good decision making, and effectively problem solve? At what age do children start to build these foundational skills? And finally, What are the positive and negative factors influencing the development of social emotional learning in early childhood?

The definition of social emotional development is "the developing capacity of the child from birth to five years of age to form close and secure adult and peer relationships, experience, regulate and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and explore the environment and learn" (Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, 2008; Yates et al., 2008, p. 2). Based on this definition it is easy to conclude that many of the social emotional skills children use throughout their everyday life are developed in two settings, children's homes and their experiences in early childhood programs (Leuzinger- Bohleber, 2014; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

This makes the importance of these two settings more significant, since this is where children are initially developing social emotional skills. According to Bagdi and Vacca (2005) "the experiences that children have from zero to five years old sets either a strong or a fragile platform for what happens next in childhood and beyond" (p. 146). During the ages of zero to five years old, children are constantly having new experiences that shape their thought processes and how they respond to various experiences (Baker, 2014; Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). When the experiences of the child are positive, the child is able to learn healthy behaviors and skills which then allow him or her to have a strong foundation to grow (Whittaker, Harden, See, Meisch, & Westbrook, 2011). Interactions with parental figures

and caregivers are a child's first experiences with social emotional learning. When children have healthy, nurturing relationships with their parents, and their home environments are calm, they are more likely to demonstrate effective relationship building skills and have decreased behavior difficulties (Denham, 1998; Jones- Harden et al., 2000; Whittaker et al., 2011).

Parental influences on social emotional learning. A parent's primary role is to support the development of interpersonal skills through constructive interactions with their child (Raver, 2004). A type of parenting called sensitive parenting is known to have a positive connection with the development of social emotional skills (Tamis-Lemonda, Briggs, McClowery, & Snow, 2009). A sensitive parent or caregiver practices supportive behaviors that encourage a child's overall development (Tamis Le Monda et al., 2009). An example of this is when a parent or primary caregiver provides care and concern when a child is hurt or crying. Through this type of positive interaction, the child feels valued and their needs are important to the adult. A positive bond is developed between the child and the parent or caregiver. Sensitive parenting can also be illustrated by conversing with the child about taking responsibility for their actions. These examples promote the development of social emotional skills (Tamis LeMonda et al., 2009).

In contrast, when a child is exposed to familial stress in early childhood they are more susceptible to social emotional difficulties that can continue into elementary school and later in life (Campbell et al., 2000). The part that parents play in terms of their own mental health and unhealthy parenting practices influence the emergence of behavioral difficulties in children (Duncombe, Havighurst, Holland & Frankling, 2012). Many of a child's problematic behaviors stem from the effects of poverty, such as conflict within the family and family disconnectedness (Ackerman, Izard, Schoff, Youngstrom & Kongos 1999; Fox et al., 2002; Halpern, 2004; Jones

Harden et al., 2000). Studies also suggest that the effects of poverty elevate the psychological stress parents feel, which in turn affects their ability to meet the social and emotional needs of their child. Because they are unable to meet this need, the social and emotional needs of the child deteriorate (Whittaker et al., 2010 as cited in McLoyd, 1990).

Parents who are feeling stressed or depressed because of their economic standing or other factors are likely unable to foster a positive relationship with their child. They lack positive interactions, a consistency for discipline, and have unrealistic expectations for their children (Whittaker et al., 2010). When parents feel constrained by outside stressors they are unable to provide the necessary care to develop their child's cognitive and social emotional skills (Whittaker et al., 2010). Not all parents who experience stress because of poverty or other factors are unable to develop and provide consistent positive interactions with their children. Some parents are still able to engage in positive relationships with their children and promote the development of social emotional learning.

The information presented in this section confirms the effect the home environment has on a child's social and emotional development. When a child has a positive relationship with their parent or primary caregiver who models positive social and emotional health, the child is able to learn and develop those skills. There is a positive connection between a positive parental influence and the development of social emotional skills in early childhood.

In the next section, I will discuss the three most important components of an early childhood program- literacy, math, and social emotional learning. I will discuss what effect these components have on overall early childhood development. In addition, I analyze studies

conducted about preschool social emotional learning programs and their effect on overall social emotional development.

Components of an Early Childhood Program

The second environment where social emotional skills develop are within early childhood programs. This next section provides an analysis of factors that make these programs successful in teaching social emotional skills, and the challenges specific to the preschool setting. Through the analysis of studies conducted, I discuss the effects that the development of these social emotional skills have on behavior and achievement in elementary school.

Early Childhood programs are believed to provide early exposure to skills that are needed and utilized in elementary school. These skills focus on reading, math and social emotional development. Through literacy development, students learn the recognition of letters, their sounds, beginning vocabulary and oral comprehension. They develop beginning number sense, shape recognition and problem solving skills through math centered activities (Yoshikawa, Weiland, & Brooks- Gunn, 2016). . Because these children are in a school setting, they also learn skills such as listening to adults, working cooperatively with their peers, and understanding their emotions when an event is upsetting them (Yoshikawa, Weiland, & Brooks-Gunn, 2016; Moore et al., 2015).

Correlation between early childhood programs and academic subjects. There have been multiple studies (Yoshikawa, Weiland, & Brooks- Gunn, 2016; Moore et al.,2015; Nix et al., 2013; Bierman et al., 2008) conducted that have researched and studied the effects of early childhood programs on academic subjects such as literacy and mathematics. Yoshikawa, Weiland and Brooks-Gunn (2016) found there are positive outcomes for early childhood students

and their literacy development. Many children experienced an upwards of two-thirds of an additional year of learning towards their early literacy development. The extra learning these children experienced provided them with an advantage over their peers going into kindergarten and continue into adolescence and adulthood. Ogut and Kim's (2015) findings from their study correlate with Yoshikawa, Weiland and Brooks-Gunn (2016). In their study, they found a positive relationship between the development of early childhood reading skills and later success the students had on standardized reading tests in 8th grade. Additionally, they found students in first grade needed to be able to read words in context and by third grade be able to infer while reading in order to be successful on the 8th grade reading exam. This study shows how students must continuously develop their reading skills starting in early childhood in order to be able to possess the skills needed to read more complex texts as they mature.

Early childhood programs and the relationship to math. The second component of early childhood programs is early math exposure and instruction. Hofer, Farran and Cummings (2013) found that children who received math instruction in their early childhood programs had higher math achievement levels and had better preparation for success in their elementary math programs. Sarama and Clements (2004) had similar findings and concluded that when students have developed strong number sense skills, they have increased mathematical success as they progress through school. The above mentioned studies provide strong evidence for early childhood programs centered around reading and math provide the foundational skills that children build upon in elementary school and beyond.

Social emotional learning in early childhood. A third component of early childhood programs is the development of social emotional skills that play a significant role in overall

school readiness for younger children. During early childhood, social and emotional disruptions are common as children are learning how to manage their thoughts, feelings, and actions and how to use language in various contexts (Gunter, Caldarella, Korth & Young, 2012). Because of the increase in these difficulties, social emotional programs used in early childhood focus on skills that not only help students understand and control their own emotions, but also focus on school readiness skills. These skills include being able to understand or show empathy towards someone else, and being able to work cooperatively with other students and adults (Gormley, Phillips, Welti, Newmark & Adelstein, 2011). Early childhood social emotional programs strive to provide scaffolding for teachers so they can effectively guide students in the learning and application of these skills and prevent future emotional and behavioral issues. Students are able to practice how to respond to various situations in a safe environment (Gunter et al., 2012).

In this section, I discussed the development of early childhood social emotional learning skills, first, in looking at factors that affect children in their home environments. It was concluded that through sensitive parenting, and positive interactions, children experience healthy development of social emotional skills that are built upon as they grow older. The second setting where additional social emotional skill development occurs is in early childhood programs. Early childhood programs focus on three components - literacy, mathematics and social emotional learning. There have been positive learning gains seen in literacy and mathematics, and positive behavioral effects seen in the early childhood classroom and beyond. It is evident through research that early childhood development matters not only for literacy and mathematics development but, also social emotional skill development. Next, I provide an analysis of two of the most utilized early childhood social emotional programs, Strong Start and PATHS.

Analysis of Early Childhood Social Emotional Programs

Strong start. Through the use of the early childhood social emotional learning curriculum, Strong Start, researchers were able to study the effects the implementation of this program had on students' social and emotional capabilities (Gunter et al., 2012). This is the first study that evaluated the success of the program. The Strong Start program has objectives and goals that correlate with every lesson and help children develop vocabulary to learn how to express their feelings. Also, to make the program cater to early childhood, each lesson has a stuffed animal character that goes along with the lessons. Teachers are encouraged to use the supplementary booster lessons to further support the skills that are being learned (Gunter et al., 2012). This study asked teachers to rate their students' emotional regulation skills and internalizing behaviors before and after the implementation of the Strong Start curriculum. The study found when teachers rated their students after the implementation of the Strong Start curriculum there were improvements in the emotional regulation skills of the students. The study also found the students' internalizing behaviors had declined a significant amount, and the relationships between teacher and students had been positively impacted (Gunter et al, 2012). The findings from this study show there is a positive relationship between the implementation of an early childhood social emotional learning curriculum and students' behaviors.

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies. Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn and Downer (2012) studied the effects of the PATHS curriculum on preschool students social competence and emotional wellbeing. The PATHS curriculum aims to provide social emotional lessons that teach skills such as understanding personal feelings and effective problem solving (Domitrovich et al., 2008). Another pair of researchers, Hughes and Cline (2015) also assessed the

effectiveness of the PATHS curriculum. In the first study conducted by Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn, and Downer (2012), the researchers chose to implement three types of supports, the preschool PATHS activities, the use of a consultant, and access to web based resources for the teachers. The PATHS curriculum is centered around activities that target vertical and horizontal control. Vertical control refers to higher order thinking skills and horizontal control refers to the process of thinking out loud about individual actions (Greenberg, 2006).

An example of how vertical control would be taught is through the recognition of and finding solutions for social problems. When students are in an emotional situation, an adult provides guidance and steps to help them calm down and work towards a solution. Through this type of practice, students are able to apply the skills to real world situations. Horizontal control is taught through the recognition and labeling of specific feelings (Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn & Downer, 2012). Supplemental materials such as books, puppets, and feeling posters are utilized to assist children when labeling their own emotions or a classmate's (Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn & Downer, 2012). What makes this study unique from other studies that have been conducted using the PATHS curriculum is the addition of teacher professional development as a support to improve the interactions between the teacher and their students (Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn & Downer, 2012). The teachers received access to web videos that provided examples of effective teacher-student interactions, and they had meetings with a consultant to review their own interactions and receive feedback (Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn & Downer, 2012).

Results. With these extra supports in place, the results of this study are not as significant as researchers originally thought. Even though there was strong evidence of an increase in social abilities in classrooms that received the PATHS curriculum, teachers did not see a decrease in

the amount of social distractions that were occurring among their students (Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn & Downer, 2012). Additionally, many teachers either did not utilize the extra supports if they were provided to them, or only utilized them for a short amount of time (Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn & Downer, 2012). This study provides an illustration of a social emotional learning program with extra supports added in.

      Additional study of PATHS curriculum. The second study conducted by Hughes and Cline (2015) also evaluated the preschool PATHS curriculum. This study provides further evidence supporting the implementation of a social emotional learning program in the early childhood stage. Hughes and Cline (2015) provided more information about the setup of the PATHS curriculum. The curriculum is divided into forty-four lessons, with thematic units. The lesson focuses include topics such as cooperating with others and identifying strategies for solving problems (Hughes & Cline, 2015). However, the educators in this study did not receive extra support through professional development or extra feedback.

      The facilitators found that there were eleven key positive ideas, and seven negative ideas that manifested from a social emotional learning curriculum (Hughes & Cline, 2015). The eleven positive ideas were as follows:

      (1) Preschool paths is good for older children, (2) it helps to change the children's behavior by developing their thinking/reasoning skills, (3) it helps to develop positive language and dialogue, (4) PATHS helps children to discuss and understand their feelings/emotions and be able to empathize with others, (5) Staff understand the need to discuss feelings more, (6) Parents have seen changes in the children at home, (7) Preschool PATHS has helped to increase the children's attention, concentration and

confidence, (8) The children "lash out" much less, (9) The children enjoyed preschool

PATHS, (10) Preschool PATHS worked well for the more verbal children, (11) The

children have generalised their skills to other settings. (Hughes, Cline, 2015, p. 80)

Hughes and Cline (2015) revealed an additional seven negative themes. They are as

follows:

(1) Pupils too young, (2) Not good for pupils with Special Educational Needs

(SEN) including language difficulties, behavior problems, and concentration issues, (3)

too Americanized in content.(4) The turtle concept is not carried out correctly by the

children, it is too complicated, (5) not motivating or engaging enough, (6) children could

not empathize with story characters (7) the language of feelings was too hard. (Hughes,

Cline, 2015, p. 81)

Through the discussion about the positive and negative themes revealed through the

implementation of this curriculum, there are encouraging connections between preschool social

emotional learning programs and positive behavior. However, it is intriguing that one of the

negative themes that emerged was that the students were too young for the program. In teacher

interviews, teachers said that the preschoolers aged three and four do not have the skills to stop

and think about the positive and negative impacts of their actions (Hughes & Cline, 2015). If this

skill is not taught and practiced repeatedly in early childhood programs, it may be lost in the

shuffle of other skills being taught in school. Both studies of the preschool PATHS curriculum

provide evidence of positive behavioral effects from the implementation of a social emotional

program. The studies also illustrate the challenges social emotional programs can face during the

use of the program. Given the evidence presented however, the benefits far outweigh any of the challenges experienced during the implementation of the PATHS curriculum.

In this section, I analyzed two social emotional learning curriculums, Strong Start and PATHS. Through this analysis, it is evident the early childhood years are a defining time for the development of early social emotional skills. There is a positive relationship between the implementation of these curriculums and positive behavioral outcomes. In the next section, I discuss the connection between social emotional learning and academic achievement seen in elementary classrooms. This section will provide evidence for the importance of social emotional skill application and practice to be continued into the elementary school years.

Social Emotional Learning and Academic Achievement

This section discusses the connection between social emotional learning and academic achievement. Included in this section will be explanation of four factors - Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the achievement gap, student-teacher relationships, and the ESSA act. All of these topics impact social emotional learning and the connection it has with academic achievement. Additionally, in this section I examine research of studies that have been completed connecting these two areas, providing a strong rationale for the implementation of social emotional learning programs.

Social Emotional Learning is a term that has been gaining momentum among school district officials and teachers (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Classroom teachers are seeing an increase in behavioral concerns that in turn are affecting students' overall academic achievement (Weissberg, & Cascarino, 2013). These behaviors are disruptive not only to the student and their overall learning but also to the other students in the classroom. Additionally, this adds to the

immense pressure that is placed on teachers to accomplish the learning objectives set forth by the administration and school board (Zins et al., 2007). Many educators believe that there is a direct connection between the implementation of a social emotional learning program and academic achievement in the classroom (DiPerna & Elliott, 1999; Pasi, 2001; Zins et al., 2007).

According to Zins et al. (2007), the most successful schools are ones that promote a child's academics and social and emotional learning. One way for schools to achieve this is through the implementation of a social emotional learning program. Schools are seen as a social environment, where learning is a social process, students learn by collaborating with others, whether that is with their peers, their teacher, or even their family members (Zins et al., 2007). Since students are working so closely with others throughout their school years, emotions can and do come into play. Sometimes, emotions can help to facilitate the learning process for the students, such as when the student is excited about the content being taught. Positive emotions bring positive outcomes. Other times emotions can cause disruptions to the overall learning process for the students, which in turn affects their overall success in school (Zins et al., 2007).

In my own teaching experiences, what starts as missing out on one learning opportunity rolls into missing another, and another, until all of the sudden the child is spending half the day or more with the principal, counselor, or at home. The student slips through the cracks, falling further and further behind their peers. Because the child starts falling behind, their emotional behaviors are heightened and even more behavioral and antisocial behaviors are created and solidified. Antisocial behaviors produce low academic performance (Hawkins, Farrington, & Catalano, 1998). Negative emotions bring negative outcomes; their overall attitude about school

changes, they stop caring and stop trying. They lack the skills necessary to recover their emotional stability enough to rejoin their classmates and continue with their learning day.

The implementation of a social emotional learning program provides the necessary stability and curriculum to teach the emotional skills needed for everyday life. These skills include being able to identify and understand emotions, establish healthy relationships, set positive goals, make responsible decisions, understand boundaries, and the importance of accepting personal responsibility (Zins et al., 2007). These skills then translate in the classroom to a more effective student who demonstrates behaviors that are conducive for learning. These skills include the setting of academic goals for themselves, developing strong communication skills for interacting with teachers and peers, being able to overcome setbacks, believing in their own success, and having the drive to succeed (Zins et al., 2007). All of these skills are crucial to forming personal ownership to their learning and development. The aforementioned skills can be applied to personal growth and development as well as specific academic subjects. In the next section I discuss factors that contribute to the connection between social emotional learning and academic achievement, these include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the achievement gap, student teacher relationships, and the recent education bill, Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA). Each of the factors discussed will illustrate a more complete picture about the importance of social emotional learning and the positive connection it has to overall student success.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Abraham Maslow developed his motivational theory called the hierarchy of needs in 1943. His theory stated that individuals are driven to meet certain needs in their lives and people prioritize some needs over others (McLeod, 2016). He identified that our most important need that we prioritize over any other level is physical survival. If that

need is met, then we are able to continue moving up the levels (McLeod, 2016). As a part of his

theory, he created a five-level model of human needs. The first level as I stated above, is physical

survival. This level includes food, water, shelter, and sleep. These are all components that we

need to survive as individuals (McLeod, 2016). The next level encompasses the needs of safety.

We must feel safe and secure in order to move up to the next level. The third level are the

feelings of love and belonging. This level includes having relationships with family and friends.

The fourth level is self-esteem, the feelings of being productive, confident, and accomplishing

goals. The first or bottom two levels are identified as basic needs while the first four levels are

identified as physiological needs. The last or top level is identified as the need for

self-fulfillment. This is also considered a growth need as it describes the feelings of pursuing

self-growth opportunities (McLeod, 2016).

This theory can be applied to social emotional learning through Maslow's idea that

students need to feel physically and emotionally safe before they can focus on learning (McLeod,

2016). Students are able to develop skills to help them feel physically and emotionally safe

through the learning of social emotional skills (Smith & Low, 2013). The foci of social

emotional learning are skills that encourage teachers and students to create a supportive learning

environment for all students (CASEL, 2015). In a supportive learning environment, students are

more likely to experience academic success (Zins et al., 2007). However, children who are not in

a supportive learning environment may experience low self-esteem (Denham & Brown, 2010).

This will in turn have a negative impact on achieving their full academic success until their

self-esteem is built up and supported (Zins et al., 2007). Social emotional learning programs

provide lessons that allow students to practice the necessary social skills to create positive

relationships with family members, peers, and teachers (Zins et al., 2007). Through the growth of social relationships, they build their sense of love and belonging as Maslow's hierarchy highlights (McLeod, 2016). As a direct effect of their stronger social skills, students are ready and able to develop skills that strengthen their own personal development (Denham & Brown, 2010).

For example, in a social emotional learning curriculum, students are taught the importance of understanding their emotions and how to manage them (Schonfeld et al.,2015). This allows students to have a healthy and positive knowledge base about appropriate or inappropriate ways to express various emotions (Schonfeld et al.,2015). Having a healthy self-esteem allows for children to move up to the next level on Maslow's hierarchy. Each of the levels in Maslow's hierarchy build upon one another. Each time an individual goes to the next level, a deeper connection occurs with the individual and their personal relationships (McLeod, 2016). This is true in social emotional learning as well. As the students learn and apply various skills taught in their social emotional learning programs, they develop fundamental skills that allow them to form deeper connections to personal and social growth (Schonfeld et al., 2015). They begin to apply the skills and use the tools that have been introduced to them effectively (Schonfeld et al., 2015). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs shares a direct connection to the issue of the achievement gap. In the next section, I discuss how the achievement gap connects to social emotional learning and overall academic success in the classroom.

Achievement gap. Discussion around the achievement gap have been prevalent for quite some time in education (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Future educators discuss this issue in college courses so they are prepared for questions pertaining to the issue during interviews. Politicians

are asked what their solutions are during election debates. There are multiple studies (Lee & Bowen, 2016; Reardon & Galindo, 2009; Murane et al., 2006) conducted to understand the factors impacting this issue and what can be done to find a solution to this obstacle. The big question continues to be how do we close the achievement gap? What do educators need to do so that students are on a level playing field for achieving academic success? Many people believe that the achievement gap only pertains to the academic success of a child. However, it also impacts the development of social emotional learning skills (Lee & Bowen, 2016).

According to the National Center of Education Statistics, the achievement gap can be defined as a discrepancy in educational achievement between minority students or low income students and Caucasian students (NCES website, n.d.). Some researchers have framed the achievement gap as the opportunity gap. The change of the language shifts the focus of the problem from the families and the students not having the same educational benefits that white middle class students have to the inequity that exists in schools today. For example, students who are affected by the opportunity gap may be subject to prejudices and biases which prevents them from gaining access to educational opportunities. This shown by these students having lower graduation rates and college enrollment rates (Patrick, 2013).

In contrast, the achievement gap is viewed as an disparity in educational benefits. Students who come from low income families do not have the same supports and resources available to them, meaning the parents are less involved in their child's education and development (NEA website, n.d.). Furthermore, many students who experience poverty experience a number of challenges in their home situations that they carry with them to school. These challenges include the stress of family instability, and the lack of positive role models at

home (Tough, 2012). Because they lack a positive role model in their homes, there has not been a stable constant who has taught them how to manage and understand their emotions (Tough, 2012).

Multiple studies have shown that children who grow up in these kinds of situations, also lack social emotional skill development, the impact of this is seen in classrooms through having greater difficulty handling stressful situations, and exhibiting behaviors that are seen to educators as disobedience (Tough, 2012). These disobedient behaviors can quickly start a vicious cycle where students are incorrectly labeled and thus miss out on a vast majority of educational opportunities (Tough, 2012). Incorrect labeling of a child and their behavior can impact their academic success in a grandiose way. Once they know they have been labeled as a "bad student", they play into that role, increasing their outbursts and misbehavior. Their whole attitude about their educational experiences morphs, and they are no longer motivated to achieve academic success. They are detached and disengaged, and it is very difficult to get them to re-attach and re-engage again (Tough, 2012).

Children who are greatly impacted by the effects of the achievement gap would benefit the most from the implementation of a social emotional learning curriculum in their schools. An SEL program would allow for students to develop and practice social emotional skills so that they can apply these skills to everyday life situations (Durlak et al., 2011). Through the teaching of social emotional learning, students develop skills that transfer over to improve academic achievement, healthy decision making, and involvement in the world around them (Durlak et al, 2011). Students have an increased value in their wellbeing and future, and thus have higher intrinsic motivation to do well academically (Durlak et al, 2011). Additionally, the development

of these skills further prepares students to be contributing members to the workforce in our society. Educators agree that the implementation of social emotional learning would have a strong effect on students of all ethnicities in "academic performance, graduation, college, and workforce readiness" (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 11).

Through the development of social emotional skills, students gain intrapersonal skills such as work ethic, teamwork, effective communication, social and cultural awareness, empathy and motivation (Tough, 2012). When students have developed these skills, they contribute positively to being successful not only in school, but in the workplace as well (Kyllonen, 2013; Tough, 2012). Given the evidence that has been stated in this section, it is logical to infer that the development of social emotional skills would stop the continuous cycle of students who are underprepared for life after high school. Students who are underprepared have more difficulty contributing to the workforce and thus remain in the cycle of poverty and further feel the negative impacts of the achievement gap. In the next section, I explain the importance of positive student teacher relationships, and share how social emotional learning enhances this relationship through the learning of social emotional skills.

Student teacher relationships.

The real core of education is the relationship between the teacher and the student, and the extent to which that relationship nurtures the longing of the child to matter in the world,and the longing of the teacher to nurture and fulfill that desire (Shriver & Buffet, 2015, p. xv).

A teacher holds the key to a child developing a desire to be a life long learner, and pursuing their dreams and goals. The relationship between a teacher and a student is one of the most important relationships that a child will have in their lifetime. Recent research conducted

on successful SEL programming and student investment found that one of the most influential ways to increase student motivation and engagement is through a strong, positive relationship between the teacher and the student. When students experience relationships where the adult shows a genuine interest in the wellbeing of the child, and has the foundational supports of respect and openness, these factors create a commitment to overall growth and development of a child's learning (Taylor & Parsons, 2011). If you were to ask any adult what they remember the most from their years in school, it is not the grades they received, but the teachers who made a difference in their lives. The teachers who took the time to get to know them on a personal level, who supported them in extracurricular activities, and never gave up on them, even when they wanted to give up on themselves. The quality of these relationships are what benefits students the most in achieving success academically and developmentally (Taylor & Parsons, 2011). Additionally, when there is a high-quality relationship between the teacher and the student, the student sees the teacher as a trustworthy confidant who is able to assist in brainstorming of problems. The student wants to please the teacher, so they are more motivated to learn and be involved in the learning activities throughout the school day (Williford & Wolcott, 2015).

The theory of attachment further explains the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the student. This theory states when a student has a positive relationship with their teacher, one that is nurturing and developmentally supportive, the child is able to develop "emotional security" thus making them able to fully "engage in learning activities needed to develop the full range of academic, behavioral and social emotional skills" (Williford & Wolcott, 2015, p. 230). When there is a strong attachment between the teacher and the student, the interactions are more meaningful and the educator is able to support the student and their

individual needs more fully (Williford & Wolcott, 2015). Based on research that has been

conducted, there are implications of a positive connection between social emotional learning and

the fostering of positive relationships between the teacher and the student (Williford & Wolcott,

2015). The obstacle in the research presently is there has not been any studies conducted that

explicitly explore the effect of specific social emotional learning skills (Williford & Wolcott,

2015). However, there is strong evidence within the framework of social emotional learning that

further research would yield positive correlations between social emotional learning and

enhanced teacher student relationships.

The skills included in the framework of social emotional learning programs support

positive relationship building between the teacher and the student. Social emotional learning

programs focus on developing the following skills through an emphasis on both social awareness

and relationship skills. This is illustrated by the inclusion of skills such as communication,

teamwork, respect for other individuals, empathy, appreciation for the diversity of others, and

their varying perspectives, and problem solving (CASEL, n.d.b.). Multiple studies (Connell &

Klem, 2006; Raver et al., 2008; Webster & Stratton et al., 2001) have been conducted that

evaluate the implementation of a universal social emotional intervention and the effects that it

had on a child's school adjustment through the improvement of a student-teacher relationship

(Williford & Wolcott, 2015). Webster & Stratton et al. (2001), implemented the program,

Incredible Years: Teacher training. In this program, there are multiple components - a parent

training program, a child training program, a teacher training program and a social emotional

learning curriculum, called Dinosaur School (Williford & Wolcott, 2015). All of the components

were implemented in the study, which produced results linking a change in classroom

management skills, a decrease in misbehavior among students, and the growth of social emotional skills (Webster & Stratton et al., 2001). Furthermore, this study demonstrates through interventions that indirectly focus on social emotional skills, there is an increase in positive teacher student interactions (Williford & Wolcott, 2015).

In a second study conducted by Hamre & Pianta (2005) an online coaching model was utilized by educators. This coaching model's purpose was to enhance teacher student interactions. The findings of this study suggest that through the enhancement of teacher student relationships there are overall positive effects in a child's academic and social emotional development (Williford & Wolcott, 2015). In a third study conducted by Solomon et al. (2000), the inclusion of the intervention, Child Development Project/Caring School community produced positive results which suggest a positive connection with nurturing relationships between the teacher and the student (Williford & Wolcott, 2015). Based on the positive correlations of all of these studies, one can make the conclusion that through the utilization of social emotional learning interventions, the skills necessary to build positive relationships are developed.

ESSA: Every Student Succeeds Act. In December 2016, congress passed and former President Barack Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This act replaced the law, No Child Left Behind. This act mandated that schools use at least one non-academic focused component as an evaluator of overall student growth (Walker, 2016). This law allows for the school districts to have more flexibility and take some of the pressure off testing, and place more importance on the teaching and learning in the classroom (Walker, 2016). The positive implications of this law include schools moving away from a strictly

academic focus to one that is inclusive of meeting the needs of the development of the whole

child, which includes social emotional factors. This shows a shift in educational objectives, and

the recognition of the significance of developing social emotional skills. This act also provides

school leaders with the encouragement to focus more on the overall learning environment and

how to prepare students for life after high school (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2016).

Already, more states have started the process of creating social emotional learning

standards that describe what students should know and do (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2016).

Anchorage, Alaska is one state that has already created and implemented social emotional

learning standards and benchmarks. The standards and benchmarks were created in conjunction

with the "*Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets"*, which aimed to provide an approach that

is grounded in best practices to ultimately serve the growth of healthy children and young adults

(Alaska School District, 2016). The standards and benchmarks are grounded in four main goals

that also encompass four social emotional skills: self-awareness, self-management, social

awareness, and social management (Alaska School District, 2016). The creation and utilization

of this type of curriculum in a school district suggests a positive step forward for the inclusion of

social emotional programs in school districts. The hope is through the passing of ESSA, that

more districts will follow the example of the Anchorage, Alaska school district, and also create

standards for social emotional learning. This in turn would mean there would be an increase in

the implementation of social emotional learning programs nationwide.

There are concerns however about how to measure the quality of non-academic skills,

such as social emotional learning (Blad, 2016). There are currently flaws and biases that could

skew the already high stakes surrounding accountability (Blad, 2016). For example, if student

surveys were used to measure skills, they may be inaccurate because of student's possible skewed ideas about their skill development (Blad, 2016). Additionally, there is the question of giving students yet another test to measure skills, especially non-academic skills. Many SEL supporters believe that this would threaten the inclusion of social emotional skills in today's schools (Walker, 2016). The answer to how to measure and evaluate social emotional learning is not through another test, this would only weaken the overall goals of social emotional learning (Walker, 2016). Tom Roderick, who is the executive director of Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility states that "we should identify best practices in SEL and give teachers the support they need to carry out those best practices with fidelity" (Walker, 2016, p. 2).

If teachers were given training in how to best teach social emotional learning skills and received support for this type of learning, many educators would be on board (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). School districts will ultimately decide what nonacademic factors they choose to use and how they will measure the quality and effectiveness. One thing is clear however, the passing of this law will have a lasting impact on social emotional learning and its role in schools moving forward.

Social Emotional Learning Curriculums

In the previous two sections, I discussed topics centered around the themes of the development of social emotional learning skills in early childhood, and the connection between social emotional learning and academic achievement. In the final section of my literature review I discuss social emotional learning curriculums. First, I provide a description of the components of a social emotional learning curriculum, and provide an example of how they are shown in a

school district's learning design for social emotional learning. Second, I describe the proper implementation of a social emotional learning curriculum. Specifically, I focus on what are the best practices for the successful implementation of this type of program in schools today. I also present the issue of the evaluation of these types of programs, how can an effective evaluation system be put into place without compromising the goals of this type of program, and what challenges are associated with the evaluation process.

Furthermore, as a part of implementation and evaluation, there are questions about economic value for school districts. What are the gains associated with the implementation of this type of program? Are there any losses that could be incurred? Finally, I provide an analysis of various elementary social emotional learning curriculums, where I place a direct focus on what components are included, and what methods were utilized during implementation. The goal of this section is to provide an in depth look into social emotional learning curriculums and the factors that surround the successful implementation in today's schools.

Components of a social emotional learning curriculum. As stated earlier in my chapter one, social emotional learning is described as the development of skills that allow individuals to successfully understand and manage emotions, demonstrate feelings such as of empathy, respect, responsibility and determination. Additionally, social emotional learning teaches skills that focus on building positive relationships with others and individual goal setting (CASEL, n.d.b). The development of these skills are achieved through the focus of the five core competencies, or skills, in social emotional learning programs. The five core skills are coupled with an effective learning environment to provide synchrony with the strategies being utilized in a social emotional learning program (CASEL, n.d.b). The five core skills are as follows:

self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision making (CASEL, n.d.b). Self-management refers to developing skills that teach individuals how to control emotions and behaviors during various situations. Self-awareness is being able to understand emotions and how they can positively or negatively have an effect on an individual's actions. Social awareness is the understanding of another person's perceptions and demonstrating empathy for their individual situations. Responsible decision making is being able to make positive, healthy decisions about personal actions and personal relationships (CASEL, n.d.b).

These five competencies are strongly, and highly suggested, but they are not a requirement in the creation and implementation of social emotional learning programs. Some programs choose to focus on four competencies, and combine the skills of self-management and self-awareness. Anchorage, Alaska is one of the states that has developed social emotional learning standards and benchmarks. Their program focuses on four main skills: self-management, self-awareness, social management, and social awareness. Within these skills are four goals that encourage students to be active participants in their learning and application of these skills. Through the language of I am, or I can, students are provided with specific objectives for their learning development. For example, the first goal focuses on self-awareness, and becoming knowledgeable about the concept of self-awareness. Students are understanding who they are as an individual, and how they connect to the world around them (Alaska School District, 2016). The I am statement is as follows "I am recognizing who I am and how I am feeling relative to the world around me" (Alaska School District, 2016, p. 5). All learning indicators and sample learning activities are centered around the I am statement.

In early elementary, learning indicators include being able to identify various emotions and what situations cause them. A sample learning activity would be students drawing a picture with a variety of emotions shown, then having a discussion about the placement of their emotions (Alaska School District, 2016). For example, they are happy when they are at the park playing with their parents. The second goal focuses on the understanding of the skill self-management. The I can statement states "I can manage my behavior in effective and constructive ways" (Alaska School District, 2016, p. 10). A sample learning activity would be the student acknowledging when they are upset, and doing something to change their attitude. The third goal targets the skill of social awareness. The students are asked to demonstrate being aware of other people's feelings, and to recognize, and respect the differences of others. An example of a learning activity would be a child seeing a peer who is upset, and trying to comfort them (Alaska School District, 2016). The final goal progresses from becoming knowledgeable about social awareness to applying those skills in social management. Students are asked to build positive relationships with others through practicing interactions with others constructively (Alaska School District, 2016).

The components included in a social emotional learning curriculum play a significant role in the success of the intended goals of the program. It is not only the teaching practices that matter, how the curriculum is executed is also central to the achievement of the overall learning goals.

Proper implementation. "Effective implementation does not occur naturally or spontaneously but requires the use of systematic methods specifically designed to increase the odds of program success" (Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning, 2015, p. 395).

One of the most important factors that must be present when implementing SEL programs is the utilization of appropriate planning methods (Durlak et al, 2011). To ensure that appropriate implementation is being achieved, CASEL (n.d.b) recommended following the acronym of SAFE, which outlines the effective approaches. SAFE stands for the following: Sequenced: a planned set of activities to be executed step by step. Active: Learning opportunities should be ones that allow active participation, such as role plays and behavior rehearsals. Focused: devoting sufficient time for the learning of social emotional skills. Explicit: Targeting specific social and emotional skills.

According to research conducted by Durlak et al. (2011), it was found that educators who adhered to the SAFE guidelines experienced significantly more benefits than the programs who did not use the SAFE guidelines. Additionally, when the educational experience includes both formal and informal teaching of the SEL skills, the overall learning environment encourages SEL skill development and application, and other parties such as parents and the school community are involved in the implementation process; all of these factors have positive effects on the overall efficacy of a social emotional learning program (Van Veisor, 2009).

Two additional factors that come into play when implementing social emotional learning programs is the training educators receive during college courses and the types of professional development offered after getting involved in an educational setting. Many first year teachers feel ill equipped in effective classroom management techniques, and in identifying mental health problems that may be present in their classrooms. However, teachers feel more prepared when they have training related to behavioral and emotional health that impact teaching and learning in the classroom. They feel more prepared and comfortable with implementing new strategies to

assist with various students' behavioral challenges (Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson & Hymel, 2016). Currently in collegiate pre-service teacher programs, there is an emphasis on developing classroom management techniques because this leads to having a more supportive learning environment for teaching and learning (Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson & Hymel, 2016).

Teacher professional development. It is also important for teachers to understand the development of children and adolescents. In most teacher education programs, students are required to take at least one course in the area of child and adolescent development. However, sometimes these courses are not offered through the education department, but rather through the psychology department. The consequence of this is the application of content to classroom situations is lost (Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson, & Hymel, 2016). When the application of content to classroom is lost, teachers are unable to apply their learning to situations they may encounter in the classroom. It would be more beneficial for pre-service teachers to have authentic opportunities to practice how to implement child and adolescent development approaches in learning environments such as the classroom and community (Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson, & Hymel, 2016). If preservice teachers were given this opportunity they would be able to develop a deeper understanding of how to incorporate these concepts into their everyday teaching, which would in turn help them better understand the social and emotional needs of the child.

Many post-secondary education programs do not prepare teachers for identifying or effectively handling a child's social, emotional, or behavioral problems (Schonert-Reichl, Hanson- Peterson, & Hymel, 2016). In a recent study that examined the syllabi content in elementary preparation programs, it was found that out of the 80 syllabi that were examined, 42

did not have content related to a child's social, emotional or behavioral learning (State, Kern, Starosta, & Mukherjee, 2011). This finding further confirms that first year teachers are not able to effectively implement social emotional learning in their classrooms because they lack the background knowledge and the opportunities for application. If first year teachers are lacking proper training in this area before they become teachers, how can we expect them to be able to implement it effectively when they have their own classrooms? Teachers new and seasoned need more training when it comes to social emotional learning. Lawmakers should make it more of a priority for teacher education programs to include child and adolescent development into their coursework. Educators need time to not only learn the background knowledge, but also for application in real learning environments (Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson, & Hymel, 2016).

The factors that teachers face in the classroom make it difficult for teachers to meet both the academic needs and the social emotional needs of the children in their classroom (Jennings & Frank, 2016). Teachers would benefit from professional development that provides an opportunity for them to dig deeper into the key skills, the theories that support the methods of SEL, and gives ample time for the practice and application of these skills. The administrators can also share how the goals of social emotional learning fit into the larger picture of a state, district or individual school vision. This would allow for teaching staff to see the bigger picture for the addition of this learning to the school day and create more "buy in" (Jennings & Frank, 2016). As stated earlier in this section, teachers are not fully prepared to effectively teach social emotional skills and concepts (Jennings & Frank, 2016). In a study about the professional development offered before the implementation of a social emotional learning program, Jennings and Frank (2016) found there was a limited amount of information about various social

emotional learning programs' professional development layout. Most programs have a one-three-day initial introduction, where teachers learn about the theory, curriculum, and possible coaching opportunities if it is available (Jennings & Frank, 2016).

Implementation. In their study of nine evidence based social emotional learning programs, they were surprised to learn some professional development programs were presented as optional, self-directed, or presented through an online program (Jennings & Frank, 2016). In the nine programs that Jennings and Frank (2016) studied, eight of them had optional or teach yourself methods. The only program that had rigorous, extensive training was the Open Circle curriculum. As a part of this program, there are four days of training where teachers learn the background of the program, they are given time to apply their learning by practicing the skills and developing ways to apply lesson content throughout the school day (Jennings & Frank, 2016). Additionally, this curriculum offers coaching visits throughout the school year to assist teachers in the teaching of the skills and concepts (Jennings & Frank, 2016). This program illustrates the importance of high quality professional development that is not only intensive, but also allows educators to apply the skills to everyday situations in the classroom. The professional development must be interactive and engaging so that it energizes educators to implement this program with quality and fidelity (Jennings & Frank, 2016). A teacher's attitude is fundamental to the success of a social emotional learning program. They need to feel motivated and confident that they can implement the program effectively (Jennings & Frank, 2016).

During implementation, problems can arise when there are differences between how researchers and educators see a program being utilized. Researchers may see a program as an intervention, while educators view it as curriculum (Jennings & Frank, 2016). These two are

very different in approach. Interventions are intended to be scientific approaches to create a behavior change. Curriculums are the teaching materials developed to be used for learning and assessment in the classroom (Jennings & Frank, 2016). The goals of researchers and educators are also different. Researchers place the most importance in high fidelity for their program, whereas teachers place the individual needs of their students above all else, which means they are willing to make modifications if necessary to meet the needs of their students (Jennings & Frank, 2016). Because the goals of program developers and educators are different, it is likely the desired outcomes will also be different unless a balance can be found (Jennings & Frank, 2016). There is a gap in research where modifications and adaptations are addressed in the implementation of the social emotional learning curriculum (Jennings & Frank, 2016).

Proper implementation of a social emotional learning program does not just include the skills or the learning opportunities available. It also includes the educators' preparation before in terms of knowledge of content, application of learning opportunities, and the continuous training they receive after they have been gifted with their own classroom. Through watchful, and focused implementation, the social emotional program will be more successful in the social, emotional, and behavioral objectives it seeks to meet.

Economic Value of Social Emotional Learning

The implementation of a new program or curriculum always has an economic impact. The implementation of a social emotional learning program is no different. When a school district decides to add a new curriculum to the mix, there is both a financial and a time cost. Financially, the school has to budget new teaching and learning materials. Additionally, there is a time cost for administrators and teachers to engage and learn the background of the curriculum

and how to make it work effectively in the classroom setting. Everyone is expected to "buy in" and promote the new learning approach. A primary concern for a school in considering a new learning curriculum is to evaluate it in terms of cost versus the potential benefit. As proven earlier in the chapter, researchers (Gunter et al, 2012; Nix et al, 2013; Zins et al, 2004) strongly supported the positive benefits of social emotional learning. The immediate and long term benefits include an improvement in behavior at school and the healthy development of the child (Jones et al, 2015). Given this rationale, it is surprising that social emotional learning is still being pushed to the bottom of the educational priority list. It would appear the priorities fall because of the economic value of the issue instead of the impact on students (Jones et al, 2015). The issue can be further illuminated when considering the exorbitant amount of public money needed each year to address societal problems occurring when social emotional learning needs are left unmet (Jones et al, 2015). For example, the cost of incarcerating an underage juvenile approaches $200,000 per year in Cook County, Illinois (Cervone & Cushman, 2015). This example strongly illustrates the cost effectiveness of early intervention programs, such as social emotional learning as a tool to prevent bigger societal issues as the child nears adolescence. In contrast, in a study conducted by Columbia University, it was found for every one dollar invested in social emotional learning programming, there was a return of eleven dollars (Cervone & Cushman, 2015). Clearly, this fact alone makes the case for the economic value of social emotional learning.

What is needed to remedy this issue is to involve policy makers in the discussion about the vital importance of these programs in today's schools. The key method to accomplish this would be to increase the quality and number of evaluations that show the economic value of SEL

programming both in the short and long term. These actions will lead to increased awareness and understanding of the economic feasibility of SEL learning programs (Jones et al., 2015). Educators have the key responsibility to change the conversation from focusing on using social emotional learning as a method to solve current problems, versus preventing future problems (Jones et al., 2015).

Evaluation of Social Emotional Skills

As more school districts move towards creating standards and benchmarks associated with social and emotional skills, the issue of evaluation has also become part of the conversation. The big question is what is the best method for the evaluation of these skills without compromising the goals of social emotional learning. Since the skills being taught are non-academic, it is difficult to come up with a method that measures their effectiveness without taking away from the overall goals of social emotional learning. As stated in an earlier section, advocates for social emotional learning strongly believe that social emotional learning skills should not be evaluated through testing (Blad, 2016; Walker, 2016).

Methods of evaluation. Currently, the methods used to evaluate social emotional learning include directly observing students during role plays, having one on one conversations, and utilizing rating scales. The methods most frequently utilized by teachers are rating scales and direct observations (Elliott et al., 2015). The rationale behind rating scales is it provides "an efficient tool for representing a summary of characterizations of individuals, and observations of other people" (Elliott et al., 2015. p. 304). The positives of this method are it can be reused, applied across various settings and can be used by teachers, parents, mental health professionals and students. These skills provide a wide range of behavioral indicators (Elliott et al., 2015).

The primary limitation of this method is it must be used as part of a comprehensive survey that will assist in increasing the reliability and validity of the results (Elliott et al., 2015). Additionally, there are issues of multiple people giving varying opinions, the use of self-reporting, and the difference of results on rating scales versus direct observations (Elliott et al., 2015). However, having multiple people provide ratings on a child's behavior is seen as best practice, because it provides information about reoccurring behaviors, and settings where behaviors are common (Elliott et al., 2015). Self-reporting can be beneficial in understanding a child's internal thoughts about their own behavior, and experiences. There are two caveats for self-reporting. First, it is important to remember that an individual's experiences and thoughts about their behavior are subjective. Secondly, the method used for self-reporting must be developmentally appropriate and their learning ability must be taken into consideration (Elliott et al,, 2015). An example of a widely used self-reporting assessment is the SSIS-RS (Elliott et al., 2015).

Rating scales and direct observations both provide valid information about a child's social emotional behaviors. However, there is one key difference that exists between rating scales and direct observations that can sway researchers and practitioners from using one over the other, or employing the use of both. The behaviors focused on during a direct observation are usually a smaller set than behaviors on a rating scale. For example, if the goal is to observe the child just demonstrating one or two behaviors or skills, then direct observations are more compatible with this type of behavior assessment. However, if the goal is to have a comprehensive view of many different behaviors, then a rating scale is more appropriate (Elliott et al., 2015).

The most common behavior rating scales in current use is the SSRS/SSIS-RS. The SSRS provides information about an individual's social behavior by examining teacher student relationships, interactions between classmates, and academic success in the classroom (Elliott et al., 2015). Both of these behavior rating scales obtain information from teachers, parents and the student (Elliott et al,, 2015). This provides a more complete understanding of the child's social skills and behavior that may contribute to poor social skills. The SSIS items measure almost all of the competencies of CASEL's (n.d.b) SEL model (Elliott et al., 2015). An example of a behavior rating scale is the SEARS-T. This scale is a teacher rating scale that measures four social emotional skills, responsibility, social competence, empathy and self-regulation. Their findings show promise for a new rating measure to simplify the process of evaluating social emotional learning skills (Merrell et al., 2003).

Social emotional comprehension methods. Currently, there are positive steps being taken to move towards having methods of direct assessment for social emotional skills. Though there are questions still remaining about application to bigger settings in terms of management, scoring, understanding of scores, and having adequate time (Mckown, 2015). For example, the skill of self-awareness has not had any direct assessments created. This could be because the skill necessitates self-reflection as an indicator of understanding (Mckown, 2015). However, one of the models that has been used before to measure self-awareness is called the BPI (Berkeley Puppet Interview). This intervention allows children to explore their understanding of self. This model connects with CASEL's (n.d.b) model of social emotional learning (Mckown, 2015). For the skill of social awareness, there are a few rating assessment types that are used. They are as follows: the AKT, CARE, NEPSY-II, and the DANVA (Mckown, 2015).

The AKT utilizes puppets showing various emotions. The child must identify the emotion and situations that would evoke that emotion. The CARE and NEPSY-II both have activities where students are identifying facial emotion recognition. Finally, the DANVA measures emotional recognition through facial expressions, way of sitting, and volume of voice (Mckown, 2015). Each of these assessments provide valuable information about a child's social awareness skill development. It is difficult to directly assess students' ability to form positive relationships or to work collaboratively. There are currently no direct assessments that have been created to assess those two skills related to relationship building. There is however, two direct assessments that are able to be utilized to assess conflict management. They are the SIP-AP, and TOPS. These two assessments can also be used to assess responsible decision making (Mckown, 2015). The SIP-AP is a computer assessment that determines a child's capability to solve proposed social situations. TOPS is an assessment with the intention to evaluate how children think through situations that happen in everyday life (Mckown, 2015).

The above-mentioned methods provide evidence based information about a child's social emotional learning skills through direct assessments. Even though there are not several options to choose from yet, the information presented shows promise as social emotional learning becomes more visible in today's schools.

Analysis of Elementary Social Emotional Learning Curriculums

As the final topic in this section, I provide an analysis of various elementary social emotional learning curriculums. As stated in the previous section, social emotional learning and academic achievement, there is strong evidence of a positive relationship between social emotional learning and academic achievement. In my analysis, I provide further evidence to

support this claim. Additionally, I focus on what skills and methods are utilized in the

curriculum. All of these factors are important indicators of the overall success of the curriculum.

You can do it curriculum. Ashdown and Bernard (2012) conducted a randomized study

using the curriculum, You Can Do It (YCDI) program. The main goal of this program is for all

children to develop social emotional learning skills and have success in academic subjects. In

addition, this curriculum highlights the importance of children's thoughts and self-talk (Ashdown

& Bernard, 2012). This program focused on five core skills that are unique when compared to

CASEL's(n.d.b) social emotional competencies. The five core skills are as follows: confidence,

persistence, organization, getting along, and emotional resiliency (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).

This curriculum also explicitly teaches the twelve ways of thinking or habits of the mind. These

include: I can do it, acceptance of self, taking risks, independence, effort, working hard, goal

setting, time management, acceptance of others, thinking about actions, following the rules, and

making positive social decisions (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).

Before beginning the YCDI program, teachers were asked to complete two questionnaires

about each student. The first questionnaire focused on student's overall behaviors, the second

focused on student's responses to various situations (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). The training

that was given before beginning the program included learning about the different components of

the curriculum, such as the structured lessons, the use of hand puppets, songs to be used in

coordination with the lessons, posters to be hung in the classroom as visuals for learning, and

information about best practices in the classroom (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).

As a result of this study, it was found that this program has a positive effect on early

childhood students and their overall emotional regulation and social emotional well-being. The

students who received this curriculum showed greater gains in social emotional competence than students who did not receive the program. Specifically, students showed improvement in cooperation, assertiveness and self-discipline. There was evidence of students controlling their emotions more effectively, building positive relationships, and an increase in academic engagement (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). All of these findings support YCDI as an effective curriculum for teaching social emotional skills (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). Additionally, the study found that there was an increase in reading skills shown by the students who received the YCDI program versus the students who did not (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). This study provides added evidence towards the claim that the development of social emotional competence is important for not only for overall academic success, but also a child's overall wellbeing (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).

Promoting alternative thinking strategies. Humphrey et al. (2016), conducted a randomized study using the curriculum Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) with elementary students. There have been multiple studies conducted previously of this curriculum that showed promising results in social emotional competency, improved mental health and academic success (Domitrovich et al., 2007, Schonfeld et al., 2014). The PATHS program is designed to assist children in developing social emotional skills such as understanding and controlling emotions, and building positive relationships (Humphrey et al., 2016). Examples of lesson topics include the identification and labeling of emotions, impulse control, understanding of others emotions, and stress reducing strategies. The program provides practice applying newly learned skills to classroom situations and asks for parental involvement in learning through an at home component (Humphrey et al., 2016). The typical format of a

PATHS lesson consists of an introduction, a main activity, and a closure. The curriculum is set up to spiral concepts taught so as to connect previous learning with new learning (Humphrey et al., 2016).

Educators were given a guidance manual to assist in the implementation of this program, provided a one day training before beginning the program, and one half day training a couple months later (Humphrey et al., 2016). In the initial training, teachers received information about the theory of PATHS, the concepts taught, and materials provided. Additionally, teachers received continuous support through modeled lessons, observations, and feedback. (Humphrey et al., 2016). "82% of educators" said that the extra coaching helped them implement the PATHS curriculum more successfully (Humphrey et al., 2016). This is different from the previous curriculum YCDI, as they did not receive extra support in terms of observations, and feedback (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).

The findings of this study strongly support the claim that the program PATHS is an effective social emotional learning curriculum that improves overall social emotional abilities. Researchers found there were secondary effects seen in the improvement of social behavior and engagement in the students. (Humphrey et al., 2016). This study however did not examine academic results after the implementation of the PATHS program. A different study conducted by Schonfeld et al. (2014) stood out from other studies conducted about PATHS because of the duration of the study- three years with the same group of students. The conclusions of this study are similar to previously referenced studies; there is a positive correlation between the PATHS social emotional program and academic achievement during the three-year time span (Schonfeld et al., 2014). The students in this study were in a high-risk school setting. While normally this

would put them at a disadvantage academically, socially and emotionally, the implementation of the PATHS curriculum was found to actually accelerate their social emotional development and academic growth (Schonfeld et al., 2014).

Strong kids. In a study conducted by Caldarella et al. (2009), and a study conducted by Whitcomb and Merrell (2011), focused on the Strong Start social emotional learning curriculum. The Strong Start curriculum is specifically designed for students in grades kindergarten through second grade (Caldarella et al., 2009, Whitcomb & Merrell, 2011). Other studies have been conducted, but these evaluate the Strong Kids curriculum which is the companion to Strong Start. The Strong Kids curriculum is designed for older students. In those studies, significant growth was observed in understanding about emotions and a decline in negative behaviors (Caldarella et al., 2009). The goals of this program include providing practicable and adjustable prevention programs for problems through the learning of social and emotional wellness skills (Caldarella et al., 2009, Whitcomb & Merrell, 2011). The aims of Caldarella et al. (2009) is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Strong Start curriculum, and Whitcomb & Merrell (2011) are evaluating the effects, overall reliability and quality of implementation.

Caldarella et al. (2009) and Whitcomb and Merrell (2011) had these findings in common; the implementation of the Strong Start curriculum had an impact on decreasing difficult or internalizing behaviors. There was an increase seen in social behaviors among the students (Caldarella et al., 2009). There are some questions however on the effect of external behaviors, which suggests that this curriculum may not be effective for all difficult behaviors that are seen in the classroom (Caldarella et al., 2009, Whitcomb & Merrell, 2011).

Through the analysis of the three curriculums, YCDI, PATHS and Strong Start it is apparent there is a strong evidence to support the implementation of social emotional learning curriculums in today's schools. When implemented, there is a solid connection between the development of social emotional learning skills, and positive behavior growth in the classroom. As research into social emotional learning continues, there is promise in more education stakeholders seeing the overwhelming benefit to social emotional learning as an integral part of a child's everyday routine at school.

Summary

This chapter discussed three main ideas, the development of social emotional skills in early childhood, the connection between social emotional learning and academic achievement, and social emotional learning curriculums. The first section highlighted the importance of social emotional learning in preschool, since it has lasting impacts into elementary school and later in life. The second section emphasized the positive benefits of a social emotional learning program on overall academic achievement in the elementary school. Through the explanation of various factors such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the achievement gap, student teacher relationships, and the recent passing of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), it is clear that social emotional learning has far reaching benefits. While the discussion about evaluative measures for social emotional learning remain undecided, the analysis of a few social emotional learning curriculums provide strong evidence of the positive behavioral changes demonstrated by the students. In the next chapter, I explain my rationale for creating my curriculum. I describe the curriculum framework, and outline how I will apply the curriculum framework. I provide background on my intended setting and participants for the implementation of this curriculum.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the project I created based on my research on social emotional learning. My research question is: *what skills and components are the most beneficial in a social emotional learning program for elementary students?* This question stemmed from my earlier experiences in the classroom, working with children who had high social emotional needs. Through my observations, I began asking the question, what is missing in these children's education? Their academic needs are being met, but what about their social and emotional needs?, Surely all of these components connect towards their academic success and overall success as teenagers and adults. In trying to determine what needs were the most important for these students, I wondered how these skills could be taught in an engaging and meaningful way. Too often students are expected to learn content through the simple act of reading a textbook or completing a worksheet. This provides surface level learning. I am looking for meaningful learning, skills and strategies that will stick with them well beyond the classroom.

Throughout this chapter, I describe the creation of my social emotional learning curriculum. I discuss my rationale for my choice of curriculum by providing evidence from the creators of the Understanding by Design curriculum framework. Additionally, I outline the intended format for my curriculum and provide examples of content that will be included. Finally, I address my intended setting and participants for this curriculum implementation. The focus of this chapter is to provide a clearly detailed explanation of the components of the social emotional learning curriculum I created and the reasons behind the framework I used.

Curriculum Framework

The curriculum model I chose to utilize is the Understanding by Design framework created by Wiggins and McTighe (2011). This framework has two focuses. First, it highlights the important relationship between teaching and providing assessments that check for understanding. Secondly, the curriculum model aims to provide an efficient and beneficial way of thinking and planning (Wiggins, & McTighe, 2005, 2011). There are eight foundational beliefs of the Understanding by Design model (UbD). The first is intended to be a pathway of thinking for the educator, not a program to follow word for word. Secondly, the main goal is for students to understand the big ideas being taught, and then be able to apply their learning to real world situations. Thirdly, within stage one the standards are identified. In stage two the standards are applied and shown through carefully chosen assessments (Wiggins, & McTighe, 2005, 2011). The fourth foundational belief is how students show their understanding of the material being taught through the application and transfer of their learning. For example, students learned the characteristics of showing empathy and then demonstrated showing empathy towards another classmate who was having a tough day.

The fifth foundational belief centers around the idea of backward planning. When using this framework, the educator identifies how the students will showcase their learning throughout the unit. They plan the end assessment first, then move backward towards the beginning. This way they have a clear idea of what the goals and objectives of each lesson are. The sixth belief is focused around the role of the educator. Teachers are meant to guide the students toward understanding. In addition, they are also watching for evidence that students are digging deeper into the content being taught and finding avenues for transferring their learning. The seventh

belief discusses the importance of evaluating curriculum and units created on a regular basis, ensuring they are top quality and highly effective. The final belief summarizes the overall mission of the understanding by design model (UbD). This model is meant to be a tool that is used for ongoing developments toward students' overall academic success. The process of evaluating, editing and making revisions is an ongoing process (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, 2011).

UbD is a tool that encourages deep planning, and provides students with specific, intentional learning activities and assessments which allow them to form deeper cross curricular connections with the content being taught. The goal within UbD is always centered on the student achieving their optimal success (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, 2011). One of the ways this curriculum model stands out from the rest is the inclusion of the backward design. The positive outcomes of backward planning include more specific and cohesive short term and long term learning goals, teaching is more intentional, and assessments are aligned to the learning goals of the lesson and overall unit (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, 2011). These ideas are fully integrated into the three-stage planning process.

The first stage in the planning process is to identify the desired outcomes in the unit. In this stage, the focus is on the long-term goals, the essential questions that will guide the overall unit, identification of knowledge to be acquired and specific skills to be taught. Additionally, it is important to decide what smaller foundational blocks need to be set in place for acquiring meaning so the students may build on them to arrive at the bigger ideas (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, 2011). The second stage builds by first identifying the desired outcomes, then determining acceptable evidence of those outcomes. This stage centers around the ideas of what measures and

criteria will be used to determine if students have been able to make meaning and successfully transfer their learning. How will a teacher know if a student is successful in finding deeper connections in their learning, and if they are exhibiting signs of transferring their learning? This stage also takes a closer look at if the assessments are closely connected to the learning outcomes in stage one (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, 2011).

The third and final stage allows for the educator to take what they developed in stage one and two, and expand on them. In this stage, educators are asked to identify effective instructional techniques and prepare for various learning experiences. The mindset of this stage is to ask questions such as: what learning opportunities are going to allow students to be the most successful at showing their learning? How can I as an educator use my curriculum or unit plan to ensure students are connecting to their learning, and are able to transfer their learning at the end of the lesson? Additionally, educators should think about how to keep track of student progress, pacing, and differentiation options available to students (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, 2011). In this learning framework, everything must flow from one stage to the next, seamlessly.

Given the rationale behind this curriculum framework, it is easy to see why it is a solid choice when planning the implementation of a curriculum or a unit. As an educator, I know the importance of having a planning process that requires you to think deeply about each stage of your unit. Just as students must understand the purpose for what they are doing, educators must understand the purpose of their teaching. Educators must be intentional and purposeful. Nothing can be a "just because" learning experience.

In the next section, I outline the format for my curriculum and provide examples of content that will be included through an example lesson. The goal of this next section is to take

what I learned about the understanding by design curriculum and apply it to my own curriculum planning on skills and concepts that are most beneficial in a social emotional learning program.

      Curriculum development outline. The format of my curriculum is the UbD model. I utilized all three stages of the planning process. In the first stage of the planning process, I identified my desired learning outcomes. These outcomes will be focused on the bigger social emotional skills that I want the students to learn and be able to demonstrate by the end of the unit. These skills will be developmentally appropriate for the K-2 age group. The skills students will learn and be able to demonstrate will be centered around the unit essential questions, as well as the daily lesson essential questions. Additionally, within stage one, I developed criteria for students to show the transfer of their learning. It is important when learning about social emotional skills, students should have plenty of opportunities for the application of these skills in real world situations. An example of a real world situation is daily happenings in the classroom or individual difficulties. Examples of the desired learning outcomes include students being able to demonstrate skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision making in and out of the classroom (CASEL, n.d.b).

      An example of a proficient demonstration of self-management is a child who can manage their emotions throughout the school day. This means, even when they are faced with an obstacle that could affect their feelings and overall school day, they know how to calm down and refocus on academic tasks. An additional element of self-management is being aware of a peer's feelings and being able to show understanding towards their feelings. This can be difficult for some students as to not make fun of or get distracted by another peer's feelings or behavior in the classroom. A transfer of learning within this skill could be demonstrated by a child helping

another child to understand someone else's emotions, so that they may too understand the child and their feelings or behaviors. An example of an essential question that would connect with a lesson about self-management is: What can we do when faced with a problem during the school day? This essential question would allow students to learn about strategies they could utilize during the school day when faced with obstacles. After learning the background knowledge, they are able to move into practicing and applying those strategies through an activity, such as role playing.

In the second stage of the planning process, I developed ways for educators to identify the learner's ability to demonstrate social emotional skills. I developed checklists and observation forms for teachers to utilize as they observe students throughout the school day. As a way to share their observations, teachers will be encouraged to have a space in their classroom where they post when they "catch" their students practicing social emotional skills throughout the day. This would create a culture of encouragement and support among the students in the class. Students will also be asked to complete mini check in sheets about how they feel about their overall learning progression. Example questions on a check in sheet about making responsible decisions include: What is one way that you have practiced making responsible decisions this week? What is something you can continue working on for next week? It would also be beneficial to develop an at home component where parents could share if they witness their child practicing and applying skills they are learning at home. This not only would give students more opportunities to practice, but it also opens up the dialogue between parent and child about the practice and application of these skills. However, given my past educational experiences, I recognized that not all children have positive home environments that will support

them and be involved in this process. I thought this would be an optional piece that educators could decide if they want to incorporate in their implementation of this curriculum. Through these various methods, teachers have a few ways to collect evidence of the learned social emotional skills.

The third stage of the planning process focuses on the overall learning opportunities in the unit. This stage in the planning process is where I identify the specific activities students would be doing in the lesson to learn about and practice the skill being taught. I decided taking a week to focus on each skill gives ample time for students to learn about the skill and practice it in a variety of ways. Additionally, since the lessons are only 30 minutes, the week-long focus provides flexibility for the progression of learning. In a lesson focused on self- management, the introductory lesson activities focus on the student learning about the term self-management, and developing background knowledge about this term. One of the essential questions of this lesson is: What are ways that we can show self- management? After learning the definition of the term self-management, the teacher would have the students create a word web, coming up with related words to help them better understand the concept and be able to make connections to the term. From there, the teacher would share a story about a child who learns how to demonstrate self-management in and out of the classroom.

After reading, the class would have a discussion where they identify actions where the character did and did not show self-management. The class could make a T-chart, so the students could begin to see the differences between the actions of the character. These activities would provide background knowledge for the students as they begin to think about this term and what it means to show these skills. The final activity in the lesson would be for the students to write one

goal about how they will demonstrate self-management during the week. The teacher would either have the students share their goals in whole or small groups, or collect them and check in with the students throughout the week on their goal progression.

Assessment of curriculum. As a part of chapter two, I researched and discussed evaluation methods for social emotional learning curriculums. Based on my findings, I decided for my curriculum evaluation to create a pre-evaluation checklist of skills that students are demonstrating well, and ones they are lacking demonstrating. There is also a check in, in the middle of teaching, so teachers can see evidence of growth and also note where students still need more instruction. Finally, at the conclusion of teaching, there is a post evaluation, similar to the pre-evaluation. Teachers will note what skills students are demonstrating, and where to go next in their learning progression. Teachers will also have the option to send home this information in a template to families. Additionally, in my research I found a strong connection between social emotional learning and academic achievement, I provided a data tracking method for teachers to utilize to see academic growth during the unit. Through these evaluation methods, teachers and researchers are able to have evidence of growth in not only social emotional skills, but also in academic success in the classroom.

Professional development. As evidenced by my research on social emotional learning curriculums, an important part of the success of a social emotional learning curriculum is the professional development available to educators. As a part of my curriculum, I have a power point presentation and hand out that will outline the big ideas, essential questions, and materials included in this curriculum. The handout also provides examples of classroom set up, and

learning activities. The presentation and hand out both provide detailed information so educators will feel confident in the implementation of this curriculum in their classroom.

Setting & Participants

The intended participants for the curriculum development are students at an elementary school located in a suburb of a midwestern state. The curriculum is geared towards students in the grades of kindergarten, first, and second. The average class size is around 20-25 students. The students will be of varying ethnicities and both genders will be represented. Most of the students come from working middle class backgrounds and live in close proximity to the school. In this setting, there is an established special education program and a setting four program within the school. Currently, there is a school social worker and a mental health specialist on site full time. The mental health specialist conducts one-on-one meetings with students who have been referred or inquired for their services. This referral could come from a teacher or a parent. If the teacher refers the student, parent consent must be obtained before services begin. A parent can also request services without a teacher referral.

The school social worker also meets one-on-one with students and sometimes has small groups. The times they are allowed to pull students for meetings is limited because of the focus of academics within the school. The school social worker usually meets with students during lunch, recess or specialist periods. In addition, the school social worker must be available to assist in crisis situations with students. Currently, there is not a specific schedule for the school social worker to conduct whole group lessons. Teachers must request a time for them to come in and conduct a lesson. This time is not allowed to conflict with any other academic subject in the school day. This leaves little time for any lessons focusing on character development skills. It

should come as no surprise that there is not currently a specified time in the school day to focus on social emotional learning. A majority of the teachers agree that social emotional learning is important; however, they feel they are not supported in making time during the school day for those lessons. Many start out the day with morning meeting before beginning academic subjects to assist with community building, although this is not actually a specific time on the schedule.

Project Timeline

This curriculum will be a full year curriculum, focusing on identified behaviors, and spiraling back to them throughout the year. My timeline for creating and completing my project will be from June 2017-August 2017. I will be sharing my professional development piece of my curriculum at teacher workshops in August, and will implement my program in my classroom starting in September 2017.

Summary

In this chapter I first discussed the UbD framework. I provided evidence from the authors Wiggins & McTighe (2005, 2011) supporting my rationale for choosing the UbD framework as the foundation I used in my curriculum development. I highlighted the three planning stages and explained how each of these stages work together to provide a cohesive unit that encourages educators to think deeply about each component of the planning process to ensure the highest academic success for all students. Secondly, I provided an outline of the curriculum I created. I identified in each of the planning stages how I would incorporate the overall essential ideas through an example lesson based on the social emotional skill of self-management. Finally, I identified the intended setting and participants for my curriculum implementation and explained background information related to the need for this type of implementation.

In the next chapter, I provide a conclusion to my thesis. First, I discuss the effectiveness of the UbD curriculum framework I chose to utilize in my own planning and development. Secondly, I share what I learned about the overall curriculum development process and ideas for improvement in the future. Finally, I provide examples from the curriculum that I developed and share my ideas for implementation in the coming school year.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

When I began teaching five years ago I was unaware of where my journey would lead me. My experiences working with students is why I became interested in social emotional learning. I believed it was the answer to the question I repeatedly asked myself-- what was missing in these children's education? During the school day, they received language arts and math instruction. They played outside at recess, and they went to classes such as gym, art and music. However, during that same school day, they also struggled to build healthy relationships with classmates and teachers, and express their emotions in a healthy way. Many students lacked the skills necessary to just focus on their learning when they had outside influences impacting them. It became apparent that these students did not just need academic learning every day, they also needed something more, something to help them build positive relationships, express emotions in a healthy way, and ultimately understand the world around them.

Beginning graduate school a year and a half ago, social emotional learning as a thesis topic was always in the back of mind. I had a strong desire to increase my knowledge and learn more about the impact social emotional learning has on a child's overall development. I believed there was a connection and the skills focused on were ones that would have an effect not only on a child when they were in school but as an adult as well. These beliefs led me to the development of my research question: *what skills and components are the most beneficial in a social emotional learning program for elementary students?* Through my literature review conducted in

chapter two, I decided to create a social emotional learning curriculum that was geared towards kindergarten-second grade students. This curriculum provides students with the hands-on learning opportunities to practice and develop lifelong skills focused on respect, social awareness, and self-awareness. Additionally, the students are given learning assignments at home to further connect their classroom learning and skill building. I believe though the explicit instruction focused on these skills, the educators will see growth not only in the social emotional skills but also in overall academic learning.

Summary of Literature Review

Research suggests that the early development of social emotional learning skills tend to begin in two settings, first, in children's homes and secondly in early childhood programs (Leuzinger- Bohleber, 2014; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The experiences that children have from the time they are born to the time they turn five sets the tone for later childhood and adult experiences (Bagdi & Vacca, 2005). During this time, the experiences children are having shape their overall thought processes and how they respond to various situations (Baker, 2014; Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The interactions that children have with their parental figures and caregivers during this stage are crucial for the development of social emotional learning skills. Through a healthy, nurturing relationship with parents and caregivers, children are able to learn positive relationship building skills and have less behavioral difficulties in school and as an adult (Denham, 1998; Jones- Harden et al., 2000; Whittaker et al., 2011). However, if a child is in a stressful and chaotic environment, their social emotional learning development will be hindered which will likely cause behavioral difficulties in elementary school and later in life (Campbell et al., 2000). This research confirms the positive

connection between having a nurturing parent or primary caregiver and the development of social emotional skills in early childhood.

In early childhood programs, there is an emphasis on learning that provides early experiences for students before they go to elementary school. One of the emphases is on social emotional learning. There have been positive results found when studying the effect of social emotional learning programs in early childhood. These programs aim to provide opportunities for students to practice and develop social emotional skills in a safe environment to prevent future behavioral and emotional difficulties (Gunter et al., 2012). The Strong Start curriculum along with the PATHS curriculum provide strong examples of the effects of social emotional learning programs implemented in early childhood and the change in student behaviors seen by educators (Gunter et al., 2011 & Hamre et al., 2012).

The impact of social emotional learning does not just affect a child's early childhood years, it also affects the overall academic achievement children have in elementary school and beyond. When students have strong social emotional skills, those skills translate in the classroom to a child who is more effective. This is demonstrated by being able to communicate effectively with classmates and teachers, and set goals for themselves as a learner (Zins et al., 2007). Through the learning of social emotional skills, students are able to develop the tools they need to feel physically and emotionally safe. This in turn connects to the idea of the achievement gap that is a very prevalent issue in today's school systems. The achievement gap often impacts students who come from low income families, who lack supports and resources available to them. Because of this, they also lack social emotional skill development. These students then frequently exhibit behavioral difficulties at school which will in turn affect their overall

academic success in school. If they were given an opportunity for social emotional skill development at school then they could apply these skills to everyday life situations. Social emotional learning curriculums typically include a focus on four or five competencies in their programs. These include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building and responsible decision making (CASEL, n.d.b). These competencies and the way the program is implemented have a significant connection to the overall success of a social emotional learning curriculum in today's schools.

Description of Project

In Chapter two, the research provided strong evidence of a positive relationship between the implementation of a social emotional learning curriculum and the growth of positive behaviors seen in the classroom. It is because of this research that I decided to create my own social emotional learning curriculum. My project is in the format of a google drive unit with three separate folders. In each of the folders are lesson folders with supplemental materials. This curriculum is geared towards kindergarten-through second grade students. My rationale behind this being that often times social emotional skill development staggers because the child is no longer receiving explicit instruction in social emotional skills. Kindergarten, first and second grade is where this learning should continue as the children are continuing to develop these skills. Included in the curriculum are three overall themes broken apart into three separate months. The first month focuses on the skill of respect. This was chosen as the first month's focus because of the thought you cannot build classroom community and a supportive learning environment without respect. The second month's focus is social awareness. The skills included provide students with opportunities to understand people around them. An example of this would

be a lesson focused on similarities and differences with classmates and with children who live in other countries. The goal is to have these skills connect with relationship building which also connects with the skill of respect from the month prior. The third month is centered on self-awareness. During this month students are building their awareness about themselves. What makes them unique, what are their strengths, what are they still learing to do, and how do they learn best? They also are developing skills focused on understanding and managing their emotions. Each of the themes have five lessons and have developmentally appropriate supplemental materials for each lesson. Additionally, there is an at home component included with parent letters to send home with each lesson. This curriculum and lessons were developed to provide students with engaging learning opportunities to practice and apply their social emotional skills.

Limitations of the Project

When I came up with the idea to create curriculum as my project, I did not think about how this is something that I have never done before. Yes, in my undergraduate studies and past teaching settings I have had to create lessons before but not a complete curriculum unit. Getting started was difficult because I had two dilemmas. The first was figuring out the themes to focus on. Then my next dilemma was figuring out what each lesson's focus was going to be. I knew that I wanted them to connect to each other and be developmentally appropriate. It was challenging to figure out which three themes and five lesson progression I wanted to follow given the time of year I planned to teach the curriculum. It took a lot of brainstorming, and thinking about what I really wanted the students to gain from these lessons and overall

curriculum. However, once I narrowed down my three themes, and figured out the focuses of the lessons the ideas started flowing more freely.

I chose to utilize the UbD format as my curriculum model because I was familiar with it from previous teaching settings. I liked that this format included essential questions and overall big ideas. I also liked that the learning opportunities were directly tied to the objectives and overall learning progression. Something that was difficult however was the issue of not having social emotional learning state standards. This made it difficult to narrow in on a key focus for each of the lessons. My options were more open ended instead of having a direction to lean towards. Additionally, one of the limitations of many social emotional learning curriculums is the decision about how to assess social emotional skills, since it is a non-academic skill.

The UbD model is set up for the inclusion of a formative assessment included in every lesson. I found this as a challenge at first because I was unsure of what methods I could utilize as formative assessments for these skills. My question was, how can you assess skill development of non academic skills? I also wondered what type of assessment would be developmentally appropriate for younger elementary students. In my curriculum, I decided to provide a pre and post observation skill checklist for each of the three months. The educator is then able to see growth from the beginning of the unit till the end of the unit. There is a limitation that presents itself through the use of the checklists. What happens if the educator does not see growth from the pre to the post check list? What I would do if this happened with my group of students is I would create a small group or try to work with the student one on one to further help the student with developing the skills they were missing. This idea however presents the issue of time during the school day to have these small groups or one on one meetings with the students. I also

created 3-4 learning opportunities in each lesson to provide educators with options for what assignments they could use as assessment assignments.

Another challenge that I could foresee happening in the implementation of this project is the time needed for each of the lessons. Since these lessons have not been taught yet, some of them could go quicker, whereas others may take more time than I am anticipating. The age group of the students could also play a factor in the time duration of activities. Additionally, teachers may choose not to implement the home component that is included in the curriculum. I could see some educators seeing that as not necessary or just something extra. Even though when I introduce this curriculum, I would emphasize the importance of the home component. Family involvement could also pose as an issue, because they do not have time or they are uninterested. The size and resources vary from school to school. It is possible that teachers may not have the space for the peace place or the space to post anchor charts, student work, or student goals in the classroom. A final challenge I could see is if the teachers do not have access to technology or one of the books included in the lessons that could make it more difficult or more of a hassle for them to implement the curriculum. For this reason, I included many youtube video links for books that were utilized in the lessons.

Implications of the Project

As I previously stated in my chapter one, my research question: *what skills and components are the most beneficial in a social emotional learning program for elementary students?* stemmed from personal experiences I have had in my first few years teaching. While I was researching I continuously read about how the implementation of a social emotional learning

curriculum was the best method for teaching social emotional learning skills to students in elementary school (Gunter et al.,2012, Hughes & Cline, 2015). It was because of this research that I decided that my project was going to be creating a social emotional learning curriculum for students in kindergarten- second grade.

The first implication of this project is the use of hands on and engaging methods and strategies within this social emotional learning curriculum to provide students with opportunities to practice and develop social emotional skills in a way that provides meaningful learning. For instance, research supports when movement is incorporated into learning, students are more likely to create more meaningful and longer lasting learning connections with the content being taught (Gunter et al.,2012). The second implication is through the home component that is included in each of the lessons. This comes from the research that supports the idea of the practice at home being just as important as the practice in school. In my curriculum, I developed home letters for every lesson with some type of activity for families to engage in. Examples of this include identifying similarities and differences with a parent, or sharing a song that was introduced during the lesson. The goal is to connect the classroom learning with conversations, activities, and student behaviors at home. When parents are involved, the students are then more involved in the learning, and overall skill development.

Through this component of the curriculum, educators are able to open the lines of communication between home and school. Teachers will be able to share what is going on in the classroom, and parents will be see the effects of the learning through the home activities, and hopeful changes in students' behaviors. It also fosters a positive relationship between teachers and parents. And most importantly, parents and their children. Through the home activities they

are spending time together, having meaningful discussions about important life skills. Students are not only able to connect to the classroom learning, but the additional learning at home.

The final implication that I see with this curriculum is through the addition of student goals within the lesson, and the emphasis on student understanding and growth throughout all of the lessons. This can be see through students creating either a class goal or an individual goal about how they are going to show respect at school, or how they are going to show someone they care. These goals not only allow students to have opportunities for application of what we are learning about, it also motivates them to make an effort to practice these skills. Also, throughout the lessons are continuous opportunities for creating anchor charts, and visuals in the classroom to be used as reminders of the classroom learning happening. I strongly felt that the development and learning of these skills was not something the students were going to do for 30 minutes a day, and then forget about it until the next lesson. Instead, the content is taught during the lesson, and then applied throughout the rest of the school day. This can be specifically seen in the fifth lesson centered on respect. The fifth lesson focuses on students practicing skills and learning from the previous lessons and applying it to how to solve a problem respectfully. This allows students to practice and apply the skills they have been learning about. It also allows educators an opportunity to see where students' strengths are with the skill, and where they could use more instruction, or practice.

When I think about the impact of this curriculum on future students, I start to feel excited because of how powerful I believe this learning is. If students received this kind of learning every day, there would be less behavioral disruptions which in turn means less students are missing out on learning. Students are happier, and able to understand the world around them so

much better. With this type of learning, they are given an avenue for understanding and developing strategies for dealing with those issues. They learn that they are not alone, because everyone is participating in the activities and learning together. By educators choosing to utilize this curriculum, they are agreeing to making time for not only academic subjects, but non-academic ones as well. They are showing their students that they care about them as a whole person, and they are committed to providing them learning opportunities that allow them to develop those skills.

If I were to change my research question, I think I would change it to focus on the assessment of social emotional learning skills, because in my literature review I found there was less information than I hoped about this topic. I also continuously read about how not enough research had been done yet on effective methods for the assessment of social emotional learning skills. It would be interesting to look into this further and see what connections can be made across the research to come up with a cohesive approach for the assessment of social emotional learning skills.

Author's Reflection

As I think back over the past five years, I think that the progression of events leading me to choose social emotional learning as my capstone topic and creating a social emotional learning curriculum was set in motion during my first three years teaching. The experiences that I had and the students I worked with during those three years are the reasons why I chose to make social emotional learning the focus of my capstone project. Throughout this process, I have learned more about what I value as an educator. I strongly believe that while teaching the academic

subjects are important, so are the non-academic or life skills. Children need both to reach their highest potential. Because of the multiple studies and articles that I read, I know that social emotional learning will be something that I incorporate into all of teaching placements going forward. No matter if I am a classroom teacher, an interventionist or an administrator. I also will share my learning with other colleagues in hopes that they will incorporate this kind of learning into their everyday teaching as well. The more teachers that see the value in incorporating this kind of learning into their everyday routine the more students will benefit and continue developing these important life skills as they progress through elementary school.

Developing the curriculum was an exciting challenge. I didn't quite know where to begin at first, because this was a new endeavor. I had to be knowledgeable and skilled in many areas. I first had to know developmentally what learning activities would be the most engaging. Secondly, I had to know how to create supplemental materials that were developmentally appropriate and met the objectives of the intended lesson. As I stated previously, there are not social emotional learning standards for elementary students in this state. Because of that, I had to decide on objectives and what supplemental materials would fit those objectives. Now that I have completed this project, I feel more comfortable and knowledgeable about each of the steps that go into creating curriculum. I would hope if I were to do this again that I would have a team to collaborate with, because I feel there is a lot of value in being able to bounce ideas off of someone and also have opportunity to build and combine ideas with another colleague. Also, when working on a team, it is nice to be able to divide up tasks and work on something that plays more to your strengths.

As I continue my career in education, I know that social emotional learning will play a large role in my classroom. This type of learning impacts the child not only for that school year but for many years to come, it is must be made a priority and I intend to make it a priority in my classroom. Additionally, I know that I can continue to grow in the area of writing and developing curriculum. There is always room for growth on what teaching strategies are being utilized in the lessons, and how to best engage the students. With my graduate courses coming to a close, there is a sense of relief in completing this big accomplishment, however I know I am not done. I still have other goals that I will pursue in the coming years. The field of education is unique in that it is always changing, and there is always something more to learn. I intend to keep learning and keep growing. I do this not only for me, but more importantly for my students and their overall success.

Conclusion

Hamline School of Education's conceptual framework aligns with my values as an educator. I believe that my project serves as an example of each of the values that are a part of the conceptual framework. The first part of the conceptual framework is to promote equity in schools and society. I believe that my project does this through lessons that are focused on demonstrating similarities and differences with their classmates and with students around the world. Additionally, the lessons in this curriculum have the underlying message that everyone should be treated with respect, kindness, and understanding, no matter their background. Promoting equity is one of the values that this curriculum has been built on.

The second part of the conceptual framework is to build communities of teachers and learners. This curriculum builds communities of teachers and learners through each of the lessons. The curriculum begins with a focus on the skill of respect. This was chosen as the first skill because you cannot build a community without having respect for one another. It is one of the foundational skills of relationship building. The second skill that is focused on is social awareness. This means being aware of others around you and their needs. One of the lessons included within this skill is how to be a good friend, which helps students with building relationships with their classmates and with other individuals in their life. The third skill is self-awareness, while this is an individual skill, it also connects with relationship building. This is because as students gain understanding about themselves, they are better able to transfer this learning to understanding about others.

The third part of the conceptual framework is to construct knowledge. Throughout the learning opportunities in each of the lessons, students are constructing knowledge about each of the social emotional skills being taught. In each of the sets of lessons, the learning progression is set up for students to construct knowledge in a variety of ways. For example, in the first lesson focused on respect students are using previous knowledge about respect to build a word web of words related to the term, respect. This allows students to not only build new knowledge about the term respect, but also use prior knowledge to further expand their learning. The final part of the conceptual framework is to practice thoughtful inquiry and reflection. The students are given an opportunity to reflect when they make goals for themselves and share with the class when they are demonstrating the skills that are being taught. Additionally, through the at home component, the students have opportunities to have conversations with their parents about skills

being taught in class and how they can be practiced at home. Teachers are given time for reflection when observing students in the beginning of the unit and at the end of the unit.

Through observing the students' progress, teachers can evaluate their teaching methods and ideas for additions or subtractions when teaching the next time. Students are given an opportunity for thoughtful inquiry through book discussions that are related to the skills being focused on and through multiple learning activities where students are asked to think about how they would respond to a specific situation or how they would identify and demonstrate the skill being taught. I plan to implement this curriculum in the coming school year and as I do this, I also will continue to find ways to add Hamline's conceptual framework to my work.

For now, I will take what I learned during my graduate courses, and in my research about social emotional learning into the classroom, where it will be utilized for the best possible reason; to foster social emotional growth and academic success for all students.

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APPENDIX A

Project Link- Social Emotional Learning Curriculum

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