

Hamline University

DigitalCommons@Hamline

School of Education Student Capstone Projects

School of Education

Fall 2019

Social Emotional Learning and Literacy in the Primary Grades: An Integrated Approach

Kaitlynn Cline

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_cp



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND LITERACY IN THE PRIMARY GRADES:
AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

by

Kaitlynn E. Cline

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

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

December 2019

Primary Advisor: Jennifer Carlson
Content Reviewer: Cheri Jensen
Peer Reviewer: Michelle Donahue

Social Emotional Learning and Literacy in the Primary Grades: An Integrated Approach

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is essential to school success. This capstone was developed around the guiding question: *How can primary grade level teachers teach Social Emotional Learning skills as an integrated approach through literacy?* There are a number of SEL curricula available to educators, some of which have had a greater impact than others. There have also been a large number of policy changes in the United States related to academic achievement and standards that have impacted what is taught in the early years of elementary education. This capstone explored SEL curricula that are currently used, policies that have impacted SEL and academic achievement, and then developed a project that primary grade level teachers can use to teach self-management skills and emergent literacy skills as an integrated approach. The self-management skills that are included are based on the CASEL competencies and include: impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation, goal-setting, and organizational skills.

KAITLYNN E. CLINE, 2019
All Rights Reserved

DEDICATION

To my partner in life, Max. You continue to support me while I pursue my dreams. You believe in me and encourage me, even on the hardest days. You help me to always strive to become the best version of myself that I can possibly be. To my students - past, present, and future. Your brilliant minds and gentle hearts are the reason for my growing love of teaching and learning.

“The only way to change someone’s mind is to connect with them from the heart.”

Rasheed Ogunlura

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thanks to my friend and colleague, Jessica. You consistently inspire me to improve my teaching practice. Your friendship, kindness, spunk, and willingness to help

are always appreciated. Thank you for the countless coffee dates and support during this learning journey. And to all my Hamline friends and teachers, thank you. Your support, guidance, and friendship throughout our time together will always be appreciated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	8
Overview and Rationale.....	9
Project Aims	10

	First Teaching Experience.....	
11		
	Substitute Teaching in an Urban Environment.....	13
	Teaching Second Grade.....	14
	Summary.....	16
	CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review.....	17
	Background and History of SEL.....	18
	Early Childhood Development.....	25
	Existing Social Emotional Learning Curricula and Frameworks.....	31
	Social Emotional Learning and Literacy Connections.....	37
	Rationale.....	41
	Summary.....	42
	CHAPTER THREE: Project Description.....	43
	Introduction.....	43
	Project	
	Overview.....	44
	Framework and Rationale.....	45
	Project Description.....	46
	Audience and Setting.....	47
	Timeline.....	48
	Summary.....	49
	CHAPTER FOUR: Reflection.....	50

REFERENCES.....51

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Early Childhood Indicators of Progress.....28

CHAPTER ONE

The Importance of Social Emotional Learning

Introduction

There is a high need for educators to explicitly teach social and emotional learning skills to their students, especially at the primary grade levels. Students come to school with varied needs and often have a difficult time regulating in the general education classroom setting. While this may be caused by a number of factors, it is important that educators have tools and strategies to help their students develop social and emotional skills in order to be successful in school. There is a link between behavior and academic success, which is a great reason for educators to place emphasis on social and emotional learning (SEL). This leads me to my research question *How can primary grade level teachers teach Social Emotional Learning skills as an integrated approach through literacy?*

Social skills are critical to students' success, beginning as early as Kindergarten. Not all students attend a preschool or early childhood program; consequently, many students enter Kindergarten without much preparation for interacting with others in a socially positive way. Often this problem continues and may even escalate as the child moves on to first and second grade. I believe it is critical to help students develop SEL skills early and to explicitly teach these skills so that they know how to handle problems. Many children find it difficult to develop and maintain healthy and positive relationships or friendships, effectively problem solve, or even to communicate with others by using words or explaining feelings. Thus, when students do not have the necessary skills, small problems often escalate in a way that causes physical danger or harm to students, educators, and property.

Overview

Throughout this chapter, I provide a rationale for the study, describing the significance of the research and project to myself as an educator. I also provide an explanation of why this type of research and project is valuable to other education professionals. I also share professional challenges that have led me to my current curiosities and wonderings about social and emotional learning. Some of those challenges include my first year working in a school, serving as a substitute teacher, and the challenges of being a first year teacher.

Rationale

It seems that each day I read another article on teacher burnout or stories of teachers leaving the profession for valid reasons, many of them stemming from student behavioral concerns. Teachers are even getting physically abused by students. Teachers are expected to manage student behaviors that are very extreme. Often times, students are not getting additional services and teachers are expected to handle these behaviors on their own. As a result, teachers are often blamed for student behavior and left feeling helpless when there seems to be a much bigger issue.

These stories and articles are not specific to the area where I work, as I have read countless similar stories from areas across the United States. While there are many factors that are contributing to this issue, technology is a primary form of entertainment for children today, whereas many years ago, technology was used more as a tool. Now that parents and teachers can simply give children a device or distract them with some form of technology, there may be less true social interaction going on, beginning for

some children, as early as infancy. I feel that this contributes to the SEL gap that appears to be widening, which has led to behavior concerns. Keeping that concern in mind, SEL is now a critical piece of students' education. Students must be taught how to interact appropriately and positively with their peers, their teachers, and support staff.

Project Aims

Through my research, I hope to study what SEL practices best support students. I also hope to learn what explicit teaching is most helpful when considering teaching SEL through literacy in the general education classroom. I am aiming to explore areas of mindfulness and meditation, skill-based instruction and practice, yoga or body control, self-regulation, and problem solving through a literary lens.

Although there are multiple approaches and strategies available to teach SEL and multiple curricula that educators may be using to teach it, my goal is to explore what SEL skills can be taught, using a literacy lens, to improve student behavior and social interactions. This project provides lessons that instruct students on how to master specific SEL skills, while simultaneously teaching broader literacy strategies. Specifically, the project is comprised of self-management lessons that can be facilitated during dialogic reading for primary grade-level students at an elementary school in an urban setting.

First Educational Teaching Experience

I began my education career as an associate educator, providing literacy interventions to students in grades one through four. I provided those literacy interventions at a community school in North Minneapolis. The demographic included many students that were homeless or highly mobile, suffered from food insecurity, or

were in foster care. Many of these students also came from backgrounds of trauma. It was during my time at that school that I learned the true hardships that families in that particular neighborhood were experiencing. I heard stories from some of my students about not having a bed to sleep in, stories of not eating at home for days at a time, living in cars, watching family members get hurt or even die, and other stories about moving from shelter to home, then to another shelter, and another home. It is important to note that some of the students that I worked with did not have those experiences, but when surrounded by such a high population of their peers with those experiences, it directly impacts those students as well. To expect that students with backgrounds similar to those mentioned have refined social and emotional skills or coping skills would be an inaccurate assumption. Similarly, to expect that students from backgrounds of trauma have no social emotional skills may also be underestimating those students. I think it is critical for educators to understand that cases vary from student to student, as do their social and emotional skills.

As an example, one of my first intervention groups was a small group of second grade students. During the first few weeks of interventions, one student had a very difficult time managing her emotions. When she got frustrated by attempting to learn a new word or if I asked her to perform a particular task, she would often become frustrated and physically unable to work. She would start yelling, screaming, or sometimes crying; thus confusing me and making me question what I could do to help this student, first manage her emotions, and then help her develop literacy skills. I started by examining my actions. While reflecting, I realized that whenever I urged her to do

something academic that she was not ready for, she immediately shut down and escalated the behavior. I changed my behavior and managed how I was speaking with her and ensured that I did not engage this student in a power struggle.

Secondly, after a few more weeks, it became clear to me that she and the other students in the group sometimes wanted to simply engage each other in positive, healthy conversation. I noted that often times, they would need help or assistance in this; thus I would give them space and extra time to develop relationships with each other. This greatly improved my intervention time causing behavior issues to lessen and academic literacy skills to increase.

A similar situation occurred with third grade students that I had in a “pull out” group for intervention time. There was one student who could severely impact the rest of the group by engaging in unsafe behavior, escalating behavior in a way that was confusing to me and others, sometimes including leaving the room without permission. This was a group I started with later in the year, hence it was hard for me to develop relationships with them as quickly. This experience taught me how important it is to start developing those trusting positive relationships early on in the school year, for both students and staff. However, I searched for ways to help this student learn to self-regulate. I reached out to his family, his teacher, and administration for help. It seemed that nobody knew exactly what to do to help; therefore, these experiences are part of what drives me to find more ways to help support students’ SEL. After providing literacy interventions for a year, I decided to become a substitute teacher and get to know the other districts in the area.

Substitute Teaching in an Urban Environment

During my second year of working in the educational profession, I served as a substitute teacher in Saint Paul Public Schools, as well as in Special Education districts. During my time as a substitute, I often found that the key to being successful was helping students with their behavior. I did this by using whatever management system was in place based on the teachers' lesson plans. I also offered students time to talk and interact with each other. I found that my most successful days were often the result of encouraging positive social interactions, and helping them learn how to problem solve.

On the flip side, I saw many extreme behaviors as a substitute in an urban environment. I had experiences, like with my previous experience at a community school, where I was met with behavioral challenges from students that were not able to problem solve, lacked social skills, and exhibited dangerous and unsafe behavior. I never knew what I was walking in to. Each day was different depending on the school, SEL curricula taught, neighborhood in which the school resides, staff knowledge of how to teach social skills, and many other factors. My experience as a substitute teacher also caused me to wonder what else can I do to help these students? How can I encourage positive social interactions, positive relationship-building with peers, using problem solving skills, and overall make the classroom a safe and successful learning environment? All of these wonderings have encouraged me to pursue research about SEL and how to best serve students by providing SEL instruction. After I guest taught for a year, I moved on to my own classroom.

Teaching Second Grade

For the 2018-2019 school year, I taught second grade at a different community school in North Minneapolis, which is just down the street from where I previously worked. It is another Northside Minneapolis School, where the demographics are similar to that of schools where I have previously worked. Many students come from backgrounds of trauma. There is also a large portion of homeless or highly mobile students, as well as students with food insecurity.

I started the school year late with my group of twenty second graders. I was hired in October to replace a long-term substitute teacher that filled in for the first six weeks of school. This was a challenging starting place, especially in a school where relationships are often the most important factor in determining students' success. I accepted the challenge and began to build relationships with my students, while also trying to get them caught up in their academics.

The school where I taught second grade used the Zones of Regulation (2019) as their SEL curriculum, which I am familiar with as it was used in some of the other schools where I worked. The four zones are red, blue, yellow, and green, and the goal in general is for students to stay in the green zone so that they are ready to learn.

While I taught the lessons explicitly to my students each day, we also talked about the zones during different parts of our day. I tried to incorporate it into our literacy lessons whenever possible; for example, if a character was acting a certain way, I might ask students "What zone do you think that character is in?" We often talked about different strategies that they could use depending on which zone they were in. They checked in daily, multiple times a day, in order to try to regulate. Though I appreciate the

Zones of Regulation as a curriculum, in that particular case, it still did not seem like enough for my students.

Each day I struggled with behavior. I struggled with students' inability to regulate their emotions and behavior. I struggled with them being unable to successfully take breaks. I struggled with students being able to keep small problems small. As I reflect on my time teaching 2nd grade, I find myself thinking that maybe if I explicitly taught desired behaviors or phrases even, in some cases, would that have helped my students manage their emotions and be enough to teach them how to positively interact in a social way with their peers? While I wrote behavior plans for students that needed additional one on one support, that also did not seem like enough. The problem still seemed bigger to me. I feel that teaching students social and emotional skills is absolutely necessary, and in some cases, the SEL curricula that is available to teachers may not be enough. That problem has inspired me to do more research on the issue, and to create additional resources for teachers and educational support staff to use with students in order to increase social and emotional skills, which ideally helps with behavior concerns, consequently improving academic performance.

The past three years in education have been challenging for me. The behaviors and SEL concerns that I have seen inspire me to find more ways to help my students. I want to find the best ways to help my students develop positive relationships with their peers. I feel it is my duty as an educator to find the best ways to serve my students, whether that is related to reading, writing, math, science, social studies or SEL. I want my students to develop a love of learning, but before they can do that, they need to feel safe,

regulated, and equipped with social and emotional skills. Physiological and safety needs must be met first, before moving beyond that to the stages of experiencing love/belonging, esteem, or self-actualization (Maslow, 1943.)

Summary

I have explained my rationale for the research and project, as well as provided contextual information that explains where my interest lies in the topic of SEL. I have also included my professional background that gives more insight into why the topic is so important. Before students can be academically successful in school, they must be able to navigate the world in a socially positive and acceptable way. Students must be able to regulate their emotions, work through problems, and communicate effectively with others. Often, students are coming to Kindergarten without these skills, and therefore educators have a responsibility to help students develop those social skills.

The following chapters explore the research on social and emotional learning that has already been established. Beyond that, the paper explores a project for teaching SEL skills in the general education setting, as well as provides a reflection on the process. Specifically, the project establishes lessons that can be used in a literacy setting to teach SEL skills based on the skill of self-management.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter One discussed the importance of social emotional learning (SEL), especially for young students in grades K-2. Some frustrations that are common among teachers that relate to managing students' behavior were discussed. There have been changes happening in educational policy, educational standards, and technology as it relates to culture and social interactions, and changes in expectations for teachers. This has led to the guiding question: *How can primary grade-level teachers teach Social Emotional Learning skills as an integrated approach through literacy?*

The following literature review includes information about SEL as well as how SEL relates to literacy. In the first section, the meaning of SEL, background information around SEL, as well as the history of SEL in education is discussed. The next section looks at early childhood development as it relates to social skills. The following section includes a review of specific SEL curricula that are available to teachers today. Lastly, the influence that SEL has on learning, specifically with respect to literacy is discussed. That section also includes ways that teachers can potentially incorporate SEL into literacy lessons.

Background and History of Social Emotional Learning

While educators and parents have been teaching children social emotional skills throughout history, the development of social emotional learning as a construct in the educational system is relatively new. There have been changes in how social and emotional skills are taught, shifts in cultural norms, technological advances that have changed the way humans interact, and also standard and policy changes that change the way people view SEL. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional,

and Academic Learning (CASEL), “ Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (2019). Having competency in those SEL areas can help children be successful learners at school. In order to understand the importance that SEL skills play in a child’s education, it is worth exploring the background of SEL as a construct. The first section looks at the history of SEL, including influential people and organizations. Second, the CASEL organization is discussed as well as the frameworks that they have developed. Lastly, policy issues and changes in the United States at the federal level as well as at the state level is discussed.

History and the Development of SEL. Social Emotional Learning is a concept in education that is relatively new. According to Elias and Mocerri (2012), Daniel Goleman’s book titled *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), served as the impetus of the developing field of SEL. The book brought together and clearly laid out the connection between emotion and the way humans function. Goleman’s work on emotional intelligence also led to the development of CASEL, which was originally known as the Collaborative for the Advancement of Social and Emotional Learning (Elias & Mocerri, 2012). While Goleman played a major role in the development of CASEL and is considered a co-founder, he was not the only influence for that organization. More history around CASEL specifically is discussed in the next section.

It is worth noting that there are studies available that dispute the value of teaching SEL based on a set curriculum. There are also people that view SEL in its current state

from a very pessimistic lens; for example, traditionally, social emotional interventions were taught by experts in the field, such as school psychologists, counselors, or clinical psychologists. Recently, there has been a shift in that, largely due to public perception of the need to teach SEL at all levels. Those interventions were provided to students who qualified for additional services and required interventions in order to be successful. Due to the growing importance and attention given to SEL, classroom teachers, support staff who may or may not be licensed, and young people that act as coaches or buddies are often those who are responsible for delivering SEL interventions or specific behavior interventions (Ecclestone & Rawdin, 2016). This could lead to problems in the fidelity of the delivery of SEL curriculum, as well as yield poor results if given by individuals without proper training or expertise.

According to Horsley and Hollingworth (2014), there is also the problem of using a variety of terms interchangeably, namely: emotional well-being, SEL, and mental health (Ecclestone & Rawdin, 2016). This is a concern as the terms become loosely thrown around, and the true meaning of mental health starts to become weakened or diminished. Similarly, the concept of SEL gets used in a variety of contexts, and the meaning may become somewhat lost or confused.

While those issues do exist, there is also an overwhelming amount of research supporting the positive impact that SEL programs can have on students, specifically young children in their primary grade level years. For example, Durlak et al. (2011) performed a study in which they analyzed 213 school-based SEL intervention programs with a wide range of ages from Kindergarten through high school. The findings showed

that those participants in the SEL programs showed more positive attitudes toward themselves personally, improved SEL competencies, and showed improvement in several behavior issues. That particular study found that SEL programs lead by an average of 11 percentile point gains in academic achievement (Elias & Mocerri 2012).

Burroughs and Barkauskas provide the argument that there is a piece missing in SEL-ethics. They claim that only teaching students SEL skills, such as teaching them to be more in tune with their emotions and others' emotions, is not sufficient. For example, if student A is in tune with student B's emotions, student A may be more likely to manipulate student B for their own personal benefit (2017). While it seems that SEL curricula are generally inclusive of SEL skills, there may be character building or ethics pieces missing that teachers should be aware of. If the goal is truly to educate the whole child, it should be considered.

One other issue to consider is the variety of programs that are available to teachers. Most teachers do not have the ability to choose which SEL curriculum is provided for them. Some teachers do not have access to a SEL curriculum at all, in which case they must develop it on their own, if it is something they wish to teach. According to White and Walker (2018), early childhood educators can be successful at developing programs that meet SEL outcomes, when provided with adequate resources. The main issue that arises with that, is the lack of resources in many school districts.

CASEL. The Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning, formed in 1994, is an organization that exists in order to support students, educators, as well as policy makers. The work of CASEL includes research, practice, and policy

related to SEL. The organization also provides information and research about evidence-based, high quality social emotional learning practices (CASEL, 2019).

Originally, it started as a group of volunteers, including researchers and educators, whose goal was to advance the SEL skills of children and was driven by five core competencies that include SEL aspects related to the self, relations with others, and decision making.

Definitions and examples are provided as follows:

Self-awareness. Self-awareness is the ability to recognize one's personal emotions, thoughts, as well as values and how all of those pieces influence behavior. Self-awareness, also includes being able to assess one's own strengths as well as limitations.

Self-management. Self management is defined as one's ability to regulate one's emotions, behaviors, and thoughts across a variety of situations. Self-management also includes the ability to manage stress and control urges or impulses. Being able to self-motivate and set personal goals is also considered a piece of self-management.

Social awareness. Social awareness is one's ability to show empathy to others while understanding their perspectives. Another piece of social awareness includes respecting differences in others. Social awareness also includes the ability to understand ethical norms, as well as social norms as they relate to behavior.

Relationship skills. Relationship skills include one's ability to establish as well as maintain positive, healthy relationships with others, including those that are different from one's self. Relationship skills also include one's ability to communicate effectively

with others through listening, cooperating, and making appropriate choices as they relate to potentially negative peer pressure.

Responsible decision-making. Responsible decision making includes one's ability to make appropriate choices regarding personal behavior as well as during social interactions based on social norms, safety issues, and ethical norms. In order to make responsible decisions, it is also essential that one is able to evaluate the potential consequences of one's actions, as well as consider the impact those decisions will have on others (CASEL, 2019).

This work is critical to understand as they are one of the largest organizations that work to promote SEL as well as academics for students in Pre-K through high school. They actively engage in research to find the most effective SEL practices, as well as seek to inform educators and policy makers about their findings.

Policy Issues. Over the past several decades, there have been changes in educational policies that impact standards, as well as what is expected of students and teachers. Many of these policies have caused additional pressure and stress on teachers to ensure strictly academic success, and consequently, students feel the pressure of rigorous academic learning. The enjoyment and fun often done in the form of play, drama, and art, that used to take place in school and learning often suffers as a result (Miller, 2005). Some of the policies that are discussed include No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), as well as state and some international policy changes.

No Child Left Behind. In 2002, the NCLB Act upped the rigor in academics and expectations for mastering academic content. It served as a way to ensure that the United

States was not falling behind in the international marketplace. To remain competitive internationally, policy makers including President George W. Bush, thought that increasing the requirements for academic success would lead to more competitive employees in the future and also help to close the achievement gap that exists between minority students and their more privileged peers. Although states did not have to comply, there were financial consequences for those that did not and they risked losing Title 1 Funding (Klein, 2015).

Under the NCLB Act, students were required to be tested in a standardized way between grades 3-8, and once in high school. It was required that schools showed adequate yearly progress (AYP). If schools or subgroups, including special education students, ELL students, or minority students, did not show AYP for two years, then the school had to offer the choice of transferring to a better performing school within the district. If this continued for a third year, the school had to offer free tutoring. Beyond that, if schools did not show AYP, schools could potentially be shut down, turned into charter schools, or be forced to incorporate a stronger turnaround strategy (Klein, 2015). While the NCLB act was replaced in 2015, it is still worth mentioning as the results were not what the policy makers had hoped for, yet it still has a lasting impact on our educational system today in the form of expectations of high academic rigor for all students.

Some of the major problems and criticisms related to NCLB are very serious. Such criticism includes NCLB simply not being successful. By the 2013-2014 school year, schools were supposed to have achieved proficiency. Even though states were able

to choose what exactly “proficiency” meant, not a single state had 100% of students meet this benchmark (Klein, 2015). Another one of these criticisms is that by being required to test at a certain level in reading, math, and for some levels, science, then less time is spent on other subjects, such as foreign language, social studies, and arts (Klein, 2015). This is problematic because by taking out these other important content areas, including finding less time for SEL, socialization and free play, school becomes a place of academic pressure, and nothing more. The true joy of exploring and learning gets lost.

Every Student Succeeds Act. ESSA was signed into law in 2015 and replaced the NCLB act. Primarily, ESSA gave more control to the states and lessened the federal government’s involvement in educational policy related to academic testing as well as teacher quality (Klein, 2016).

One component of ESSA is that it specifies one way to support student learning is to lessen the use of disciplinary policies that remove students from the classroom (Gregory, A., & Fergus, E., 2017). This component lends itself well to the increasing importance of SEL in the classroom. Rather than being removed from class, students are taught coping strategies, as well as problem solving strategies. This is done in the hopes that students can continue their academic learning, while also refining their social emotional skills. ESSA also requires that states create accountability systems that include not only the two indicators of academic success, but also go a step further requiring at least one indicator of school quality or student success, for example SEL or school climate (Ekund, K., Kilpatrick, K., Kilgus, S., & Haider, A, 2018). While ESSA may be a step in the right direction with respect to prioritizing SEL as an important piece of

learning, some parts of NCLB still remain in place. The academic pressure is still extremely high, which causes SEL to sometimes become less of a priority.

State Policy Changes. Some states have changed the way student discipline works in their schools, in the hopes of improving academics, while also increasing SEL skills. The California Assembly Bill 1729 that took effect in 2013, states that suspension should not be the primary disciplinary action. Some other course of action must be taken first; for example, in California, schools may not suspend any students from kindergarten through third grade, unless there is a threat to others' safety. Connecticut has banned suspension fully for their primary students, with very few exceptions. The states that are embracing these policies are also focusing more on SEL as a construct (Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

The next section reviews the history and background of SEL. A definition of SEL was also provided, as well complications around the meaning of SEL. CASEL's framework was discussed. In the last subsection, educational policies and recent changes in the educational system were also reviewed. The next section discusses early childhood development as it relates to SEL.

Early Childhood Development

It is important to look at early childhood development when considering SEL concepts and skills, both how they are learned as well as how they are taught. Having a better understanding of early childhood development can help educators understand the needs of the children that they serve. It can also help educators develop appropriate lessons and learning material. Hunter, Bierman, and Hall stated that the landscape of

early childhood educational programs in the United States has changed drastically in the last 15 years, as the focus in Kindergarten has shifted more towards academics than playing and learning social skills such as how to get along (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). The section that follows looks at preschool programs with respect to educational readiness. The second section looks at the importance of play during early childhood. The last section looks at recent trends and changes that have an impact on early childhood development.

Preschool Programs and Educational Readiness. Educational readiness has become a growing concern for governments and educators. Due to this, there has also been public investment in increasing access to quality preschool programs (Dealy & Stone, 2018). According to Gray, the conversation around readiness developed in the 1920s in the United States (Dealy & Stone, 2018). While the conversation around readiness may have started long ago, it is still an important topic to educators and governmental leaders.

In 1989, educational readiness became the top priority goal out of six national educational goals that were developed by the nation's governors. According to Kagan (1995), they created five developmental domains of readiness including:

- physical wellness/motor skills
- social and emotional skill development
- approaches and attitudes toward learning
- language development
- cognition/general knowledge (Dealy & Stone 2018).

In Dealy and Stone's study, they explored the relationship between out of school play and educational readiness. The study included three domains of readiness, including approaches to learning/self regulation, social emotional development, and language or literacy development. The results were surprising because out of school play did not positively correlate with educational readiness, according to teachers' assessments. They go on to suggest that more research is needed in this area.

According to Hunter, Bierman, and Hall (2018),
by definition, school readiness reflects the acquisition of foundational skills that foster a child's success in school after kindergarten entry, and hence measures of school readiness should predict to early elementary school measures of school adjustment, performance, and attainment" (p.1083).

They go on to elaborate, stating that most of the readiness assessments have traditionally focused on academics, rather than the social emotional skills that are needed to be successful in school. Prior to 2000, the majority of studies have not included social emotional skill assessment. For example, in one analysis of 70 studies examining educational readiness, only two of them included social emotional components (Hunter, Bierman, and Hall, 2018). After that study, there have been many additional studies that include measurement of SEL skills.

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has standards called the early childhood indicators of progress (ECIPs). ECIPs include three main components which are the self and emotional awareness, self-management, and social understanding and

relationships. To offer additional information about what these standards look like and how the components and subcomponents are categorized, they are listed as follows:

Figure 1. Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs used by MDE)

Component	Subcomponents
Self and Emotional Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Confidence ● Self-Awareness ● Emotions
Self Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Managing thinking ● Managing emotions and behaviors
Social Understanding and Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social responsiveness ● Building relationships ● Social skills

The ECIPs can help teachers and parents alike understand what is developmentally appropriate and expected of children. Since adults play an important role in the development of children, it is important for them to become familiar with the ECIPs. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017).

Importance of Play. Due to the increase in academically rigorous standards, time for play has been pushed aside which affects the development of children. It also impacts the way children interact with the natural world, which directly relates to many science standards. Miller (2005) discussed the importance of the following experiences for children: developing close relationships with trusted adults, experiencing and exploring the natural world, outdoor play, music, drama, painting, dance, and experiencing a variety of arts, both in specialist classes as well as incorporated through core lessons throughout the day. Young children experience richer learning experiences through those types of

hands on learning experiences, which can also include story-telling, interactive read-alouds, as well as conversation or poetry (Miller, 2005). Some of these experiences may or may not directly correlate with a state standard or national standard. Taking into consideration the recent policy changes that place more pressure on academic success, and increase focus on accountability, educators have been forced to cut choice time, free play, recess, and many other high quality learning experiences, because they are not seen as adding academic value (Dealy & Stone, 2018).

Wood (2014) performed a study which was mostly observational in a rural area in England, where she observed 3.1-4.5 year olds during play/free choice time, as well as in whole group organized events such as snack time. Wood's goal was to examine children's individual and group choices during whole group activities as well as during times of free play. She also looked at the way agency, or the ability of making choices and having an impact on the world around one's self, impacted play and behavior. Her findings mainly included observational data; for example, one task that was assigned to two student helpers during snack time, was placing the name cards of each student on a chair, so everyone knew where to sit. This task was manipulated by the children, because they could read all the name cards, so they chose to move names around so that they could sit by their friends. This was one time when Wood identified children utilizing choice, pushing limits, and exercising personal agency.

Another example provided in the study was the case of one particular student. When asked to line up as a class, one student decided to giggle, touch other students' heads, shake her entire body and intentionally fall to the floor, in order to disrupt the

norm that was expected by the teacher. This was noted by Wood (2014), as exercising agency, as agency can be linked to individual dispositions, as well as the willingness to disrupt the rules, and also the ability to manage peers and events around one's self.

During periods of free play, that particular student as well as others often chose to do tasks individually, rather than with a group. This may have been done as a way to exclude others or to simply exclude one's self. Ultimately, Wood's observations aimed to show the different choices that children make when given the opportunity to choose activities freely. She also found that complicated social relationships exist, even in young children. Children also found ways to demonstrate power over others, control related to adults and peers, as well as participate in exclusion and inclusion of others or the self. Wood goes on to encourage the discussion and discourse around the nuances that exist during periods of free play (2014). This is important for early childhood/primary teachers to consider as there is more to be learned about how free play influences social interactions.

Recent Trends and Changes. Technology is changing the way toddlers, pre schoolers, and primary grade-level children are interacting with the world. With such a large amount of time spent engaging with technology, it lessens the time spent developing positive relationships with peers, developing positive relationships with adults, and learning problem solving skills. The presence of computers and other technology in early childhood classrooms is growing at an extremely high rate. For example, a recent study of childcare centers in Texas confirmed that 75% of preschool children were using computers at those centers (Miller, 2005).

University psychologist, David Elkind, states that the most important work of young children is to master skills related to SEL including: regulating emotions, problem solving, using imaginative thinking, focusing or paying attention, body coordination, developing flexibility, as well as navigating various social situations (Miller, 2005). This is critical to consider as many of those skills and experiences get deprioritized with the increasing use of technology in school and early childcare centers.

The technology-based education standards are also increasing. One example that Miller provides was developed by the International Society for Technology in Education in 1998. That standard states that by the end of second grade, students should be able to use input and output devices. Some examples of these include a computer mouse, keyboard, remote control, or computer monitor. This standard also includes the use of computers, VCRs, and other technologies. Lastly, it also includes having students create a multimedia product, and successfully collect information on the internet (2005). Miller goes on to elaborate on the concerns based on this, stating that technology should be used as tools, rather than the focus of the learning. Which specific technology should be used should also depend on the task and age of the child (Miller, 2005). Instead of teaching to the technology, educators should be teaching children to use technology as a tool to enhance their learning experience, so they may be allowed more time to explore the natural world through hands on exploration which often provides a richer learning experience.

Existing Social Emotional Learning Curricula and Frameworks

There are many SEL curricula available to educators. However, the curricula used typically depends on the principal and or district level employees, as they are responsible for the purchasing of the SEL curricula. Teachers often have limited resources, depending on what they have access to at their individual schools. Some SEL programs may work better for some students than others. It is difficult to find a curricula that works well for all students, which leads to the problem of teachers meeting the needs of all their students with limited resources.

Some of the existing SEL curricula include the 4Rs program, Responsive Classroom, Positive Action (PA), Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), Research Based, Developmentally Informed (REDI) which is used at Head Start programs, Zoo U, and Second Step. There are many other SEL curricula as well. For this project's purposes, commonly used SEL curricula are examined. The next section looks at the effectiveness of the Responsive Classroom curriculum. The section that follows looks at Zoo U, a virtual game based social skills curriculum. Then, the third section examines the effectiveness of Second Step. The last section looks at the 4Rs program.

Responsive Classroom. Responsive Classroom (RC) is a whole-school intervention designed to improve the social emotional skills and behaviors of students, as well as literacy and math skills (Anyon, Nicoreta, & Veeh, 2016). One study looked at a school that used three of the core practices within RC. One of the components was morning meeting, which is a time where students come together to greet each other and build community together. Another component was the use of specific teacher language including reinforcing statements of positive behavior, using questions and modeling to

remind students of behavior expectations. The third component that was incorporated was the use of logical consequences for student behavior. The goal of this particular study was to see what RC looked like as a school-wide intervention and approach to SEL, and specifically what lead to implementation fidelity, or lack thereof, in individual classrooms.

The results of the study found that many teachers agree with the community building aspect of RC and found morning meeting and other components of RC to be valuable because it helps get to the root cause of the behavior, which is lack of relationship and trust (Anyon, Nicoreta, & Veeh, 2016). Contrastly, some teachers found that the lack of punitive consequences was not in the best interest of students. These teachers felt that there must be firm consequences and in some cases, zero tolerance policies (Anyon, Nicoreta, & Veeh, 2016). Another issue that was brought up by many teachers as well as administrators was that RC is not a solution to the very extreme behaviors, especially those that threaten physical safety. There are several students with extremely high needs, and RC does not lend itself well to handling those situations. Many teachers felt that they ran into a phase in which they wondered what else they could do and behaviors actually escalated over the year, instead of improving (Anyon, Nicoreta, & Veeh, 2016). Other criticisms based on teachers responses in this study include displacement of other academic content. Because activities like morning meeting, as well as rehearsing procedures until they are done correctly, take time, academic lessons are pushed aside, which the teachers felt was not right (Anyon, Nicoreta, & Veeh, 2016).

In another study, by Stearns, RC is critiqued. Stearns observed a teacher that is heavily invested in RC and is a very experienced teacher. During the observations, what was found was that students often seemed to be taught that hard feelings need to be sorted out quickly, and that if a student felt hurt or angry, it should be dealt with in a certain way. There was not time or encouragement to truly handle the emotions, or a time to actually experience disappointment. The focus was keeping school a place for positive affect (Stearns, 2018). All of these critiques are worth considering, when looking at the use of RC. While there is value and importance in relationship building, there also may be issues such as suppression of true emotions or lost instructional time as well.

Zoo U. Zoo U is an online virtual game program aimed to teach students ages seven to twelve core social skills in order to improve peer interactions. The program is also designed around mastery, so before moving on to a new topic, you must master the one that comes previously. Zoo U is designed as a game, so that children's natural curiosity and interest is heightened (Craig, Brown, Upright, & DeRosier, 2016).

Based on parental responses, the research around this program found that the children that completed Zoo U showed greater impulse control, ability to regulate emotions, social interaction skills, and ability to cooperate with others. This study also reported that children who completed Zoo U had decreased antisocial and aggressive behaviors, while appropriately demonstrating more assertive behaviors. However, parents also reported that after the completion of Zoo U, the children showed an increase in internalizing behaviors, including anxiety or social withdrawal (Craig, Brown, Upright, & DeRosier, 2016). The findings from this study are interesting as there are similarities

between the findings based on Zoo U, and the previously mentioned RC. Namely, the potentially negative consequence of these SEL programs include developing anxiety or the inability to express and feel real emotions as they surface.

Second Step. Second Step is a SEL curriculum that is commonly used in schools across the United States. Second Step has programs available for preschool students, elementary-aged students, and middle school students. The lessons change, depending on grade level in order to provide developmentally appropriate lessons and to address the appropriate SEL skills for each age group. There are four types of lessons including: skills for learning, empathy, management of emotions, and problem solving skills (Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Desgosses, 2018).

A study was conducted that examined the effectiveness of the Second Step curriculum. It included students in Kindergarten through third grade, in a variety of rural and urban settings. There were four data points included in the research, two per year, with one being in the fall and the other in the spring. The study found that students in Second Step schools outperformed the students in the control schools based on the measure of emotional symptoms and hyperactivity. The overall effects and improvements were larger for students that started with lower SEL skill scores, based on teacher reports. The study also showed positive growth in the areas of emotion management, skills for learning, and problem solving. Interestingly, the study found that only boys improved conduct and peer problems, while girls and boys showed improvements in hyperactivity. The study also went on to show that students in the Second Step program improved SEL skills during the school year, but not during the summer. Another finding of the study

was that Second Step was more effective in reducing behaviors than preventing the problematic behaviors. The results also found that there was no significant increase in academics in comparison to the control group, unfortunately (Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Desgosses, 2018). Overall, based on this two year study, it seems that Second Step is a high quality SEL program for reducing student behavior issues, as well as promoting prosocial behaviors. One concern with the program may be the lack of improvement of academic skills, though that is not a primary focus of the program.

4Rs Program. The 4Rs program is a school-based intervention program for elementary students. The 4Rs stand for reading, writing, respect and resolution. This curriculum integrates literacy learning with SEL, utilizing high quality children's literature as a vehicle to teach SEL skills such as listening, cooperation, assertiveness, and mediation. The themes that emerge through the literature include conflict, feelings, community, and relationship building. The curriculum was developed in response to the emerging conflict between increasingly rigorous academic standards and the surfacing need to teach social emotional skills to students at school (Brown, Jones, LaRusso, and Aber, 2010).

One study on the 4Rs program examined the variables of overall classroom quality, classroom emotional support, classroom organization, and classroom instructional support. The results of the study conducted around the 4Rs program did not show significant impact on classroom organization, but did find a significant effect on emotional support at the classroom level, as well as the classroom instructional level. High level of classroom instruction included increased quality of instructional

interactions and supports for students, such as concept development and the quality of feedback during instructional times (Brown, Jones, LaRusso, and Aber, 2010).

Something to consider about the 4Rs program is that it seems to add quality to the instructional time, particularly during literacy, but may not serve as a classroom management or behavior tool. It may be ideal or even necessary, depending on the needs of students, for some educators to incorporate additional SEL skill practice into their day, when using the 4Rs program.

SEL curricula have a variety of pros and cons, depending on which curriculum one examines. It is important for educators and administration to consider the strengths of one program versus others as they try to decide what is the best fit for each school or classroom. As each child's needs are different, it may also be difficult to find the best fit curriculum for any given school or classroom. Since SEL is a newer field in education as it relates to curriculum development, it can also be a challenge to find an adequate amount of studies and research to support one curriculum over another.

Social Emotional Learning and Literacy Connections

The importance of incorporating SEL lessons in classrooms has been steadily increasing. On the other hand, so has the need for high academic standards and high academic success. Policies such as No Child Left Behind, and Every Student Succeeds Act are a couple examples of how policy makers are trying to positively raise academic standards, and to ensure that every child is getting the best education possible. Because these policies focus so much on the academic part of learning, and put additional pressure on educators to focus strictly on academics, sometimes there is a conflict between that

aim and trying to teach students SEL skills at the same time. Due to the need to meet academic and SEL standards, educators have tried to implement curricula that intertwines both academic learning and SEL. Many of those programs are implemented through a literacy lens. According to Fisher and Frey, studies have shown that SEL should be incorporated into the core curriculum, rather than being taught separately (2019). The first section looks at the research behind integrating SEL with literacy, as well as within other content areas. That section includes information on general effects SEL has on academic achievement. The second section looks at changes in academic standards that may be hindering the learning of SEL skills. The last section examines ways to teach SEL skills through literacy.

The Relationship Between SEL, Learning, and Literacy. According to Fisher and Frey, the research shows that SEL should be integrated with the core curriculum (2019). Fisher and Frey also argue that literacy is the strongest content area with respect to lending itself well to SEL integration. Students that learn to express their thoughts and feelings in an appropriate way, show empathy and consideration for others' feelings, and those who can be active listeners will ultimately learn more and then contribute positively to society (Fisher & Frey 2019). That piece of research indicates that teachers should allow students time to process feelings throughout literature lessons, provide speaking opportunities to share feelings, as well as giving students writing opportunities to practice the skill of self-reflection.

Doyle and Bramwell present an interesting example of combining an emergent literacy skill such as sequencing events with pictures, which focuses on narrative

structure, with the SEL skills of cooperation and problem solving, by having students work on the task together after participating in a shared reading with teacher guidance (2006). According to Blair, it is important in Kindergarten to promote school success by integrating skills including cognitive, social, and physical skills (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Shared reading creates many opportunities for students to develop both SEL skills and emergent literacy skills. Shared reading involves reading a text aloud with students, and giving students opportunities to interact with the text in a deeper way. For example, when reading a story about the first day of school, the teacher may ask what the students' first day of school was like (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Primary school teachers have many opportunities to engage students in shared reading throughout the school day, during the literacy block, at morning meeting, or during snack time.

Dialogic reading is a technique that includes several readings, known as repeated readings, as well as conversations around the same text, shared with students in small groups. During this process, students participate actively by retelling stories as well as responding to questions. Research shows that the use of dialogic reading supports oral language development, which is a critical component for young students experiencing emergent literacy. There is an established relationship between oral language and literacy skills such as writing, knowledge of graphemes, phonemes, concepts of print, as well as phonemic awareness (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). In order for students to become successful readers, they need opportunities like that presented in dialogic reading, in order to develop oral language skills.

Another important component that is involved with dialogic reading is the repeated reading strategy. Students that listen to a story more than once are more likely to engage in dialogue around the text, as well as to ask more questions (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). An additional benefit of repeated reading is related to vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary can be developed either through direct instruction of words and their meanings, or through the exposure of new words through verbal contexts (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Dialogic reading can have a positive impact on a variety of literacy and SEL skills including cooperation, problem solving, oral language development, comprehension practice, and vocabulary development to name a few. When considering the organization of dialogic reading, utilizing small groups to engage in repeated readings of a text would be one way to actively keep students engaged during dialogic reading lessons.

Changes in Academic Standards and the Impact on Literacy. Over the past few decades there have been changes in academic standards and policies, as previously mentioned. According to Boyles, after NCLB, there was also the introduction of the Common Core standards and ESSA which caused educators to focus more than ever on strictly academics. She goes on to elaborate that reading teachers stopped asking questions related to SEL such as: how does that make you feel, or what would you do if...? (Boyles, 2018). By incorporating those types of questions, and those related to reasoning, insight, and strategic thinking, educators can make sure students are being exposed to questions that require higher level thinking. This is beneficial to students, as it gives them opportunities to explore questions that dive into Webb's Depth of Knowledge

(DOK) levels of 3 or 4, which require higher level thinking, than levels 1 and 2 (Boyles, 2018). There are several high quality children's books that lend themselves well to incorporating SEL skills in the literacy block. Through questioning, conversation, and writing, literacy and SEL can be taught in a combined way to deliver truly powerful lessons.

Ways to Teach SEL Skills Through Literacy. Boyles suggests a few different ways to incorporate SEL into literacy instruction including: getting kids to talk about their feelings, having them role-play, and getting students to write. Writing involves powerful reflection, sometimes in a deeper way than even peer or teacher conversations (2018). Boyles also goes on to suggest only choosing one focus skill per text. While there may be multiple SEL areas addressed in one book, it is beneficial to focus on one skill at a time so that students can think more deeply about that skill. For example, focusing on self-efficacy as a skill would be done at a separate time than focusing on self-motivation or empathy (Boyles, 2018). By choosing to focus on one skill at a time, teachers can offer opportunities to practice the skill and fully understand the meaning of the skill.

When considering integrating literacy and SEL, it is important to consider how best to implement the lessons. According to Doyle and Bramwell, research supports that it is ideal to present dialogic reading lessons with small groups of students (2006). This supports the oral language development component, as well as provides additional opportunities, specifically for English Language Learners (ELL), to elaborate on thoughts or ideas. Using a small-group model also allows for additional time for students to

develop meaningful relationships with their peers, as well as their teacher (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006).

There are also intervention programs available to educators such as the Social-Emotional Learning Foundations (SELF) curriculum. SELF focuses on developing literacy skills as well as developing the CASEL 5 core competencies. Lessons are built around a text that the teacher reads during the first of three lessons. SELF lessons are also taught in small groups, in a small-group intervention style, two to three times per week. This program was developed in order to help students with emotional and behavioral issues in the primary grades (Daunic et al., 2013). Although certain curricula is available depending on school resources, teachers can still look at the interventions that are out there such as SELF, and develop their own lessons using a similar structure in order to help their students develop literacy and SEL skills.

Rationale

There have been several studies conducted that link SEL skills to school success, and ultimately life success. In order for students to positively contribute to society, they need to have foundational SEL skills such as cooperation and self-regulation, as well as the potential to succeed academically. By providing instruction around SEL as an integrated part of literacy instruction, teachers have many opportunities to provide rich learning experiences that enhance students' literacy skills as well as SEL skills. If teachers integrate literacy and SEL, there are opportunities for students to develop problem solving skills, cooperation, self-regulation, as well as empathy, and self-motivation. The policies and technological advances that have taken place in recent

decades have changed the way young children interact with each other, which have increased the need for SEL instruction. In order for students to develop prosocial behaviors, they often need explicit instruction or lessons on how to do so. Primary school teachers and early childhood educators have opportunities to help enhance students' emergent literacy skills, while simultaneously teaching important SEL skills.

Summary

Chapter Two included a broad explanation of what SEL is as well as the history of its development and place in education. Definitions and examples of specific SEL skills, as outlined by CASEL and other researchers was explored. Early childhood development, especially in light of the recent trends and changes that have occurred as a result of technology and public policy was discussed. A variety of curricula that are available to educators today was examined. Lastly, information about the impact that SEL has on academic achievement, particularly literacy was discussed. All of those topic areas aimed to inform the guiding question: *How can primary grade-level teachers teach Social Emotional Learning skills as an integrated approach through literacy?*

Chapter Three presents an outline of the curriculum development project. It includes information about the intended audience and setting. It also explains why this particular curriculum writing method was used.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

There has been an increased focus on social emotional learning (SEL) in education, especially in elementary schools across the United States. While teachers try to find a balance between meeting academic standards and meeting students' SEL needs, academics are often considered more important by administrators and the government. Policies that have been discussed in Chapter Two have greatly influenced the need for teachers to focus on academics, which consequently allows for less time to focus on SEL. As a result of policy changes and the growing need for SEL in schools, the capstone project sought to explore the guiding question: *How can primary grade-level teachers teach Social Emotional Learning skills as an integrated approach through literacy?*

Chapter Three explains how this project incorporates SEL instruction into small-group literacy lessons. It begins with an overview of the project which identifies the intentions and goal of the project. Following the project overview, the framework is discussed, which includes an explanation of why curriculum development was chosen for the project. The rationale explains information about the Understanding by Design (UbD) model that was used for the project. Next, a detailed project description is presented. The project audience and setting is discussed. Lastly, the timeline for project completion is given.

Project Overview

For this capstone project, a unit of small-group literacy lessons for Kindergarten through second grade that incorporate SEL skills, specifically in the category of self-management was developed. At least two texts per skill was identified and used in the lessons, resulting in twelve small-group lessons. Each text includes a formal lesson

plan including the identified SEL focus skill, learning target, prompts, questions, stopping places, assessment criteria, and extension activities. The small-group lessons are to be performed after an initial whole-group shared reading has been done with the class. Repeated readings have been shown to allow students more opportunities to engage with the text. Students ask more questions and engage in more dialogue as a result of listening to a story multiple times (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006).

The lessons were built around the strategy of dialogic reading. As mentioned in Chapter Two, dialogic reading involves using multiple readings of a book and having conversations around the book. This helps students develop emergent literacy skills, while also supporting oral language development. This strategy is particularly beneficial for young learners, ages 2-6. (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Dialogic reading is appropriate for Kindergarten through second grade, as it supports oral language development. Also, for students that are behind in oral language development or emergent literacy skills, dialogic reading can be used as an intervention for primary grade level students.

The goal of the project is to create literacy lessons that have an integrated SEL skill that can be targeted simultaneously. The project contains twelve formal small-group lesson plans that use the style of dialogic reading. The framework and rationale is discussed next.

Framework and Rationale

The choice was made to develop a SEL curriculum that is integrated within the core subject of literacy. The reason for this is that there has been an increased focus on academics and ensuring that all students are reading at grade level, while meeting state

literacy standards. There has also been an increased need for students to learn SEL skills at school. In order to accommodate both of those growing needs, the curriculum development includes SEL lessons that also promote literacy skills.

The framework that was used to develop the project is the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework. The UbD framework is a curriculum-planning guide that is built around helping students *understand* concepts and then transfer that learning into new situations (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). The concept of understanding can be complicated as there are multiple meanings of the word understanding. The UbD framework is built around the idea that understanding goes a step further than simply acquiring knowledge. The modified UbD lesson plan template that was created for this project includes an additional assessment piece which is the ability to transfer learned skills to new situations.

In order to allow for successful planning and more purposeful teaching, the UbD framework utilizes backward planning as the main curriculum-planning strategy. Instead of starting with content, this framework begins with what students should be able to do with the content. The UbD framework includes three stages of planning including stage one: identify desired results, stage two: determine acceptable evidence, and stage three: plan learning experiences and instruction accordingly (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

The UbD framework was particularly useful when planning SEL lessons that are integrated into literacy lessons because the learning targets and overall focus was around what students can do with the identified SEL skill, and how they can apply and transfer

specific SEL skills to real life situations. The UbD framework begins lessons with the end in mind, which helps educators plan more intentionally.

The UbD framework has been discussed, as well as the reasoning for pursuing a curriculum development project as the capstone project. The following section includes a detailed project description.

Project Description

The project was the development of a curriculum that focuses on teaching the SEL component of self-management as an integrated approach with literacy, using dialogic reading as the strategy. Each small-group lesson was designed around a text that has already been shared with the students at least once during whole group time. The six sub-skills that fall under the self-management include: impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation, goal-setting, and motivational skills (CASEL, 2019). Each of those six skills has two lessons that support the learning and development of that skill. There are two texts that support each of those six sub-skills, which resulted in a total of twelve lessons.

Each lesson takes approximately fifteen minutes as they are to be completed during guided reading or small-group literacy time during the school day. The lessons were built using the dialogic reading strategy, which also includes the strategies of shared book reading, repeated readings, small-group instruction or intervention, as well as vocabulary development, and focusing on comprehension skills. The implementation of the project takes up to 8-10 weeks. One skill is focused on each week, which means that two books are shared and explored each week. The implementation could be done in a

minimum of 6 weeks. Since topics may need to be revisited or retaught, additional time is allowed to meet that need.

There is opportunity to expand the project and develop lessons around the four other core SEL competencies that CASEL has identified. That potential will be explored after the completion of the capstone project. The project details have been discussed in this section. The following section discusses the intended project audience as well as the project setting.

Project Audience and Setting

The primary audience for this project is Kindergarten and primary grade level students. The lessons are to be used by the classroom teacher, as well as other teachers with an interest in teaching SEL as an integrated approach with literacy. The reason that the skill of self-management was chosen as the broad SEL skill to focus on is that Kindergarteners and primary grade level students are often still learning and developing skills such as impulse control, self-motivation, goal-setting, self-discipline, stress-management, and motivational skills. The other reason this skill was chosen is that there are many high-quality read aloud books that can serve as a SEL tool as well as a literacy tool.

The intended setting of this project is a public elementary school in an urban setting in Minnesota. The district serves approximately 36,000 students. The school in which the project takes place services students in preschool through fifth grade. The school itself serves approximately 380 students. The school is also ethnically diverse, servicing students from a variety of backgrounds, as well as English Language Learners.

The setting of the project is an urban area in Minnesota. The project takes place in a Kindergarten classroom. The lesson plans can be used by K-2 teachers that see a need for teaching SEL skills as an integrated approach through literacy. Project implementation takes place during the literacy block of the school day. The timeline of the project is discussed in the following section.

Timeline

The capstone project began in June of 2019. The background information in Chapter One, research done in Chapter Two, and the project description in Chapter Three were all completed in the Summer of 2019. The project implementation is planned for the 2019-2020 school year. The actual implementation of the project ideally takes place within the first 6 weeks of school as it can also be used to help teach routines as well as building classroom community, by giving students ample opportunities to have discussions with each other. However, performing the actual lessons could be done at any time throughout the school year. The gathering of materials and texts to use for each lesson were completed in the Fall of 2019. The final project and formal lesson plans were completed by November, 2019.

The lesson plans were designed for small-group settings. However, the lessons were designed as a follow-up to texts that have been previously read to students as a whole group. The lessons take place during the literacy block, specifically during guided reading or small-group instructional time, while the remaining students are working at centers or on other literacy tasks.

The timeline for project completion as well as project implementation have been discussed. The last section of Chapter Three includes a brief summary of the main learnings of the chapter.

Summary

The effectiveness of the project is to be measured based on formal and informal assessments given to students that participate in the lessons. These assessments are to be done by the teacher during lessons, as well as after lessons. Observing how students use self-management tools taught during the dialogic reading lessons are to be used as the primary assessment format. Effectiveness can also be measured by the feedback provided by other teachers that choose to use this SEL/Literacy curriculum. The long term goal of the project is to help K-2 students develop SEL skills during literacy instruction.

Chapter Three discussed an overview of the project, the framework and rationale, the intended setting and audience, as well as the project description and timeline. Chapter Four provides a reflection on the capstone project development.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Overview

During the past three years that I have worked in urban education, I have found that many young learners struggle with social emotional skills. I have also found that there are opportunities to teach social emotional skills through literacy lessons. Students can find ways to relate to characters and interact with a text in a way that fosters the learning of social and emotional skills. I have often wondered how to help students transfer that knowledge into real life situations. These experiences and wonderings led to the guiding question: *How can primary grade level teachers teach Social Emotional Learning skills as an integrated approach through literacy?*

In Chapter One, I discussed my personal experiences and background that led to the guiding research question. Chapter Two provided a literature review that examined a variety of research materials, looking at specific SEL curricula that are used by educators, effectiveness of specific programs, early childhood development and the importance of SEL, literacy's connection to SEL, and policies around education that impact the public education system. Chapter Three offered a project description. The timeline, audience, and setting were also discussed. Chapter Four focuses on major learning outcomes, limitations, future projects, revisiting the literature, benefits to the teaching profession, and concludes with a summary.

Learning Outcomes

The research process and the project development process have been rich learning experiences for me. Throughout the research portion of the project, I have found that a variety of researchers have concluded that SEL can be taught as an integrated approach within academic content areas. Literacy lends itself well to the integrated learning

approach as students can interact with characters and stories in a manner relatable to real life situations. I was also able to explore specific SEL curricula and examine their outcomes based on research that has already been done.

I have also found a specific teaching strategy called dialogic reading, which provides a small group structure as a way to teach literacy and SEL skills (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Through the development of the capstone project, I have used dialogic reading as the structure for the twelve SEL lesson plans. The small group structure will allow for students to interact more deeply with each text and also allow for ample discussion and learning time with their peers.

During the development of the capstone, I have also found the work of CASEL to be particularly helpful. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning has a variety of resources available to educators on their website (2019). I found their website: <https://casel.org/> to be particularly helpful throughout my project development. This organization breaks down SEL into five specific areas which allows educators to look at SEL more critically. By looking at the five core competencies and the subskills that fall within each of those competencies, educators can create lessons and tools to support their students' specific SEL needs.

Throughout the capstone process, I have explored a variety of SEL curricula, organizations that support SEL, as well as the ways that literacy can be incorporated into SEL. During the development of my capstone project, I was also met with challenges and limitations.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to consider throughout the development of the project. One issue that came up during research, was realizing the SEL is a relatively new topic in education, but since it has gained so much attention in the last three decades, there is a very large number of research articles available. It took lots of time to find quality resources and to find resources that would be relevant for primary grade level students. Since SEL can be a very broad topic, it also took time to determine which research would be appropriate to discuss with respect to specific SEL skills, in this case - the CASEL five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2019). There is an ample amount of research available on SEL skills and strategies that are not used by CASEL.

Another limitation to consider with respect to this project is the time constraint. While my end goal is to develop lessons for each of the five core competencies, it was only feasible to look at one core competency, self-management, given the time that was allowed to complete the capstone project. In the future I hope to develop two lessons for each subskill that CASEL has currently identified.

An additional challenge that came up throughout the creation of the project was determining which texts to use for each of the six SEL subskills that fall under the umbrella skill of self-management. The skills of impulse control, stress management, self discipline, self motivation, goal setting, and organizational skills are very specific. There are a large number of texts that could be used with any given skill. However, finding multiple age appropriate texts for each subskill was time consuming and challenging. Since I have experience teaching second grade, and I teach Kindergarten currently, I am

focusing primarily on books that would interest young learners, as well as focusing on skills that benefit young learners. If this project is to be used by older students as an intervention, finding more age appropriate texts may be necessary.

Future Projects

Looking ahead, I plan to create SEL/literacy lessons for the primary grades with respect to each additional CASEL core competency, including: self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Each of those core competencies have skills that fall within those broader categories. My intent is to create two lessons per subskill, similar to how the capstone project was completed. For example, for the core competency of self-awareness, there are five subskills including: identifying emotions, accurate self-perception, recognizing strengths, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. Each of those skills will have two written lesson plans. Those lessons will be written to accommodate Kindergarten through second grade, and will be in the style of dialogic reading.

Other future projects may include creating more activities that align with each text and SEL subskill. There is also potential to create more than two lessons for each subskill that CASEL has identified. Depending on the needs of students, it may be ideal to create more lessons based on one skill over another.

There are many opportunities in the future to continue this project's work. The main constraint that will impact future project developments will be the time constraint. It is worth revisiting the literature in order to provide final thoughts as the capstone project has been completed.

Revisiting the Literature

Doyle and Bramwell's research on dialogic reading provided a discussion based strategy that allows students to engage with texts more deeply (2006). This research helped me design the project with a specific style in mind. This strategy allows students for ample discussion time which helps students develop oral language skills. This strategy allows students to interact with texts on a deep level, where they are able to ask and answer questions about the text, as well as make connections that will help them transfer discussed skills into real life situations.

This particular style of lesson also proves useful for students developing comprehension skills, vocabulary development, and concepts of print (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). While the focus of the lessons are to develop SEL skills, students are simultaneously developing emergent literacy skills. Students are allowed to have rich learning experiences through this style of lesson.

Dialogic reading provides students opportunities to develop oral language skills, to have positive interactions with peers, and to ask and answer more questions about a text (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). My research led me to conclude that dialogic reading was an ideal format to use when developing SEL/literacy lessons. The following section will offer future recommendations for those interested in using and developing SEL/literacy lessons.

Recommendations

Based on my research findings, I recommend that teachers use these lessons as a way to teach emergent literacy skills, while also teaching very specific SEL skills.

Because self-management is a skill that may come after self-awareness, it may be worth developing self-awareness lessons prior to teaching self-management lessons. If students have self-awareness skills, then it is appropriate to move on to self-management skills. CASEL describes five core competencies that are interrelated, but also can be taught separately.

After self-management skills have been taught, it is then appropriate to move on to the more social skills addressed by CASEL - including social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills (2019). While these skills are not mutually exclusive, it is important to consider what skills are appropriate to focus on, depending on the students' current SEL skill level.

Benefits to the Teaching Profession

This project will help Kindergarten through second grade teachers incorporate SEL lessons into their literacy block. Since there are twelve lessons within the self-management core competency, the lessons will be particularly helpful for educators that are trying to teach students skills such as impulse control, stress management, goal setting, self motivation, and self discipline skills. Formal lesson plans will be available for those teachers that are interested in using these texts, prompts, and activities.

These lessons could also be used as interventions with small groups receiving special education services or English Learners. Since dialogic reading and small group environments provide students with more opportunities to speak, it can benefit any students that need more opportunities to interact using oral language.

Summary

Through the explicit teaching of social and emotional skills, teachers can make a difference in students' lives and in their educational futures. As the world becomes increasingly less "social" with the rise of technology, the challenge of teaching students social skills increases. As educators try to keep their passion for teaching and learning alive, they are met with the challenge of teaching students how to simply interact with others, problem solve with peers, and navigate through the school day. It was my goal that through research, I would find clearer ways teachers can support SEL, by incorporating SEL lessons in literacy. It was also my aim that through developing a project, I could offer specific strategies and tools for teachers to use with their students. I feel that I have done this through the development of twelve self-management lessons to be used in Kindergarten through second grade classrooms. I am also confident in my ability to create future lessons for additional SEL skills.

REFERENCES

Andrew, K., Richards, R., Ivy, K., Wright, P., & Jerris, E. (2019). Combining the skill themes approach with teaching personal and social responsibility to teach social and emotional learning in elementary physical education. *JOPERD: The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 90(3), 35-44.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2018.1559665>

Anyon, Y., Nicotera, N., & Veeh, C. (2016). Contextual influences on the implementation of a schoolwide intervention to promote students' social,

emotional, and academic learning. *Children & Schools*, 38(2), 81-88.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdw008>

Blair, C. (2002). School readiness: Integrating cognition and emotion in a neurobiological conceptualization of children's functioning at school entry. *American Psychologist*, 57, 111-127.

Boyles, N. (2018). Learning character from characters: Linking literacy and social-emotional learning in the elementary grades is easier than you think. *Educational Leadership*, 76(2), 70-74.

Brown, J. L., Jones, S. M., LaRusso, M. D., & Aber, J. L. (2010). Improving classroom quality: Teacher influences and experimental impacts of the 4Rs program. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(1), 153-167.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0018160>

Burroughs, M. & Barkauskas, N. (2017). Educating the whole child: social-emotional learning and ethics education. *Ethics and Education*, 12(2), 218-232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2017.1287388>

Collaborative for Academics, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2019).

What is SEL? Retrieved from <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>

Craig, A., Brown, E., Upright, J. & DeRosier, M. (2016). Enhancing children's social emotional functioning through virtual game-based delivery of social skills

training. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 25(3), 959-968.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-015-0274-8>

Daunic, A., Corbett, N., Smith, S., Barnes, T., Santiago-Poventud, L., Chalfant, P., ... Gleaton, J. (2013). Brief report: Integrating social-emotional learning with literacy instruction: An intervention for children at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders. *Behavioral Disorders*, 39(1), 43-51

<https://doi.org/10.1177/019874291303900106>

Doyle, B. & Bramwell W. (2006). Promoting emergent literacy and social-emotional learning through dialogic reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(6), 554-564.

<https://doi.org/10.1598/RT.59.6.5>

Durlak, J., Weissberg, R. Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R., and Schellinger, K. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development* 82(1), 405-432.

Ecclestone, K., & Rawdin, C. (2016). Reinforcing the 'diminished' subject? the implications of the 'vulnerability zeitgeist' for well-being in educational settings. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 46(3), 377-393.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2015.1120707>

Eklund, K., Kilpatrick, K. D., Kilgus, S. P., & Haider, A. (2018). A systematic review of state-level social-emotional learning standards: Implications for practice and research. *School Psychology Review*, 47(3), 316-326.

<http://apps.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/periodicals/spr-index-list.aspx>

Elias, M. & Mocerri, D. (2012.) Developing social and emotional aspects of learning: The American experience. *Research Papers in Education*, 27(4), 423-434.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2012.690243>

Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2019). The links between social and emotional learning and literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 63(1), 115-117.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.963>

Goleman, Daniel. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Gray, W. S. (1927). Training and experience that prepare for reading. *Childhood Education* 3(5), 210–214. doi:10.1080/00094056.1927.10723141

Gregory, A., & Fergus, E. (2017). Social and emotional learning and equity in school discipline. *Future of Children*, 27(1), 117-136.

Hamilton, P. L. (2013). It's not all about academic achievement: supporting the social and emotional needs of migrant worker children. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 31(2), 173-190. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2012.747555>

Hunter, L., Bierman, K. & Hall, C. (2018). Assessing noncognitive aspects of school readiness: The predictive validity of brief teacher rating scales of social-emotional competence and approaches to learning. *Early Education &*

Development, 29(8), 1081-1094.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2018.1495472>

Institute of Education Sciences. (2006). Voices literature and character education program. What works clearinghouse intervention report, What Works Clearinghouse in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED493441&site=ehost-live>

Kagan, S. L., Moore, E., & Bredekamp, S. (1995). Reconsidering children's early development and learning: Toward common views and vocabulary. 95-03. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel. from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED391576>

Klein, A. (2015). No Child Left Behind: An Overview. *Education Week*. Retrieved July 20, 2019 from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/no-child-left-behind-overview-definition-summary.html>

Klein, A. (2016). The Every Student Succeeds Act: An ESSA Overview. *Education Week*. Retrieved July 20, 2019 from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/every-student-succeeds-act/>

Kuban, C. (2012). Healing childhood trauma worldwide. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 21*(3), 14-16.

Low, S., Smolkowski, K., Cook, C., & Desfosses, D. (2019). Two-year impact of a universal social-emotional learning curriculum: Group differences from developmentally sensitive trends over time. *Developmental Psychology, 55*(2), 415-433. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dev0000621>

Miller, E. (2005). Fighting technology for toddlers. *Education Digest: Essential Readings Condensed for Quick Review, 71*(3), 55-58.

Minnesota Department of Education, (2017). Early Childhood Indicators of Progress. Retrieved from <https://education.mn.gov/mde/dse/early/ind/>

Peterson Dealy, R. & Stone, M. (2018). Exploring out-of-school play and educational readiness. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 46*(2), 201-208. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-017-0849-7>

Schmitt, S., Lewis, K., Duncan, R., Korucu, I. & Napoli, A. (2018). The effects of positive action on preschoolers' social-emotional competence and health behaviors. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 46*(1), 141-151. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-017-0851-0>

Stearns, C. (2018). Unruly affect in the kindergarten classroom: A critical analysis of social-emotional learning. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 19*(1), 8-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463949118762162>

White, A. & Walker, S. (2018). Enhancing social-emotional development through evidence-based resources. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 43(4), 4-12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.23965/AJEC.43.4.01>

White, A., William Moore, D., Fler, M., Anderson, A. (2017). A thematic and content analysis of instructional and rehearsal procedures of preschool social emotional learning programs. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 42(3), 82-91. <https://doi.org/10.23965/AJEC.42.3.10>

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2011). The understanding by design guide to creating higher-quality units. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

Wood, E. (2014). Free choice and play in early childhood education: troubling the discourse. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 22(1), 4-18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2013.830562>

Zins, J., Weissberg, R., Wang, M., Margaret, C. Walberg, H. (2004). *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?*, New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Zones of Regulation. (2019). Retrieved from: <http://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html>