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Social And Emotional Learning Strategies In The Elementary Classroom And Their Impact On Student Success

Megan Williams
Hamline University

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SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING STRATEGIES IN THE ELEMENTARY

CLASSROOM AND THEIR IMPACT ON STUDENT SUCCESS

By

Megan Williams

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master

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Hamline University

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Primary Advisor: Kelly Killorn-Moravec
Content Expert: Emily Gosen
Peer Reviewer: Sarah Hutchins-Haavisto

ABSTRACT

Williams, M. How can having access to a set of activities for teaching social emotional learning skills support teachers in creating a positive elementary classroom? (2018)

Social and Emotional Learning is an essential component of academic success. Many researchers have indicated that explicit instruction in social and emotional learning at the elementary level will help teachers to meet the needs of all students in a positive and constructive classroom environment. This capstone reviews several theories including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Emotional Intelligence, all of which support the need for social and emotional learning to be explicitly taught in the elementary classroom. Additionally, this capstone emphasizes the need for parental support in teaching students social and emotional skills as well as highlights the need for support from other adults in the school including the school psychologist, counselor and support workers. Finally, this capstone summarizes the capstone project in which the researcher compiled resources and activities to share with other teachers in order to promote social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom and answer the research question, *What are the most effective social and emotional learning strategies to improve student engagement in the elementary classroom and how will the creation of a binder of daily implemented social emotional learning strategies improve the climate in the elementary classroom?*

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In order for students to be successful in the classroom, teachers must work hard to make sure all of their needs are being met. Teachers know that students who are hungry, for example, will have a difficult time paying attention in class and their academic achievement will suffer as a result. According to American Psychologist Abraham Maslow (as cited in Atkins, 2011), humans have a hierarchy of needs that must be met. He suggested that a human's basic needs, such as food, water and clothing, must be met in order to fulfill more sophisticated needs such as self-actualization.

Another crucial aspect of student success in the classroom is their social and emotional well-being. Maslow (as cited in Atkins, 2011) indicated this as an important step in his hierarchy of needs, following basic needs and safety. Students must be able to peacefully solve conflicts, develop and maintain interpersonal relationships and communicate effectively with others. These skills connected to the social well-being of learners described by Maslow are also related to a child's social and emotional learning (SEL). Raimundo, Marques-Pinto and Lima, (2012) described how social-emotional learning can include many components but most often refers to the

> "development of self-awareness, and self-management skills to achieve school and life success; use of social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships; demonstration of decision-making skills; and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts" (p. 166) .

Given the importance of SEL, the research questions for my capstone are: *What are the most effective social and emotional learning strategies to improve student engagement in the elementary classroom and how will the creation of a binder of daily implemented social emotional learning strategies improve the climate in the elementary classroom?* This question has become more important given changes observed in the students entering my classroom.

In my professional teaching experience over the past nine years, I have seen an increased need for specific social emotional learning curriculum in the classroom. As a first year teacher, my assumption was that students were coming to school ready to learn and had developed social and emotional skills, specifically conflict-resolution skills, at home. Very quickly it became clear that my students were not equipped with these skills. While in the classroom, I witnessed students who were unable to solve problems on their own, as well as students who struggled developing and maintaining relationships with their peers. While this is something that is expected in kindergarten and first grade students, I did not expect to see this in my 6th through 8th grade students. When asked to complete a project with a classmate, I was shocked at how difficult it was for students to work cooperatively with each other, compromise and solve problems.

It became very clear that students are coming to school with a deficit in this area and need to be given opportunities to learn about and practice using social emotional skills. Raimundo et al. (2012) supports the idea that by implementing social emotional learning strategies into the daily routine of the elementary classroom, teachers can easily equip students with the skills they need in order to be successful in the classroom and

beyond. When doing this, teachers are working toward developing and maintaining a positive classroom environment and will help to prevent issues from arising in the classroom (pp. 165-167).

During the course of my project, I explored social and emotional learning strategies that can be easily implemented into the elementary classroom, specifically my fourth grade classroom. These students attend an elementary school in a first ring suburb of a large metropolitan area in the upper midwest. My intention was to develop strategies that were easy to implement and promoted a positive learning environment that allowed students to increase their academic success. The successful implementation of these strategies helped students develop and use conflict resolution skills and therefore promoted a positive classroom climate. This project was the first step in helping me reach this goal by identifying the strategies to implement. The following research questions guided my project: *What are the most effective social and emotional learning strategies to improve student engagement in the elementary classroom and how will the creation of a binder of daily implemented social emotional learning strategies improve the climate in the elementary classroom?*

In this chapter, I introduce my capstone project by explaining its purpose and narrating the journey that led me to develop it, I describe the stakeholders who were an integral part of the process, and provide a rationale that explains the process of the project and some of the key components.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to identify strategies that, when implemented in the elementary classroom daily, promote social and emotional learning (SEL). Several research-based strategies and activities were compiled into a document for teachers to use each day in their classroom. Strategies and activities were short and easy to implement in order to encourage teachers to use them. By incorporating these strategies into daily routines, the long term goal was for teachers to develop a classroom community of students who were able to manage conflict and solve problems in a productive way as well as communicate effectively with their peers.

Professionals in education acknowledge that social and emotional learning (SEL) is essential to student success in the classroom. According to Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) from The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), "For children to succeed during elementary school, further schooling, and careers, they need to be socially, emotional, and academically competent" (p. 36). When teachers implement social emotional learning strategies in the classroom, students develop skills that help to reduce problems and enhance the classroom environment.

Ross, Powell and Elias (2002) supported the idea that when students work on strategies involving "social interaction, conflict resolution, stress management, and assertiveness," they are helping to "lower levels of interpersonal violence" in school (p. 45). Being able to effectively exhibit these skills as well as being able to manage emotions appropriately gives students the tools they need in order to maintain a positive relationship with their peers and therefore contributing to a healthy classroom environment. Additionally, teachers who establish a consistent routine of social and

emotional learning strategies lay the groundwork for a positive classroom environment. Research strongly supports this idea and Dusenbury and Weisberg suggest that students will learn 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" (2017, p. 36) through social and emotional learning opportunities. Finally, students who are able to practice these skills will eliminate the barriers in their educational experience that might prevent them from learning (Dusenbury & Weisberg, 2017).

A successful social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum includes components that allow students to learn about these areas and practice skills that help them to be successful in school and life. Dusenbury and Weisberg suggested that SEL programs not only need to be well-designed, but also conducted with fidelity, or an emphasis on carrying out the program as it is written (2017, p. 43). Strategies should not only teach the skills, but allow students to practice using the skills in real-life situations in an environment that is safe and allows them to learn from their mistakes. For example, students were given scenarios to act out in front of the class. The scenarios involved two students who were having a difficult time compromising about what to do at recess. In the scenario, students acted out strategies they could use in order to come to an agreement. After the activity, the class discussed other strategies that were not mentioned and also made connections to the activity by sharing their own personal experience.

According to Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017), activities that have been shown to improve student's social and emotional skills included teacher modeling, reflecting and brainstorming, storytelling, social and self-reinforcement of skills and opportunities for hands-on learning and inquiry. These types of activities are researched and examined in the literature review section of Chapter Two of my capstone.

In the following paragraphs, I highlight the components of my personal journey as an educator that allowed me to identify the need for social and emotional learning activities in the elementary classroom.

Personal Journey

I started teaching in 2008 and over the past ten years have noticed a significant change in children's ability to cope with difficult situations. I have worked with a variety of students from a wide-range of socio-economic backgrounds and have found many similarities among the groups. First, my students have a difficult time developing and maintaining friendships on a consistent basis in elementary school. This past year (AY 2017/2018), I observed students on several different occasions sitting by themselves during free time. When asked why they were not playing with other students, they indicated that they did not know how to ask other students to play or they were worried that the students would say no. Instead of attempting to play with others, students preferred to sit alone so they would not have to experience rejection or the uncomfortable situation of asking someone to play. This showed me that students need to practice these skills.

Next, when faced with adversity or a conflict situation, students were not equipped with the tools they needed to work through these instances. One particular student in my class this past year was so competitive that when things did not go his way while playing a game at recess, he cried and threw a fit. Once he was removed from the game, he needed a significant amount of time to calm down before he could talk about what happened. Even once he was calm, he was not open to problem-solving. Instead, he was stuck on the situation and could not process his feelings. Even though this situation happened frequently with this student, he continued to react in the same way, indicating that he was not learning anything from this experience and needed support in how to deal with difficult situations.

Finally, students in my school had an increased level of stress and had a difficult time working through these stressful situations, which often lead to conflict and/or outbursts in the classroom. Students in my third grade classes over the past two years have shown signs of distress when we started preparing for the required comprehensive state assessment. This assessment was new to third grade students and a lot of unintentional pressure was placed on them by parents and teachers. Additionally, test preparation was extensive and often boring for students and they were told repeatedly how important the results were, causing stress for most students. It is clear that students in my classroom and our building needed to learn how to appropriately deal with difficult situations and effectively communicate with their peers.

While reflecting on the changing social and emotional needs in the elementary classroom where I work, it was clear that something needed to be done in order to teach

children how to cope with these difficult situations. They needed support and strategies in order to navigate through the changing times. While researching potential strategies, I found information on the importance of implementing social and emotional learning into student's daily routines, especially in the elementary classroom. These included opportunities for students to collaborate with others, role-playing activities to promote conflict resolution and inquiry-based learning opportunities to encourage problem solving skills. I decided it would be extremely beneficial to use my capstone project to develop specific social and emotional learning strategies and activities that can be easily implemented in the daily routines of the elementary classrooms in my school and district. The final product was something I shared with my coworkers and spread throughout the school and district which benefited others in many ways. First, teachers in my school helped to promote social and emotional learning, enhancing their classroom environment and ultimately improving the school environment as a while. Once other teachers in the district began to use the resources, all students benefited from consistent instruction in social and emotional learning, regardless of the school they attended.

I put together a collection of strategies and resources for teachers to use in their classroom, specifically in grades three through five. These tools could be easily implemented into the daily routines of classroom teachers and did not create additional planning and setup. Teachers in my building have a tremendous amount of responsibility and with the constant increase on our workload and stakes for mandated testing, it can be overwhelming to think about adding another piece to our day. The strategies I compiled easily fit into the school day and were intended to become a part of student's daily

routine. The ease of implementation was something that encouraged teachers to use these

strategies as they are essential in the development of children. In the following section, I

describe teachers as stakeholders as well as identify others who were an essential part of

my process.

Stakeholders

Many people are involved in the social and emotional learning of children but in

my project, teachers lead the charge in developing social and emotional learning skills in

students. According to Schonert-Reichl (2017), "teachers are the engine that drives

social and emotional learning (SEL) programs and practices in schools and classrooms,

and their own social-emotional competence and wellbeing strongly influence their

students (2017, p. 137). This idea emphasizes the importance of teachers being aware of

their own social and emotional abilities in order to create a positive classroom

environment in which students are able to thrive. In addition to teachers feeling

confident about their own social and emotional learning, Schonert-Reichl (2017) also

mentioned the importance of support in the success of a SEL program. This included

extensive professional development in the area of social and emotional learning as well

as administrative support throughout the school year (2017, p. 146). Without this

support, teachers were unable to successfully create a positive classroom environment.

In addition to administrative support, other adults in my school were needed to

support me and my students in this journey. It was helpful that teachers in all grades were

committed to setting up these structures in their classroom so students could consistently

learn and practice these skills. I taught these strategies to fourth grade students, and

shared the strategies with fifth grade teachers at my school so students would continue to receive support as they move on to fifth grade.

It was also important for school support workers, social workers and psychologists to have an understanding of the SEL strategies that were implemented and they needed to support me as I implemented the strategies in my classroom. Ross, Powell and Elias (2002) discussed the important role of school psychologists in children's social and emotional learning. They suggested that psychologists roles have shifted to the "areas such as prevention programming, teacher and administrator professional development, and collaboration with other educators and professional organizations" (2002, pp. 43-44). They should also be available to assist students who need additional support or are not receiving enough instruction in their classroom. I met with our school psychologist, guidance counselor, and student support worker to discuss how these strategies could be passed along to other teachers in my building.

In the following section, I identify my rationale for completing this project. I discuss key research in the area of social and emotional learning and emphasize the reasons why a social and emotional learning component should be present in elementary schools.

Rationale

My classroom teaching experience and research on the changing needs of students has made it clear that students need to be taught social and emotional skills beginning in elementary school in order to increase their academic success. Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) agree and describe how social and emotional learning programs "Designed to

promote student social and emotional development at the elementary level are effective at promoting academic achievement, reducing conduct problems, improving prosocial behavior, and reducing emotional distress" (p. 37). Additionally, Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) supported the idea that by implementing these skills into daily routines, students learned how to manage conflict, manage emotions and have positive social relationships throughout their life.

Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) also noted how social and emotional learning programs help students after they leave school. According to the author, students who participated in social and emotional learning developed skills that were essential for their continued success in their career, especially in higher paying jobs (Dusenbury, 2017, p. 38). Based on the Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) research it made sense that teachers should set students up for success in the future by implementing social and emotional learning in the classroom. As an experienced elementary teacher, the benefits described by Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) along with the immediate effects, made it clear that social and emotional learning was essential in the elementary classroom. The strategies that I implemented for my project are outlined in the following paragraphs.

While several strategies and lessons were developed in this project, I highlight some of the key areas addressed. First, students began each day with a morning meeting. In this meeting, students made connections and shared with their classmates, participated in a fun, team-building activity and learned the events of the day. By doing this quick activity, students set themselves up for a successful day. Next, students participated in many different types of social interactions throughout the day. Students were asked to

work with several different combinations of partners and groups. During this time, students practiced communication and conflict resolution skills that were pre-taught and reinforced throughout the school year.

Students also participated in inquiry-based learning during the school year. This helped them to learn how to collaborate with others and solve problems on their own. These types of activities also helped students to learn what it was like to struggle and how to problem-solve. All of these activities were not effective in my classroom if we did not work hard to develop and maintain a positive classroom environment.

This project is continued throughout the 2018-2019 school year by allowing students to help set and maintain classroom expectations, as well as allowing them to have a voice in other important classroom decisions. My students continue to work on making connections with classmates in order to develop rapport. As their teacher, I am viewed as someone who is part of the community but am there to facilitate learning, not talk at the students. When this type of environment is present, many aspects of social and emotional learning are implemented successfully.

Summary

The project was a compilation of strategies and activities for teachers in my school and district to use with elementary students that promote social and emotional learning. In order to prepare for this project, I conducted a review of literature surrounding the importance of social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom. This information helped me to develop activities and resources for teachers that are easily implemented into the classroom. In Chapter Two, I review the literature that supports my

capstone project and explains the need for social and emotional learning in the

elementary classroom. In Chapter Three, I outline my project and explain how I

developed a collection of social and emotional learning strategies that are easily

implemented in the elementary classroom. In Chapter Four, I discuss the implementation

of the project and review my capstone project by revisiting the research question and

outlining the project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

defined Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as, "the processes through which children

and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need to recognize and manage

their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive

relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging social situations

constructively" (Massari, 2011, p. 9). This chapter discusses the need for social and

emotional learning strategies in schools as well as identifies how students can practice

social and emotional skills in the classroom, therefore supporting my research questions:

What are the most effective social-emotional learning strategies to improve student

engagement in the elementary classroom and how will the creation of a binder of daily

implemented social emotional learning strategies improve the climate in the elementary

classroom?

In this review of the research literature, the key concepts of SEL were explored.

Important ideas uncovered during the review process indicated that SEL should be

explicitly taught in the elementary classroom. The author discussed the effects that an

integrated social and emotional learning component had on students, particularly in the

areas of conflict-resolution, communication skills and lifelong learning. After that, the

author reviewed particular social and emotional learning strategies that were useful in

promoting these skills in the elementary classroom. Finally, key components necessary to ensure longevity of a social and emotional learning program in elementary schools were examined.

Need for Social and Emotional Learning

Experts in the field of social and emotional learning (SEL) and psychology provided evidence for the need of SEL in the elementary classroom. This included an emphasis on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Atkins, 2011) and Emotional Intelligence (Massari, 2011). The author examined the changing needs of elementary students and highlighted how social and emotional learning strategies provided students with valuable skills to help them be successful in school and life. Finally, this section focuses on the need for social and emotional learning strategies in the classroom in order to reduce conflict and aggressive behavior in students and increase engagement and on-task behavior.

In the 1960's, American Psychologist Abraham Maslow (as cited in Atkins, 2011) developed a theory of human motivation called the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs. He asserted that in order for people to reach their full potential and achieve great things, they must have all of their needs met in a particular order (p. 1395). Teachers applied this theory to students in the school setting in many ways. For example, students must have their basic needs met before they can learn and be successful in school. If a child does not have clothing, a place to live or enough food to eat, it is difficult for them to pay attention in school. Their mind is focused on their lack of basic needs and is unable to complete math problems, read, or finish other tasks in school (Atkins, 2011).

Additionally, this theory provided important background information that supported the idea that social-emotional learning is essential for student's success in school (Atkins, 2011, p. 1396). In the five levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, basic needs such as food, air, water, shelter and sleep are at the bottom, meaning these must be achieved first before anything else. After that, Maslow (as cited in Schmutte, 2013) identified safety, security, stability and order as needs that must be met. Once these needs have been taken care of, Maslow (as cited in Schmutte, 2013) identified social needs as the next requirement on the hierarchy. This included the need for belonging, love and acceptance. It is at this level that social and emotional learning came into play (as cited in Atkins, 2011, p. 1396). Without strong social relationships and the feeling of acceptance and love, students were unable to be successful in school.

According to Maslow (as cited in Atkins, 2011), students must achieve all needs at one level in order to proceed to the next level (p. 1396). If Maslow was correct, this meant that student's social and esteem needs needed to be met or they were unable to progress to the final level of Maslow's hierarchy, which was where they can reach their full potential and experience a strong feeling of accomplishment. However, according to Atkins (2011) when a person had their social and esteem needs met, they felt self-confident (p. 1397). Atkins (2011) also suggested that they became less concerned with the opinions of others, which meant they were secure about themselves and were willing to take more risks in order to achieve their full potential. This theory provided a foundation for the idea that students who worked toward improving their social and emotional skills were able to achieve a level of self-actualization in Maslow's Hierarchy

of Needs. Maslow's theory was one important component of why students need to be

taught social and emotional skills beginning in elementary school. The next section

discusses Emotional Intelligence as another theory that supports the need for SEL in the

classroom.

Emotional Intelligence

Another important reason students need opportunities for social and emotional

learning in the classroom involved students' Emotional Intelligence. Massari (2011)

defined Emotional Intelligence as awareness of the skills needed in order to be socially

and emotionally competent (pp. 10-11). In other words, students needed to be able to

identify and recognize their own emotions in order to manage them appropriately and to

react productively to the emotions of others. Students who possessed the ability to

manage their emotions, show empathy to others, establish positive relationships, make

productive decisions and handle challenges appropriately showed a high level of

emotional intelligence. According to Massari (2011), student's ability to practice these

skills can also lead to academic success and reduce instances of bullying in schools (p.

11). In order for students to become proficient in these skills, they needed to be given

opportunities to practice them each day in school.

Emotional intelligence was shown to be as important to academic success as

academic intelligence (Massari, 2011, p. 9). One reason is that students with well

developed emotional intelligence were able to manage conflict peacefully by showing

empathy to others and communicating effectively, which helped them accomplish great

things in school and life. Their ability to manage difficult situations showed that they

were able to set high goals for themselves and worked hard to achieve them. In addition,

Massari, (2011) stated that students with higher levels of emotional intelligence had the

ability to attain higher grades, complete more challenging courses and do better on

standardized tests (p. 9). In order to be successful in these areas, students had to be

taught skills that were grounded in self-awareness and social awareness. Students who

were able to identify uncomfortable emotions in themselves as they arose were better

equipped to handle them in a productive way (Massari, 2011). Being aware of others

helped students to interact peacefully and solve problems through compromise.

       According to Massari (2011), teaching students skills that allow them to improve

their social awareness changed the culture of the school and decreased incidents of

bullying. In addition to social awareness, instruction in social and emotional learning

helped all students to be proactive and stand up for their own well-being. This included

students who were being bullied (Massari, 2011, p. 11). In contrast, students who lacked

self-esteem and confidence were less-likely to stand up to a bully, which increased

incidents of bullying in schools where students did not have a strong sense of self.

Teaching SEL strategies to students gave them the tools they needed in order to deal with

bullying situations.

       According to Vahedi and Nikdel (2011), high emotional intelligence can be linked

to academic achievement as well. In order for students to be successful in school,

academic intelligence must be combined with emotional intelligence, providing students

the opportunity to reach their full potential. Vahedi and Nikdel (2011) identified the key

components of emotional intelligence as "Leadership, group performance, academic

achievement and policing" (p. 332). According to the authors, these components were necessary for students to be successful in school as well as life beyond school. One take away from the work of Vahedi and Nikdel (2011) was that students who were not aware of their emotions and could not deal appropriately with them had a difficult time being successful in school, especially when faced with challenges. In the following section, I discuss these and other effects social and emotional learning strategies have on students and the classroom environment as a whole.

Effects of Social and Emotional Learning in the Classroom

Teaching students social and emotional learning strategies in the classroom helped improve the classroom environment, particularly in the areas of conflict resolution and reducing aggressive behavior in students (Portnow, Downer & Brown, 2018). This was done by promoting positive communication skills among students, which set them up for a successful future. This section examines the effects of social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom which helped to solidify the importance of SEL beginning in early elementary school.

Social and emotional skills were essential in promoting positive relationships among students by increasing their self-awareness and self-confidence, which allowed them to deal with difficult situations that arose. Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) found that activities and programs designed to promote social and emotional skills in the elementary setting lead to the reduction of conflict in the classroom as well as promoted academic achievement and reduced distress (pp. 37-38). The work of these authors suggested that SEL programs not only set students up to be successful in the classroom,

they provided them with the skills they needed to be productive members of society. In addition, social and emotional learning strategies, when used effectively, lowered aggression in students and allowed them to solve conflict peacefully. According to Portnow, Downer, and Brown (2018):

> SEL programs foster reductions in aggression and conduct problems through two complementary pathways that operate at both an individual (i.e. student) and setting (i.e. classroom) level: (a) improving students' social and emotional skills through direct instruction and (b) creating safe and caring learning environments. (p. 39)

They also suggested that social and emotional learning strategies helped teachers to appropriately deal with conflict situations, improving the classroom environment (Portnow et al., 2018, p. 49).

Social and emotional learning was also essential to classroom management. In order for the classroom environment to promote student learning, the teacher needed to be able to manage the class as a whole. According to Jones, Bailey and Jacob (2014), effective classroom management included the teacher's knowledge of each student, an understanding of how children develop and behave and a familiarity of the strategies that have been shown to be effective with students (p. 19). Strategies that were grounded in social and emotional learning supported teachers in these areas, which improved classroom management.

SEL strategies supported classroom management in many ways. Students who were more self-aware and socially aware understood that they must coexist with their

peers. They acknowledged that although they may not agree on everything, they can compromise to come up with a solution to any problem. When students learned and practiced using skills such as "listening attentively, following directions, managing emotions, dealing with conflicts, and working cooperatively with peers," they developed skills that helped them thrive in the classroom and contribute positively to their classroom environment (Bailey, et. al., 2014, p. 20). When children used these skills, they were less likely to be disruptive, allowing their peers to get more out of classroom instruction.

Social and Emotional Learning Strategies

This section discusses the types of social and emotional learning strategies that were developed for use in schools. The first portion discusses strategies that supported students in emotional awareness. These strategies were intended to help students deal with difficult situations and allowed them to peacefully manage conflict. Next, this section reviews strategies that helped students to communicate better with their peers. Additionally, it outlines how teachers incorporated mindfulness and empathy skills into the daily routines in the classroom. Finally, time is spent discussing how these strategies can be easily incorporated into the daily routines in the classroom.

Elksnin and Elksnin (2003) noted that while children develop the ability to recognize their emotions at a young age, it was difficult for students in elementary school to manage their emotions appropriately. In order to successfully resolve conflict with their peers, Elksnin and Elksnin (2003) wrote that children needed to not only be able to recognize their emotions but also manage them. The authors also noted that children

were more successful in resolving conflict and managing difficult situations if they were able to pick-up on nonverbal cues from their peers and recognize different emotions, both positive and negative, in themselves and others. Understanding and recognizing emotions was an essential component in developing self-control and dealing with anger appropriately (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2003). Teachers helped students to develop these skills by teaching them to recognize nonverbal messages.

The first component of nonverbal communication is paralanguage. Elksnin and Elksnin (2003) defined paralanguage as "nonword sounds that convey meaning" including "tone of voice, rate of speech, emphasis and variation in speech, and nonverbal sound patterns" (p. 65). Students needed to understand that the tone of a person's voice is important in the meaning of their words. Understanding paralanguage was important in helping students to interpret the words of their peers in an appropriate way. Teachers helped students to practice these skills by providing them with sentences to read to a partner. Each time the students read the sentence, they emphasized a different word in the sentence. This showed their partner that tone and emphasis can completely change the meaning of the sentence. Frequent practice with paralanguage helped students to notice these skills in their conversations with their peers (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2003, p. 65).

The next component of nonverbal communication involved facial expressions and gestures. Elksnin and Elksnin (2003) discussed that in our society it is considered polite to look at people when they are speaking and to maintain eye contact whenever possible. Children who interpreted the facial expressions of others had strong social skills that enabled them to interact with their peers in a positive way. Elksnin and Elksnin (2003)

suggested that facial expression recognition could be explicitly taught to students by showing them pictures, videos and having them practice interpreting facial expressions with their peers. Interpreting posture and gestures was also important in developing non-verbal communication skills. This helped students to ensure they were using appropriate gestures in specific settings. For example, a student who had their arms crossed over their chest showed that they were disinterested. When listening to others, it was important to show that students were engaged and listening, therefore this was not an appropriate gesture to use.

Finally, Elksnin and Elksnin (2003) asserted that it was necessary to teach students how to use appropriate interpersonal distance (space) and touch with their peers (2003, p. 65). They identified four spatial zones that were important for children to recognize. These were the intimate zone (nearly touching), personal zone (18 inches to 4 feet), social zone (4 to 12 feet) and public zone (12 feet and more).   Elksnin and Elksnin (2003) described how children must understand that certain zones were appropriate at different times and it was imperative for teachers to provide opportunities for students to practice using personal space and identifying when to use these zones (p. 65).

Along with understanding and appropriately using nonverbal communication skills, students must also practice using social skills. Elksnin and Elksnin (2003) emphasized that in order to show emotional intelligence, students must be able to use appropriate interpersonal skills and these skills must be explicitly taught to students starting at a young age (p. 68). Social skills that were important for students to recognize and practice included making and keeping friends, joining into conversations and giving

compliments, sharing and working cooperatively, listening and following directions, following through and dealing with stress, attending to the speaker and conversational turn-taking and assertiveness skills (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2003, p. 68). In order for students to develop these skills, they had to be be taught and students needed opportunities to practice them on a daily basis.

Elksnin and Elksnin (2003) described how teachers could incorporate social skills into many aspects of the school day by developing routines. The goal of these routines was to allow students to use social skills. Additionally, teachers were setting students up for social success. The authors also explained how social skills can be developed through role-playing activities. During role-playing activities the teacher provided students with scenarios where they practiced a specific social skill or skills. When students completed role-playing activities, they were free to make mistakes because they were guided by their teachers and peers. Students developed important social skills through role-playing and also practiced identifying and analyzing their use of the skills when the activity was completed (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2003, p. 68-70).

In addition to social-skills, strategies that promoted a positive classroom environment and improved classroom management were essential in student's social and emotional learning. One strategy for improving classroom management and enhancing social skills among students was the development of appropriate group dynamics that focused on creating group norms and goals. Dugas (2016) suggested that this was an essential component of classroom management. In this approach, students were recognized not only as individual learners, but also as part of the group which was

defined by a collection of shared goals (Dugas, 2016, p. 42). The group developed norms in which they all agreed to follow in order to maintain a strong classroom community. Individual students were responsible for upholding these norms and holding each other accountable.

Students may also have important roles that were necessary to the success of the group as a whole. Dugas assigned students these "task roles" as well as "social emotional roles" such as "Emotional Historian" or "Empathetic Sharer" (2016, p. 42). He believed these roles were essential in developing a strong classroom community, which was the type of environment that promoted social and emotional learning as well as academic success. In addition, Dugas (2016) took time to identify negative roles that students obtained in the classroom. This helped students to recognize some of the misbehaviors that occurred in the classroom which negatively affected the group. This enhanced the group dynamics and improved the classroom environment as a whole (Dugas, 2016, p. 42). Highlighting the negative behavior that occurred in the classroom brought attention to it and allowed students to understand what appropriate behavior looked like. It helped students to build positive relationships with others, which improved the classroom community.

While it may seem daunting to add social and emotional learning to a full day of teaching, many strategies can be easily incorporated into student's daily routines. In addition to the development of group norms and expectations, opportunities for appropriate social interaction and role-playing, many SEL strategies can be incorporated into academic lessons as well. Blad (2017) outlined the work of 2nd Grade Teacher

Susannah Young and explained how she wove social and emotional learning skills and strategies into the academic lessons in her classroom (p. 1). According to Blad (2017), Young focused on inquiry-based lessons in which students were presented with a problem or question and worked to solve the problem or answer the question through reflective conversations with their peers. In these lessons, Young focused on guiding students through difficult conversations by emphasizing important social skills such as talking them through disagreements and helping them to communicate their ideas effectively.

By weaving important social and emotional skills into academic areas, teachers enhanced their lessons, while not adding more work for them or the students. This changed the climate of the school and impacted how teachers planned their lessons. By looking at academic tasks through a social-emotional lens, teachers were able to incorporate social and emotional learning strategies and skills into the traditional classroom work (Blad, 2017, p. 2). Students who completed inquiry-based learning participated in a social and emotional learning approach to their traditional classroom work. They learned important information and practice essential social and emotional skills.

Essential Stakeholders that Support SEL in the Classroom

Research on how these stakeholders contributed to the social and emotional learning of students helped develop a strong background before implementing these strategies in the classroom. According to Ross, Powell and Elias (2002), in order for

social and emotional learning strategies to be effective in schools long-term, many people need to be involved in its implementation.

While the classroom teacher is person who administered the strategies, Ross et al. (2002) described how the school psychologists, school support workers and school counselors were key contributors to the success of these strategies. Additionally, Ross et al. (2002) highlighted how crucial parental involvement was in the long-term retention of social and emotional skills in children. Given the need to have a whole-team approach to SEL implementation it was essential to rely on support from other professionals to enhance student learning. The support of the school psychologist was extremely important as they were in a position to inform parents of what students were learning in school, while also emphasizing the importance of parental involvement at home. The following section focuses on the people who play an important role in developing and implementing social and emotional learning strategies in schools as well as addresses the key role parents play in the success of student's social and emotional learning.

It was found that the school psychologist played an essential role in the social emotional learning of students. According to Ross et al. (2002), with the introduction of social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom, school psychologists had an opportunity to "redefine their roles" in order to focus on areas such as "prevention programming, teacher and administrator professional development, and collaboration with other educators and professional organizations" (p. 44). School psychologists provided a wealth of knowledge based on the type of training they received that directly supported the classroom teacher. Ross et al. (2002) elaborated on their support for the

use of school psychologists in SEL. They asserted that their expertise was needed

because their training and background was in the social and emotional needs of students

and they were well-versed in the strategies and methods that best meet those needs (p.

47). This training, combined with the classroom teacher's knowledge and relationship

with the students helped to create a positive classroom environment in which students felt

supported and had experience practicing the strategies they needed to be successful.

Ross et al. (2002) also suggested specific tasks for school psychologists in order

to support teachers and students in social and emotional learning. First, the authors

recommended that school psychologists use their knowledge and experience to promote

health and reduce risk behavior in students. Ross et al. (2002) specifically mentioned

how, "School psychologists should be the premiere experts in their schools and districts

on effective programs and curricula available to address SEL/EQ" (p. 48). Having the

psychologists be the expert made sense as they supported schools by providing ideas to

staff and worked to obtain SEL curriculum and resources that met the needs of the

students in their school. Ross et al. (2002) also pointed out that school psychologists

should be facilitators of activities that promote social and emotional learning (p. 48). Not

only should psychologists work to find curriculum and resources that support students

and staff, they should also be available to teach curriculum and activities as needed.

One of the best ways school psychologists supported classroom teachers with

SEL was by providing training and resources that were based on the needs in their

classroom. Ross et al. (2002) mentioned that although classroom teachers had a wealth

of knowledge, they may not have been taught social and emotional learning skills.

Additionally, they may not have been comfortable incorporating these skills into their daily routine. Ross et al. (2002) suggested that this was an area that school psychologists should support teachers (p. 48). Given their unique knowledge and skillset Ross et al. (2002) described how school psychologists supported teachers in this area because their training reflected the social and emotional needs of students. Another role for school psychologists noted by Ross et al. (2002) was how they were advocates for social and emotional learning and communicated effectively with administration to express the need for SEL in the classroom. Additionally, school psychologists advocated for staff development focused on SEL strategies. Psychologists provided direct instruction on SEL strategies and were available to answer questions from teachers which supported them in the classroom.

Finally, school psychologists were utilized to support SEL in schools by collaborating with teachers. Ross et al. (2002) discussed the need for school psychologists to work with teachers, staff and administrators in order to develop a systems approach to SEL. In order for SEL to be implemented effectively, everyone needed to be involved, including other staff and community members (2002, p. 49). Everyone needed to work together in order to meet the SEL needs of students and to create a positive classroom and school environment. School psychologists were an integral part of this effort but could not do it alone.

In addition to the support from school psychologists, parents also played a crucial role in the development of social and emotional skills in young children. Cheung and Pomerantz (2011) acknowledged that parental involvement was essential as it supported

student achievement and helped them develop essential skills and strategies in school (p. 934). When the skills being taught at school were supported and practiced at home, students had the opportunity to develop a strong understanding of these skills. This made it more likely for them to continue to use these skills throughout their life because they were deeply ingrained in them. Cheung and Pomerantz (2011) mentioned evidence that supported the importance of parental involvement in their child's learning. They suggested that parental support helped students to become engaged learners who were better able to manage their emotions (p. 934). Their conclusion supported the need for teachers to work diligently to involve parents in their child's education throughout the school year in order for their child to reach their full potential.

Another suggested way for parents to be involved in their child's social and emotional development was to have parents administer social and emotional interventions with their children. Thomson and Carlson (2016) mentioned that the most successful early intervention for social and emotional learning involved teachers and parents (p. 419). Involving parents in their child's education and providing them with strategies to support their child socially and emotionally supported their development. It was essential for parents to be an active part of their child's social and emotional development and many of the strategies students learned were cultivated in the home. The importance that Thomson and Carlson (2016) placed on the home setting was to emphasize the point that skills taught in the school setting must be transferred to home in order for them to be effective (p. 419).

Some of the strategies in parent education that were effective in improving the social and emotional development of children included reducing behavior problems and being proactive. Thomson and Carlson (2016) emphasized that children's social and emotional competence was built through an emphasis on promoting positive school to parent interactions (p. 419). These interactions were improved when the teacher and parents made a significant effort to communicate about what was happening at school and at home. The teacher also provided ideas and activities that could be completed at home which supported the learning that was taking place in school.

Conclusion

The research reviewed in this chapter supported the need for social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom and emphasized the importance of my research questions which state: *What are the most effective social-emotional learning strategies to improve student engagement in the elementary classroom and how will the creation of a binder of daily implemented social emotional learning strategies improve the climate in the elementary classroom?* When Atkins (2011) reviewed Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, it was clear that children who did not have their basic needs met, including social and emotional needs, were unable to reach their full potential, therefore their ability to thrive in the classroom was diminished. This idea, along with an understanding of Emotional Intelligence supported the need for students to participate in daily practice and direct instruction of social and emotional skills beginning in elementary school. By examining the effects of social and emotional learning in the classroom, the author provided a clear picture of what a classroom that promotes SEL looks like and how children can thrive

academically and socially in this environment. Finally, this literature review provided an

insight into the need for additional adult support, including parents, school psychologists,

social workers, school support workers and administration, in order to make these

strategies successful long-term. Chapter Three discusses the author's capstone project in

detail and describes how they developed a collection of social and emotional learning

strategies for classroom teachers to implement in their daily routine.

CHAPTER THREE

Capstone Project Description

Introduction

Now that the need for social and emotional learning in the classroom has been

discussed and research that supports this need has been provided, the author elaborates on

the details of the actual project that was completed for this capstone. The research

questions that drove this project was: *What are the most effective social and emotional*

learning strategies to improve student engagement in the elementary classroom and how

will the creation of a binder of daily implemented social emotional learning strategies

improve the climate in the elementary classroom? Chapter Three gives an overview of

the capstone project, introducing the audience and context as well as identifies its goals.

Next, it provides support for the need for social and emotional learning in the classroom

by discussing important theories and ideas that emphasize this need. Finally, it explains

the timeline for the project which identifies important steps in the completion of the

capstone.

Project Overview

For my project, I created a collection of resources for elementary classroom

teachers to use in their daily routine in order to promote social and emotional learning

skills. When choosing lessons and activities for this project, I placed an emphasis on

activities that could be easily incorporated into the daily routine so teachers did not feel

like they had something extra to teach. Teachers were more likely to use the suggested

lessons and activities because they did not create more work for them or add more

content to their day. The materials were housed in a binder so that all lessons were

together in one place and could be accessed easily. I also provided teachers with an

electronic copy of the resources. The resources were organized into sections using

headings to differentiate between sections. The formative and summative assessments

were provided to teachers separately as they were an additional resource not created for

this project. All teachers interested in implementing these strategies were provided with

a binder and the activities were available digitally through Google Drive and shared with

other teachers in the school and district.

This collection of lessons and activities were created with a specific demographic

of students in mind. Activities were geared toward students in third through fifth grade

with a special focus on the students in my fourth grade class. Although the emphasis was

on older elementary students, some strategies could be used or altered for use in other

grades. The project was the actual creation of lessons that were organized in a binder,

however I also implemented the strategies as I compiled them during Fall 2018. Once

lesson plans were complete and organized into the binder in December 2018, I intended

to fully implement the strategies outlined in the binder in the Spring of 2019.

The target audience for this collection of resources was elementary school

teachers, specifically those who taught grades three through five. Teachers were male

and female classroom teachers and had a wide range of teaching experience. The actual

lessons and strategies were geared toward fourth grade students in a first ring suburb of a

major metropolitan area in the upper midwest. The school district served approximately

11,000 students and the specific school that the target audience attended had about 630

students. Approximately 78% of students were White, 7% of students were Black, 7% of

students were Hispanic or Latino, 3% of students were Asian and 5% of students

represented more than one race. Approximately 20% of the students received free and

reduced priced lunch, 16% of the students received Special Education services and 3.5%

of the students were English Language Learners. Less than 1% of students were

homeless. The school won a National Blue Ribbon Award for Excellence in Education in

2017 for their scores on the required statewide achievement assessment.

The binder included a collection of lesson plans and activities that promoted

social and emotional learning. Each lesson plan for a specific strategy followed the same

outline. At the top of each page, I identified the student learning outcomes and materials.

The strategy was described in detail and included several examples of how to use the

strategy with students. Additionally, teachers were provided with separate resources to

use to assess students at various points throughout the lessons and activities. These

assessment resources were selected with the support of the school psychologist and

provided formative and summative assessment data to teachers throughout

implementation.

The lesson plans for the SEL strategies being taught were developed with the

support of my school psychologist. I used her as a resource throughout this process in

order to ensure the strategies I compiled were appropriate for elementary students and

were effective in supporting social and emotional learning. She was also available to

support me and my students as I implemented the lessons and activities for the first time. We were in constant communication throughout the development of the lessons and activities and she helped make changes and improvements as needed.

Rationale and Explanation

The goal of my project was to compile a collection of lessons and activities for elementary teachers to use with students in order to develop social and emotional learning skills in the classroom. Several theories and ideas emphasized the need for social and emotional learning strategies to be explicitly taught and practiced in the elementary classroom. First, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (as cited in Atkins, 2011) suggested that our basic needs such as food, water and clothing must be met in order to meet the next level of needs which included social and emotional needs.

According to Atkins (2011), these needs must be met in order to have the opportunity to reach our full potential. Transferring Atkins (2011) idea to the school setting meant that without these needs being met, students were unable to gain academic knowledge in school. In addition, social and emotional learning activities promoted social skills and allowed students the opportunity to interact positively and effectively with others. When this occurred, students felt confident and secure, allowing them to focus their energy on their academics. This also enhanced the classroom environment, reduced conflict, and helped students to solve problems on their own (Atkins, 2011). These skills were essential starting in elementary school and, when continuously practiced, stayed with students throughout their lives.

Emotional Intelligence was another essential component to social and emotional learning. Massari (2011) defined Emotional Intelligence as awareness of the skills needed in order to be socially and emotionally competent (p. 9). In other words, students needed to be able to identify and recognize their own emotions in order to manage them appropriately and to react productively to the emotions of others. According to Massari, when students were aware of their emotions as well as the emotions of others, they could manage them appropriately. Emotional Intelligence was also linked to academic achievement, which was essential in helping students to reach their full potential.

Massari (2011) suggested that social and emotional learning helped support students academically. When students were preoccupied by the emotional needs that had not been met, it was difficult for them to focus on their school work. Vahedi and Nikdel (2011) also asserted that emotional intelligence was linked to academic achievement. The authors suggested that a person who was not aware of their emotions and could not deal appropriately with them had a difficult time being successful in school, especially when faced with challenges. With the rigor increase in elementary school, it is essential that students are able to appropriately deal with challenges because they will face many throughout the school day. This supported the idea that social and emotional learning strategies must be taught and practiced beginning in elementary school in order for students to perform well academically.

Social and emotional learning has been linked to the reduction of aggressive behavior in children in the classroom. In addition, it has been shown to reduce anxiety in children and increase confidence, which allowed students to interact positively with their

peers, contributing to a productive classroom environment. Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) found that, "School-based programs designed to promote student social and emotional development at the elementary school level are effective in promoting academic achievement, reducing conduct problems, improving prosocial behavior, and reducing emotional distress" (pp. 37-38). The work of these authors suggested that SEL programs not only set students up to be successful in the classroom, they provided them with the skills they needed to be productive members of society.

Project Assessment

In order to monitor the effectiveness of the social and emotional strategies implemented in this project, an assessment tool was developed for use before and after the project. This assessment was called the SSIS and was administered to all students in the author's fourth grade class at the beginning of the school year. It measured each student's social and emotional learning strengths and areas of growth. The assessment was used again at the end of the school year in order to analyze the improvements students made in their social and emotional learning. In addition, the assessment pointed out key areas of strength and growth related to SEL, which helped me to improve the collection of resources to ensure that all student's needs were met.

Additionally, I used a feedback form for teachers to take before, during and after implementation. Before teachers began using the collection of strategies with their students, they completed a feedback form that identified their needs related to social and emotional learning. This was a Google Form that identified their knowledge and use of various social and emotional learning strategies. They also made observations about their

students and identified various social and emotional learning needs in their classroom.
The data was compiled to monitor the effectiveness of the social and emotional resources
implemented by the teachers.

Project Timeline

The timeline for this project began in June 2018 and continued through December
2018. I began GED 8490 Capstone Project in September 2018. Once this course began,
I continued to identify resources that supported my learning. I also continuously edited
chapter one through chapter three of this paper, which were completed in the summer of
2018 in GED 8023. Once all of the resources were identified and examined, I created a
final reference list of the resources used in the development of my project. I closely
examined chapters one through three, ensuring they followed APA formatting. Once all
of this was completed, I began to compile the resources, lessons and activities that
evolved into my final capstone project.

The process of compiling resources to complete a binder of SEL strategies
followed the steps of Understanding by Design (UbD), separated into three phases.
Wiggins and McTighe (2012) suggested that the first phase of UbD should identify the
intended outcomes of the lesson or activity. I did this by asking myself what I wanted
students to know and be able to do when completing the activities. During this stage, I
set long-term performance goals for students in order to guide the types of activities I
chose to include in the collection of resources. This process was completed in September
of 2018 and established a strong foundation for the rest of the capstone project.

Phase II of UbD was completed in October of 2018. During this phase, I researched formative and summative assessments to be used in conjunction with the activities. In order to choose the assessments I would use, I identified how I would know if students were obtaining and effectively using social and emotional learning strategies. Also, I determined what evidence to collect in order to decide whether or not students were meeting the assessment criteria. These included performance tasks as well as other evidence. The evidence was determined during this stage of the project.

In the final stage of development, completed in November 2018, I planned the learning experiences and instruction that occurred. This included the specific tasks and activities that students completed in order to develop their social and emotional learning skills. In order to develop these activities, I used the research and knowledge I gained during the literature review portion of the project. Once this was complete and I revised the lessons and activities, I compiled the strategies and activities into an online Google form and created a printed binder of the resources. These steps began in November, and were completed in December along with chapter four of this paper. In December 2018, after continuous editing and revision of my paper and project, I was ready to turn in my final capstone project.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the capstone project which answers the questions: *What are the most effective social and emotional learning strategies to improve student engagement in the elementary classroom and how will the creation of a binder of daily implemented social emotional learning strategies improve the climate in the elementary*

classroom? Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (as cited in Atkins, 2011) as well as research on Emotional Intelligence (Massari, 2011) supported the need for social and emotional learning strategies to be explicitly taught and practiced in the classroom. Further research suggested that social and emotional learning lead to academic success as well as reduced aggression and anxiety in children. All of this contributed to a positive classroom environment which is ideal for all children and teachers.

For the project, I compiled a binder with social and emotional learning strategies that are easily implemented into the daily routine in the elementary classroom. The binder also included suggestions for several formative and summative assessments to be used along with the activities. The project was completed in December 2018 along with my capstone paper and the strategies were implemented in the Spring of 2019. In the following chapter, I discuss a final summary of my project and of the information I have gathered for this project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflections

Introduction

In this final chapter of my paper, I review my capstone project by revisiting my research question and outlining the project. While reviewing the project, I discuss what I learned throughout this process and indicate the areas of growth needed for the future implementation of this project. The research questions that guided my capstone project and paper are: *What are the most effective social and emotional learning strategies to improve student engagement in the elementary classroom and how will the creation of a binder of daily implemented social emotional learning strategies improve the climate in the elementary classroom?*

In this chapter, I discuss what I learned throughout the creation of this project. Next, I summarize my findings in the Literature Review and discuss the implications and limitations that arose throughout this process. Then, I make recommendations for the future implementation of the resources gathered in this project and make a plan of action moving forward. Finally, I discuss the benefits this project had on students and on the teaching profession.

Learnings Connected to the Literature Review

In the literature review, key ideas and components associated with social and emotional learning were explored. In the the following section, I discuss the important understandings that arose from the literature review. First, research in the areas of

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (as cited in Atkins, 2011) and Emotional Intelligence (Massari, 2011) indicated that social and emotional learning strategies need to be explicitly taught in the elementary classroom. Additional research from Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) suggested that students who developed social and emotional skills at a young age were able to interact well with others, which contributed to a positive, safe and effective learning environment. Finally, social and emotional learning was linked to academic achievement and contributed to the success of students beyond the classroom.

Atkins (2011) discussed the importance of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in student academic and social achievement. Maslow (as cited in Atkins, 2011) asserted that children needed to have certain basic needs met in order to reach their full potential. Without food, water and clothing, children were unable to participate effectively in the classroom environment. After these basic needs, Maslow (as cited in Atkins) identified safety, security and stability as the next needs to be met. Finally, Maslow (as cited in Atkins) identified social needs at the top of his hierarchy. If students did not feel fulfilled in any of these areas, they were unable to reach their full potential in school and beyond. Students who felt secure in their social needs were also less likely to be concerned with the opinions of others, which helped maintain a positive and effective classroom environment (Atkins, 2011).

The information from Maslow (as cited in Atkins 2011) informed me that it is essential to understand our students by identifying what they need. Teachers can work hard to meet the needs of their students as long as they understand that all students are not in the same place. When we recognize that students basic needs must be met in order

for them to pursue social goals, it will help us in planning classroom activities. Social and emotional learning does not add work for teachers. It is an essential component that helps teachers fill in gaps that students may have that prevent them from being high academic achievers. Without social and emotional learning opportunities, students are unable to set high academic goals or learn in a safe and productive environment.

Next, Emotional Intelligence was found to be a key component of social and emotional learning. Massari (2011) defined Emotional Intelligence as awareness of the skills needed in order to be socially and emotionally competent (pp. 10-11). Students who possessed the ability to manage their emotions, showed empathy to others, established positive relationships, made productive decisions and handled challenges appropriately showed a high level of emotional intelligence. These skills were found to be essential in establishing and maintaining a positive classroom environment. Students who were able to manage conflict appropriately had sophisticated communication skills and were able to set high academic and social goals (Massari, 2011).

This information helped me to learn that being aware of emotions helps students to solve conflict peacefully with their peers, which contributes to a positive learning environment. When students are able to solve problems on their own, they develop self advocacy and leadership skills. Involving students in social and emotional learning helps them to become aware of their emotions and practice skills such as conflict resolution and communicating with peers in a safe space. This is another essential component that must be integrated into the classroom routine.

Additionally, Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) asserted that students who participated in social and emotional learning were not only achieving academic success in school, but also success beyond the classroom. This contributed to a positive learning environment, helping teachers with classroom management which set students up for high academic achievement. When teachers were not constantly managing issues in the classroom, they were able to meet the academic needs of all students. Integrating social and emotional learning in the daily classroom routine is essential for classroom management and developing self-sufficient and confident students who can attain high academic goals.

In this section, I reviewed the important components of the literature review which helped me to develop a strong understanding of the need for social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom. In the next section, I explore the implications of this project, including potential policy implications, as well as discuss the limitations. Additionally, I make some predictions about the future of social and emotional learning in Minnesota based on the current policies and procedures from the Minnesota Department of Education.

Implications and Limitations

Several implications developed from this project. First, in order to promote social and emotional learning in my school, teachers must understand the importance of teaching students these skills. It is necessary to share the research I found indicating the importance of teaching social and emotional learning to students in elementary school. With the overwhelming amount of material and standards we have to teach, many

teachers feel like they cannot take on any more. The research outlines the importance of this type of learning so it becomes a priority.

Next, it is essential that teachers have an open mind when reviewing the resources I have compiled. Once teachers see the types of activities that promote social and emotional learning in the classroom, they will understand that they are already doing a majority of the activities in their own classroom. Also, many of the activities require little or no preparation or materials. Teachers must set aside time at the beginning of the school year to teach routines that encourage social and emotional learning. This could be a limitation, however most teachers spend a lot of time on classroom routines at the beginning of the school year. This instruction helps the activities to become second-nature to students and will not take additional time out of academic lessons during the school year.

Finally, there are policy implications to consider involving social and emotional learning. The Minnesota Department of Education has developed the Social and Emotional Learning Implementation Guidance to "provide schools with guidance and resources to help schools integrate social emotional learning (SEL) into schoolwide teaching and learning practices" (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.). This is in response the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and encourages schools to implement social and emotional learning into their teaching practices and school culture. While this isn't currently a mandated standard for Minnesota schools, it may be in the future. The state of Minnesota has identified social and emotional learning as an important

component of academic success in students which means that it is something teachers need to look closely at and consider when planning lessons.

In this section, I discussed the implications and potential limitations of this project, including policy implications related to the Minnesota Department of Education's recommendations for social and emotional learning. In the next section, I discuss the recommendations for this project moving forward and outline what the next steps are in the process of bringing these resources to teachers in my school and beyond.

Recommendations

Several recommendations for the use of this project in schools are made in the following section. Moving forward, it is my recommendation that teachers in my school look at the resources I have provided and identify what they are currently doing in their classroom. Next, teachers complete a survey I have created that identifies their knowledge and use of social and emotional learning strategies in their classroom. After that, I can support teachers in my grade level team as they implement some of the resources I have provided. Over the course of the school year, I plan to meet with my grade level team to discuss how the strategies and activities are evolving in their classroom. We will share triumphs and challenges and work to solve problems together. Teachers complete an informal survey during the school year that indicates areas of growth related to social and emotional learning practices.

Once teachers in my grade level have explored and used the collection of resources I provided them with, I plan to work with teachers in grades three and five at my school. A similar process will occur where teachers are given an opportunity to

explore the resources and identify what they are already doing in there classroom. They will complete the survey to identify their knowledge and use of social and emotional learning strategies in their classroom and once they begin implementing the resources, I will be available to support them as needed.

After the resources have been used successfully in the third through fifth grade classrooms at my school, I plan to meet with primary teachers to discuss how lessons and activities can be modified to meet the needs of students in grades kindergarten through second. Most of the resources I have complied can be used in all grades, however some additional resources may be added or altered to meet the needs of younger students and classrooms. In the next 2-3 years, all teachers in my school will feel comfortable using the resources and in engaging all students in social and emotional learning activities throughout the school day. When this happens, I will share the information with other teachers in my district and beyond.

Throughout this process, I plan to revise the project to meet the needs of all students and teachers at my school. Feedback from other teachers will help to ensure that the resources I have provided to teachers are beneficial and efficient. Additionally, resources will be added as I learn about them or as specific needs arise in my school. The document is constantly evolving with the needs of students and staff at my school.

This section discussed the recommendations for this project moving forward. It outlined the process of implementation of the collected resources in my grade level, school and district. Also, this section explained my plan for expansion of this collection

of resources. In the following section, I will discuss the benefits this project will have on the teaching profession.

Benefits

The following section discusses the many benefits this project has on the teaching profession.   First, it provides teachers with a collection of resources to promote social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom. As the demands of our education system increase, it is more important than ever to be proactive in teaching students how to manage their emotions. Teachers who create a culture of kindness and respect in their classroom help to develop leaders that leave our schools with the confidence to tackle challenges and achieve difficult goals. When students learn how to manage conflict with their peers, they become productive members of society who abide by rules and laws. All of these things and more can be achieved by proactively teaching students social and emotional skills in the classroom through activities that are woven into the classroom routine.

Additionally, this project benefits the teaching profession because it gives teachers resources and strategies to use that do not take a lot of additional time. Teachers are overwhelmed by the amount of material they need to cover each day and are often discouraged by adding more activities. These resources are meant to be a part of teacher's daily routine and are things that will help teachers to develop a strong classroom community, cultivating a highly efficient classroom. Once students are able to manage conflict and solve problems on their own, teachers will have more time to teach content because they will not have to stop teaching to manage difficult situations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a summary of my capstone project that answers the questions: *What are the most effective social and emotional learning strategies to improve student engagement in the elementary classroom and how will the creation of a binder of daily implemented social emotional learning strategies improve the climate in the elementary classroom?* I reviewed my findings and shared some of the learning I gained throughout the process of collecting resources that promote social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom. The literature review was summarized, noting key information that helped me to gain background knowledge on the topic of social and emotional learning, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Emotional Intelligence. Next, I reviewed the implications and potential limitations of the project and outlined my future plans for implementation and expansion of this project. Moving forward, it is my goal to promote social and emotional learning in all elementary schools by providing teachers with resources that allow them to easily teach these strategies to students. Once teachers understand the importance of social and emotional learning as well as acknowledge the ease of implementation using this collection of resources, students will be able to not only set high goals and achieve them with confidence, but also leave our schools with the tools they need to be successful in life.

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