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SEL IN THE HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

by

John Gonzalez

**A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master's of Arts in Education**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Many high school social studies educators spend countless hours planning, instructing and assessing students on the topics of U.S. History and World History. The local and national social studies standards require teachers to focus on building the reading comprehension, content analysis, and writing skills of adolescent learners. This pressure to concentrate on academics leaves little classroom time to enhance the social and emotional competencies of students. Yet, each year, teachers observe more anxiety, stress, and disengagement from school within the students as the pressure to demonstrate academic success across multiple subject areas increases. There is an urgency for high school educators to develop welcoming classrooms that value the development of the whole child. Therefore, the research question is the following: *What does social-emotional learning look like at the high school level, and how effective are these practices on student engagement and achievement?*

This research will define social-emotional learning, examine the approaches to social-emotional learning at the elementary level, explore techniques for social-emotional learning in middle and high school, and determine the effectiveness of these practices on student engagement and achievement at the secondary level. However, it is first important to understand my own journey to this research topic.

Social-emotional development of adolescents has been a passion of mine since long before I even realized. From a young age, I attempted to look after my younger sister and brothers as we faced much adversity. My junior year of high school, I moved to a boys' home. This safe space allowed me to cook my siblings' meals, facilitate afterschool games with my

siblings, teach my brothers how to throw a football, and take my siblings on adventures around St. Paul. I searched for ways to better understand my siblings to help each one feel recognized and engaged. This eventually led to volunteering with children with Muscular Dystrophy in the camp setting. It was at camp that I formally learned how children who feel a part of a community can demonstrate achievement towards personal goals.

When I became a teacher, my goal was to provide a classroom where all students felt welcomed and cared for by educators and peers. It was important for me to create space for community building, personal identity exploration, and social-emotional development in my lesson plans. While this continues to be my goal, the pressures to prioritize academic skills increase each year. Ranking academics at the top has shown negative results in my classroom experience. The lack of attention to adolescent social and emotional skills, as well as other adolescent challenges such as bullying and peer pressure, has caused the number of students who present symptoms of anxiety and depression to rise. These mental health concerns cross gender, racial, and socioeconomic groups, with students who have faced adverse experiences at a greater risk. It is imperative for high school educators to develop the social and emotional skills of adolescent learners in order to help students cope with the pressures of school and life.

In order to begin to answer the question of how to implement social-emotional learning at the secondary level, it is important to examine the history of public education in America and how we have reached our current system. In the 17th century, the first schools in the 13 colonies made education compulsory based on the size of the populous. Many young white males were required to learn the values of family, religion, and community. At this time, reading and mathematical concepts were traditionally taught inside the home and students attended school to

become hard-working, moral citizens. The students were given time and space to develop socialization skills and learned specific trade work. These young men who were able to attend school developed a strong sense of self and the role in community at school, all while learning to read and compute at home from parents or private tutors hired by the family (The American Board, 2015).

However, by the mid-19th century, the role of schools in the United States greatly expanded and academics became the sole responsibility of the public schools. The technology advancements of this time meant that fewer children were employed in factories and more began endeavors in education. The one-room school house called the Common School was created to educate young white men and women. Schools began to focus heavily on the development of reading and mathematical skills in students. It was during this time that states increased involvement in schools, creating a state-influenced curriculum for these subjects. The dedication to self-regulation and socialization slowly disappeared from the school's daily learning as the pressures for teachers to develop students who could read, write, and compute increased.

The system of education remains nearly the same two centuries later. With local and national initiatives for students to demonstrate pre-determined grade level standards of reading, writing, and math, little time remains for developing each individual student as a whole person. While academic skills are critically important to becoming citizens of the global world, “many students lack social-emotional competencies and become less connected to school as they progress from elementary to high school, and this lack of connection negatively affects their academic performance, behavior, and health,” (Kim et al, 2015, p. 3). There is an urgency for

educators to value the development of student social and emotional skills along with academic skills.

Defining Social-Emotional Learning. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is an umbrella term used to describe the process of coping with everyday challenges through the following: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Social-emotional learning is more than a specific program or lesson to be taught by a teacher. Social-emotional learning requires the educator to look closely at how the social and emotional competencies of each individual child underscore the ability to learn. It is an approach that is designed to be used across all curricular areas and at all ages, including into adulthood. Social-emotional learning is a mindset to be adopted by all school staff in order to be most effective (CASEL, 2019).

This first pillar of SEL is self-awareness. Self-awareness helps learners to better understand and manage emotions. While emotions can positively enable students to deepen interest and engagement in learning, it is also emotions and unmanaged stress that can interfere with attention and memory causing disruptive behavior. An accurate self-perception and a developed growth mindset represent strong self-awareness competencies.

The second pillar of SEL is self-management which encourages learners to set and achieve positive goals. This includes both academic and personal goals. A student with developed self-management skills is able to control impulses and motivate themselves to reach personal goals. Students with developed self-management skills are often intrinsically motivated to succeed.

The social awareness pillar of SEL includes the ability to understand social norms for behavior. A student with developed social awareness is able to see situations through the perspective of others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Social awareness includes feeling and showing empathy for others and recognizing resources and supports from family, school, and the community.

Relationship skills are the pillar of SEL that focus on establishing and maintaining positive relationships with others. This includes positive, healthy relationships with those from diverse communities. A student with developed relationship skills is able to resist negative peer pressure and be a positive member of a team. The student seeks help when needed and communicates effectively with others. Relationship skills also include the ability to truly listen and respond to the needs of others.

The last pillar of SEL is responsible decision making to make purposeful choices about personal and social behavior. A learner with responsible decision making competencies can identify and analyze problems and self-reflect. Students have an ethical responsibility and consider the well-being of themselves and others when choosing behavioral actions.

Social-emotional competencies are important skills for children to begin to develop during the primary years. Therefore, as more educators and schools become aware of the need for SEL, experiences for building these skills are becoming more visible in elementary schools. More elementary schools are adopting and implementing specific SEL curriculum. These personal and interpersonal abilities strengthened by the SEL curriculum in elementary schools provide a foundation for success in the future.

At the elementary level, educators are taking time to gather social-emotional competency data from students. Through assessments such as the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), elementary educators measure the social-emotional ability of young students through a universal screener. This allows teachers to take a strengths-based approach to SEL, analyzing the results to inform direct instruction of social-emotional skills differentiated to meet the specific needs of each learner. According to CASEL (2017), this practice has led to positive social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved grades and test scores at the elementary level.

While significant implementation and research of SEL is being done at the elementary level, the same cannot be said for high schools. Yet, educators of high school aged students continue to report a rise in anxiety and depression that inhibit a learner's ability to feel successful and connected to school. "Research has shown that by high school, as many as 40-60% of students become chronically disengaged and 30% of students engage in high-risk behaviors (e.g., substance abuse, violence, depression)," (Jacobs & Struyf, 2013, p. 1568). Students who lack a sense of purpose and belonging in school are at greater risk for non-completion and dropout of high school. The focus and pressure on academic achievement in the traditional approach to school ignores the development of the whole adolescent, including the desire to connect to learning in school and the vision for life post-secondary. Teachers may find difficulty with providing the appropriate amount of classroom time, collaboration, and support needed to meet the social and emotional needs of students, and are instead obligated to continue pushing academic instruction further.

The challenges of depression, stress, and a low sense of belonging at the middle and high school level can be especially true for students with disabilities, students who have survived trauma, students who have been marginalized in school, and students who have faced barriers to learning. The development of socio-emotional competence for adolescents who have faced adverse experiences may have been interrupted, requiring the need for intensive support to build these skills during the years in high school. Because social, emotional, and cognitive abilities are intertwined, a student cannot increase academics without development in the areas of social and emotional as well.

The goal is to better understand the most effective ways to implement SEL into high school content courses in order to increase student engagement and achievement. Therefore, the project utilizes research about the most effective ways to develop student social and emotional skills in the classroom. Based on the analysis of the research, a scope and sequence for SEL has been developed to be used with students throughout one school year. This is outlined in chapter three. The students include 130 tenth and eleventh graders at a public school in a large Midwestern city who are studying United States History or World History. Eighty-five percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The learners come from diverse backgrounds with nearly 83% of the students identifying as students of color. Many of the students are considered homeless or highly mobile.

Chapter three describes the specific lesson content of the SEL experiences created for the high school students. These lessons outline the topics of self-identity, emotional recognition and control, bias, building healthy relationships, and consent. The project also includes the ways in which the students build ownership in the classroom by creating classroom essential agreements

and expectations. The goal of the project is to increase the social and emotional competencies of students and determine the effectiveness of this on student engagement and achievement.

Ultimately, it is the hope that the use of intentional SEL lessons build welcoming classrooms where students feel recognized and respected, that students' voices are valued, and that there is a drive to achieve at the fullest potential.

In summary, the focus on academic skills in today's classrooms has inhibited teachers from developing the social and emotional competencies of learners, especially at the middle and high school level. This has negatively affected students' connection to the school community and desires to reach academic goals. It has led to the increase in stress of our adolescent learners. While significant research has proven the effectiveness of SEL on student engagement and achievement at the elementary level, more research and implementation of social-emotional curriculum is needed at the high school level. The chapters to follow will further explore the most effective practices for SEL and assessment at the elementary and middle school level. The few approaches to SEL that currently exist for high school and discover the need for more approaches to exist will be the focus. Research-based evidence that SEL positively affects student engagement and achievement, specifically those from marginalized groups, will be used to create a scope and sequence to be implemented in the classroom.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social emotional learning (SEL) in schools focuses on the development of student recognition and management of emotions, empathy for others, positive peer relationships, and responsible decision making in all areas of life. Throughout the past decade, there has been a rise in the approaches to SEL in schools at the elementary level. While significant research shows the positive effects of SEL at the elementary level, the integration of these practices at the high school level is less understood. *What does social-emotional learning look like at the high school level, and how effective are these practices on student engagement and achievement?* This analysis of literature will deeply define social emotional learning and the effects on the brain. It will examine the approaches to SEL at the elementary and middle school level including Second Step, Responsive Classroom, and Zones of Regulation in order to better understand the importance of SEL. This analysis will explore strategies for SEL in high school, including ways to build student self-identity and positive relationships through Teaching Tolerance and ONEder. It will look more closely at the factors that play a role in the lack of SEL at the high school level and the need for more approaches. Lastly, it will determine the effectiveness of SEL on student engagement and achievement at the high school level, specifically the effects on marginalized groups of students.

Social Emotional Learning and the Brain

Social-emotional competencies are imperative for children to learn how to navigate the world. “From birth, children rapidly develop their abilities to experience and express different emotions, as well as their capacity to cope with and manage a variety of feelings,” (Shonkoff et al, 2012, p. 1). It is important for the adults to support the development of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Thus, it is important that the social-emotional skills are equally as nurtured as a child’s thinking and cognitive skills.

The personal experiences and influences of the environment around a child affect the development of emotions. Early emotional experiences become ingrained in the brain as a child grows. For example, a newborn or young infant will display distress due to hunger or feeling cold. The interaction with a caretaker during these moments becomes the child’s first emotional experiences. The type of response the caretaker provides changes the makeup of the infant’s brain. This informs the future emotional responses as the child grows because emotion is biologically wired into the central nervous system (Shonkoff et al, 2012).

Because early childhood social and emotional experiences directly impact the brain, it is important that early childhood and elementary educators pay close attention to the social and emotional competencies of young learners. Schools have a powerful opportunity to value social-emotional development equally to that of academics in order to build well-rounded children. Therefore, educators must spend time carefully choosing how to implement experiences for this development in schools.

Social Emotional Learning Approaches at the Elementary Level

Specific Approaches to SEL. Social and emotional competencies can be early predictors of a personal ability to adapt to changes and adjust to the environment, develop positive relationships, and make appropriate decisions. Therefore, the early intervention of social and emotional development is crucial. Elementary schools have introduced various approaches to building social and emotional skills within students. The specific approaches of focus in this analysis will be the following: Second Step, Responsive Classroom, and Zones of Regulation.

Second Step. The first approach to SEL in elementary schools is the Second Step curriculum. Created by the Committee for Children (2019), Second Step works to build citizens who can recognize and manage personal feelings and relationships, and believes that when students are able to manage feelings, the students are better equipped to learn. This program contains a grade-level curriculum for students in Preschool through 8th Grade. Second Step weekly lesson plans include a brain builder game, weekly themed activities, reinforcing activities, and a home link.

The brain builder games generally involve a movement experience for the children to introduce the theme for the week. For example, during a kindergarten lesson, the focus of one of the weekly lessons is about recognizing comfortable and uncomfortable feelings. When the teacher reads aloud a scenario that represents an uncomfortable feeling, the children stand with stiffened bodies representing hard, uncooked noodles. When the teacher describes a situation that represents a comfortable feeling, the children loosen and sit or lay on the ground, similar to a

cooked noodle. According to the Committee for Children (2019), Second Step strives to develop students' social and emotional competency through a multisensory approach.

Throughout the 28 week program, these resources included themed activities. The students read short stories about children in diverse classrooms. Each short story connects to the weekly theme and allows for students to discuss. Through discussion, the students are able to model and role play the best ways to solve and grow through the scenarios. The goal is for children to have practiced and discussed during classroom learning in order to feel prepared for these experiences and situations in real life.

The third and fourth days of each week include reinforcing activities with the weekly theme. These reinforcing activities are completed in the whole group and small group learning sessions. Typically, this includes a book read aloud by the teacher that connects to the theme for the week while the children analyze and discuss the ways in which the weekly themes were present in the story.

The final day of each week is called the home link. While the most imperative part of Second Step is the work directly with elementary students, this program also strives to educate and support the teachers and caretakers of these children. Second Step's comprehensive approach provides educators, families, and the community with the tools needed to take an active role in the social-emotional growth of the children. This curriculum includes prewritten letters to be shared with students' families. The letters include common language, descriptions of the social-emotional activities in the classroom, and ways to continue the discussion with the children outside of school (Committee for Children, 2019).

Based on a two-year long evaluation of Second Step by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) through randomized and quasi-experimental studies, children who experienced Second Step social-emotional lessons demonstrated an increased positive social behavior, reduced conduct problems, and reduced emotional distress. According to Holsen, Smith, and Frey (2018), the results of implementing this curriculum showed that the program had significant positive effects on social competence for students in fifth grade. One of the most significant reasons for the effectiveness of the Second Step program is the ways in which the curriculum builds from kindergarten through fifth grade. It builds upon the content learned in previous years to allow students to practice these skills. Therefore, children develop the use of common language around social and emotional competencies. “Kindergarten and fifth-grade students had impactful conversations about real school conflicts situations and how to handle them appropriately based on what they are learning through Second Step lessons,” (Dewald, Ternes, & Wald, 2019, p. 28). Overall, Second Step has proven to be an effective way for elementary students to build emotional regulation, decision-making skills, and positive relationships.

Responsive Classroom. A second approach to SEL commonly used in elementary schools is Responsive Classroom. According to Responsive Classroom (2019), the program is described as an approach to teaching and discipline that focuses on positive community, effective management, and developmental awareness. This program promotes its ability to create students with strong social, emotional, and academic skills. It has been described by CASEL as one of the most well-designed, evidence-based social and emotional learning programs. The specific areas of social-emotional competencies that are built through Responsive Classroom include the

following: cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. Responsive Classroom (2019) argues that in order for children to be successful academically in school, learners must develop this set of social-emotional skills. Teaching social emotional skills is equally as important as teaching academic content.

At the elementary level, Responsive Classroom incorporates the use of a morning meeting, establishing classroom rules, energizers, quiet time, and a closing circle. During the morning meeting, all students and teachers gather in a circle for twenty to thirty minutes to begin the school day. During this time, the classroom proceeds through four essential community building experiences, with the first component being a greeting. The students take a turn in the circle greeting each other to help each student feel welcomed and cared for in the classroom. The type of greeting varies from day to day, i.e. handshakes, high fives, saying hello in another language, etc. After the greeting is complete, the students participate in a sharing. This might look like a whip share where a question is proposed and each child states a short response. It can also mean that a small number of students from the class each day have an opportunity to share with the class anything that is on the student's mind. The next part of the morning meeting is where the class participates in a group activity or team building game. Lastly, the morning meeting concludes with a message from the teacher about the school day to follow (Responsive Classroom, 2019).

The next important part of the Responsive Classroom approach is the collaborative process of establishing classroom rules. Students begin by setting hopes and dreams for the school year. The students discuss goals with peers and create classroom essential agreements to help each child reach the goals throughout the school year. To demonstrate a commitment to

these essential agreements, the first and last name is signed by each child to the agreements document and is posted on the classroom wall throughout the entire school year.

Throughout the day, educators and students who implement the Responsive Classroom approach insert energizers and quiet time. Energizers include short, playful, whole group activities to be used as breaks from direct learning throughout the day. On the other hand, quiet time is a daily addition to the schedule immediately following the stimulating experiences of lunch and recess. As students are given the opportunity to read, write, rest, or draw silently to transition back to learning for the remainder of the school day.

The last component of Responsive Classroom is the closing circle. For ten to fifteen minutes, the children and educators reconnect about the school day. The learners practice social and emotional skills through reflection and celebration about positive events during the school day.

Through research completed by the District of Columbia Public Schools, data collected showed that a majority of students who experienced Responsive Classroom at school showed an increase in social skills. Teachers reported that 51% of children who experienced Responsive Classroom noticeably increased social skills comparable to 38% of students from the control group who showed noticeable increases in social skills (Elliot, 1995, p. 18). This research encourages the continued use of the Responsive Classroom approach for increasing elementary student social skills. It indicated a need for teacher and staff development in the practices of Responsive Classroom, including time to learn from others and time to implement what has been learned, in order to effectively implement the program (Elliot, 1995). Both Responsive

Classroom and Second Step research demonstrated that the presence of a social-emotional curriculum resulted in better developed social-emotional skills for elementary learners.

Zones of Regulation. Like Second Step and Responsive Classroom, the third approach to SEL called Zones of Regulation focuses on student development of emotional recognition and control. Specifically, Zones of Regulation teaches elementary students how to recognize feelings and categorizes the feelings into four concrete colored zones. It was created by Leah Kuypers in 2011 with the ultimate goal of developing students who can independently control personal emotions, manage sensory needs, and improve problem solving skills.

Through Zones of Regulation, students learn to categorize feelings into four color zones. The first zone, known as the Red Zone, is the zone of most heightened state of alertness and intense emotion. The Red Zone means a person may be escalated and experiencing anger, rage, or terror. The second zone, the Yellow Zone, indicates elevated emotions though the person is in more control of these feelings than someone in the Red Zone. A person in the Yellow Zone may experience stress, frustration, anxiety, or wiggleness. The third zone known as the Green Zone is used to describe a calm state where a person may be happy and focused. This is the zone in which optimal learning occurs. The fourth and final zone is the Blue Zone where a person may feel sad, tired, or bored (Kuypers, 2019).

Through the Zones of Regulation instruction, children learn to identify feelings including naming which color zone aligns with the current state of emotion. Learners practice and increase the strategies to use when feeling in the blue, yellow, or red zones in order to eventually return to the green zone. Through intentional teaching of the Zones of Regulation and embedded opportunities for students to practice this self-regulation throughout the school day, children can

increase social-emotional skills. Students gain awareness of emotions and behaviors and are able to increase focus through self-regulation techniques. Zones of Regulation help students build empathy towards the feelings of others and to recognize the control over personal behavioral reactions (Munro, 2017).

Assessment of Social Emotional Competencies. As the importance of social and emotional learning continues to grow, elementary schools are beginning to collect and track data on the social and emotional skills of students. One tool for tracking these skills is known as the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA). The DESSA is a comprehensive, strengths-based assessment that provides data on the social-emotional strengths and areas of need of the students. This tool assesses social and emotional competencies within the following areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, goal-directed behavior, personal responsibility, decision-making, and optimistic thinking (Aperture Education, 2018).

The DESSA assessment contains a set of student behaviors for monitoring in real-time. A universal screener is administered for each child, taking one minute or less per screener. The data from the screener is sorted into students who demonstrate age-appropriate social-emotional skills (Tier 1), those with slightly underdeveloped social-emotional skills (Tier 2), and students who need significant intervention around social-emotional skills (Tier 3). Once this data has been collected based on the one-minute screener, according to Aperture Education, a 72-item full DESSA is completed for students most at-risk for low social-emotional competencies.

Upon completion of the full DESSA, educators are provided specific data on the areas of strength and areas of needs for learners. This assessment tool provides specific intervention plans and instructional suggestions to increase the social and emotional skills of the students.

These activities can be used in a whole group, small group, and individual settings. It includes take-home activities to engage families in the development of social and emotional skills. The DESSA has partnered with the Second Step approach to SEL and can provide direct alignment to the Second Step curriculum for students in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade. DESSA recommends the repetition of the universal screener four times per year for each student, and provides slightly different versions of the screener to ensure validity over a period of time (Aperture Education, 2018).

“In a recent study, students in the *Need for Instruction* range (Tier 2 and Tier 3) on the DESSA-mini at the beginning of the school year were 4.5 times more likely to commit a serious behavioral infraction by the end of that school year, compared to their peers,” (Aperture Education, 2018). The DESSA argues that collecting the social-emotional data of students, implementing direct instruction, and intervening early with the students needing the most support can prevent challenging behaviors before occurrence. With over twelve years of research behind DESSA, this assessment tool and data collection proves the extreme need for schools to focus on social and emotional skills and learning. It is necessary for educators to utilize assessment tools to intentionally find the areas in which students have the most need to increase SEL. As elementary educators continue to increase the value and focus on SEL, it is the hope that children are better prepared to handle the social and emotional challenges of adolescence in middle school.

Summary. A significant amount of SEL approaches for elementary-aged learners exist in the classrooms today. Second Step, Responsive Classroom, and Zones of Regulation highlight three of the successful models currently used with primary and upper elementary children.

Ultimately, data collected on the effectiveness of these social-emotional curriculum demonstrated a positive impact on the social-emotional competencies of these young learners that students will carry into middle school.

Social Emotional Learning Approaches at the Middle School Level

Though early intervention of social-emotional skills is extremely important, the development of these skills does not conclude once a child leaves elementary school. Middle school can be some of the most challenging, confusing experiences for adolescents. There are biological factors that impact the social and emotional development of middle school students. While the focus and research on middle school SEL is more recent, it has still proven to be essential to building the whole child. The following are examples of SEL programs that are utilized with middle school learners: Second Step and Responsive Classroom.

Second Step. Under the umbrella of social-emotional learning, curricula often considers the intervention of these skills to be most effective in kindergarten through eight grade. Therefore, Second Step extends through middle school. However, the middle school approach varies greatly from the elementary level to meet the needs of adolescent learners. First, Second Step at the middle school is web-based and is driven by the most recent research on the importance of SEL on adolescent brain development. Instead of scripted lessons as in the elementary version, this middle school approach offers relevant, discussion-based content. This allows students to practice social-emotional skills both in and out of the classroom (Committee for Children, 2019).

The first unit of the Second Step for middle schoolers focuses on growth mindset. Students learn research-based strategies for setting and achieving goals. The second unit is centered around making decisions based on personal values to build strong friendships and avoid negative relationships. The third unit of Second Step teaches students how thoughts, emotions, and decisions are influenced by the environment and can be controlled. The final unit teaches middle schoolers how to identify, avoid, and resolve serious conflicts including bullying. Second Step at the middle school strives to develop learners who are strong in social, emotional, and academic skills. Similarly, a commonly used SEL program at the middle school level is Responsive Classroom.

Responsive Classroom. While there are some similarities between Responsive Classroom at the elementary and middle school level, the additions that come into play at the middle school level are significant. These include an advisory meeting, investing students in the creation of school rules, brain breaks, active teaching, student practice, and small group learning.

As developed by the Committee for Children (2019), an advisory meeting differs from the elementary morning meeting because it does not necessarily happen in the morning and it incorporates acknowledgements. The advisory meeting begins with an arrival welcome between the students and educators. The educator greets each student by name as the students enter the classroom. Students read an interactive message written and displayed by the teacher. Next, in pairs or small groups, students share and discuss responses to the prompt in the announcement. The learners are also given an opportunity to share a piece of news or information about themselves. Lastly, the entire group engages in a fun activity with a specific social-emotional

development focus. It is important for middle schoolers that the advisory meeting is consistent and predictable to allow students to strengthen communication, collaborative, and social skills.

Responsive Classroom in the middle schools builds emotional competencies as it teaches adolescents how to self-reflect. Students reflect on personal skills and challenges in order to develop personal goals. Once the students have developed goals, the educator guides the students through creating essential agreements for the classroom that the class values and respects in order to reach these goals. Together, the educator and students discuss concrete behaviors that demonstrate the agreed upon rules for the classroom. Through Responsive Classroom, middle schoolers continuously reflect on personal behaviors and the impact on goal achievement.

While students strive to increase behaviors that support goals as well as the goals of peers, students also engage in brain breaks. Brain breaks at the elementary level often involve movement games, however, the brain breaks at the middle level give students a chance to interact and learn more about each other. Brain breaks help students discover that abilities are not fixed but rather that students can grow and increase cognitive and social skills with perseverance. Learners participate in whole-class activities that build cooperation, assertiveness, and self-control (Responsive Classroom, 2019).

Responsive Classroom at the middle school level encourages active teaching and student practice to promote social growth. The educator begins by teaching and modeling the specific content such as self-management and positive self-talk. Students build collaboration skills by working together to practice these skills. Through this small group learning, students discuss and compromise while working towards a common goal, assignment, or project on these topics.

Summary. While many middle school educators state a need for the development of social skills and emotional regulation to increase engagement and learning, significantly less research has been completed about how to effectively implement these activities with adolescents. Second Step and Responsive Classroom demonstrate two variations of an elementary school model to fit the needs of middle school learners. However, the push towards including SEL daily in middle school classrooms shows a need for more SEL approaches and resources for educators. Many middle school teachers recognize a need to focus on the social and emotional development of students at such a critical age, yet struggle to find the necessary resources and research-based evidence of the effectiveness of the programs that currently exist for adolescents (CASEL, 2019).

Social Emotional Learning Approaches at the High School Level

While research states that social and emotional skills continue to develop through adulthood, the commonly adopted SEL programs typically end curriculums in eighth grade. However, the need to increase students' social and emotional competencies continues through high school. When high schools create an atmosphere where students feel welcomed and represented, the social-emotional skills continue to develop which increases student engagement and achievement. High schools guide students through building identities, understanding personal biases, and creating and maintaining healthy relationships in order to create a positive learning community with members who are socially competent. Two commonly used programs are Teaching Tolerance and ONEder.

Teaching Tolerance. As high schoolers make the transition from adolescence to young adulthood, students are more capable of deep self-reflection. It is through this self-reflection that students are able to better understand identities. It can be highly effective to build social-emotional competencies in high school by incorporating discussion and lessons from resources such as Teaching Tolerance (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019). Teaching Tolerance provides free resources to educators of grades kindergarten through high school, yet the focus is on the development of understanding identity, diversity, justice, and action with high schoolers in order to create inclusive schools.

Teaching Tolerance began in 1991 as a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center to promote social justice and anti-bias. The goal of this program is for high school students to develop a deep understanding of personal identities to build emotional and social skills needed for addressing personal biases, challenging the prejudice of others, and learning how to become agents of change in students' own lives. With materials that have won two Oscars and one Emmy, Teaching Tolerance is a highly respected resource for guiding high schoolers through developing social and emotional skills through intense identity, bias, and justice experiences (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019).

From birth, children begin to develop identities. Children discover likes and dislikes, develop connections to various communities, and build relationships and experiences with those who are alike and different that influence identities. While even the school's youngest elementary learners are capable of exploring personal identities with the guidance of adults, according to Teaching Tolerance, it is especially important that teachers allow space for deep identity work in high school as identities are ever changing.

Teaching Tolerance describes two important reasons for high school students to better understand personal identities. The first important reason for identity work with high schoolers is for students to explore personal family structure and family history to form the belief that a positive future self is possible and relevant. The exploration of identity is challenging and messy and can often lead to strong feelings. The lessons created by Teaching Tolerance that guide teachers and students through identity work give time and space for these strong feelings as well as the language to use in courageous conversations around race, ethnicity, religion, ability, class, gender, sexual identity, and all other topics of identity. Through discussion, the strong feelings around personal identity help high school students discover similarities and differences amongst peers. According to Teaching Tolerance, these discoveries may help learners build a sense of purpose. When students believe in a positive future self, students are motivated to build emotional competencies that lead to positive relationships, engagement, and achievement.

Teaching Tolerance helps students find deeper understanding and meaning about personal strengths and challenges. It helps young adults understand how identity affects bias, which can greatly affect relationships with others. It strives to build students' social awareness and relational skills by helping students see the perspective of others, especially those from backgrounds that are different from the students.

ONEder Academy. This social-emotional program is unique as it is one of the few that strictly focuses on the development of ninth through twelfth graders. According to ONEder, it is a program created by teachers and for teachers based on current young adult social-emotional research. It is an online program which allows students to work through the program at an individualized pace. The content within the lessons is provided at over 700 different Lexile

levels, also known as different reading levels. The content can also be translated into over 60 different languages. Students have the option to choose a Lexile reading level and language, and the teacher also has the ability to assign this for each student through the Teacher Guide (ONEder, 2019).

The ONEder program provides five learning courses to each participant. Each course is aligned to the Common Core State Standards of each high school grade level. According to the website, the five courses are the following: Discovering Self-Awareness, Building Social Awareness, Developing Self-Management, Responsible Decision-Making, and Growing Healthy Relationships. Each course begins with a pre-course assessment. This is a ten question multiple choice quiz. The program gathers information about what the students already know in order to provide differentiated content throughout the course to each individual.

Each course follows a guiding, essential question. For example, the course on Building Social-Awareness has the following essential questions: “What is someone else feeling? How do I know? How do I act as a result?” (ONEder, 2019). The program is presented to students as miniature comic strips. Each comic strip has journal responses, role playing activities, partner discussion prompts, and other activities to help students engage directly with the content. As the students work through the activities of each course, the online program records data that is accessible to the teacher for tracking. The students work through roughly twelve lessons per course. At the end of each course, the students complete a post-course assessment.

Summary. While ONEder is one of the first social-emotional learning programs to focus specifically on the development of high school students, it is one of the curriculums that does cost per student to purchase. According to the website, each course within the social-emotional

program has a price of \$25 per student, with a discount total of \$50 per student for purchasing the entire five course bundle for each student. While many high school educators see the importance of social-emotional curricula, budgetary constraints often make it difficult to implement the practices. Other challenges such as lack of time, administrative support, evidence of effectiveness, and training or support also hinder the ability of high school educators to bring SEL to students. There continues to be a great need for more research-based resources for educators in order to implement intentional SEL at the high school level. Along with a need for more resources is a need for research and evidence to prove that SEL plays a significant role in a high school student's engagement and achievement in school.

Effectiveness of Social Emotional Learning on Student Engagement and Achievement

Each person fundamentally has a need to feel accepted and gain attention and support from at least one other person. This is true of adolescent learners in high school as learners search for belongingness both in and out of school. This need to belong causes students to seek stable, long-lasting relationships with people in different communities of life. When students form these significant relationships and feel the support in school from both educators and peers, engagement increases. As student engagement increases, students demonstrate greater achievement (Smith, 2009).

Through social-emotional programs, students learn to develop the skills to manage the emotions that often interfere with concentration and learning. When a student is able to recognize personal feelings of distraction, frustration, or disappointment with learning, students are better equipped to persevere even when faced with academic challenges. Students with

developed social-emotional competencies can vocalize feelings regarding the learning to peers and adults to seek help. Building the skills for self-awareness and self-management allow students to stay engaged with learning which has a positive effect on achievement. According to the research, the purposeful use of SEL programs increased student attendance and decreased student dropout rates at the high school level (Ragozzino et al, 2003).

High school students also increased engagement and achievement by working cooperatively and effectively in peer learning groups through SEL programs. Many of the programs provided opportunities for students to practice collaboration and dialogue. The curriculums incorporate activities where students role play with one another. Students learn the relational skills and social norms through this practice in order to apply it to real life situations. Because the nature of school is social, students who participate in SEL programs to build skills of communicating ideas properly, listening to and asking questions about the ideas of others, and evaluating and incorporating the ideas of others often find greater success than those who do not receive direct SEL (Ragozzino et al, 2003).

Effectiveness of Social Emotional Learning on Marginalized Groups of Students

As the understanding of the effectiveness of SEL increases, schools at all levels are implementing universal programs to address these areas of development. However, it is important to consider if a universal social and emotional skills program has a positive effect on students who have been marginalized. For students who have been denied representation of economic, cultural, or social identities, the adoption of one universal program can be problematic

if diverse perspectives are not considered. Like all learning in schools, SEL resources must address issues of equity.

Students from marginalized groups often face greater risk of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, family and community violence, and the impact of poverty and racism. When students face these often traumatic experiences, this can cause a deficit in social-emotional competencies. It is imperative that schools evaluate a social-emotional curriculum for its equitable approaches prior to adoption for all students, as social-emotional growth is extremely important for marginalized students (Jamieson, 2018).

As educators instruct and assess social-emotional competencies, taking a close look at the messages of the curricula is important. Many SEL programs teach students how to recognize and choose appropriate, ethical behaviors. “These norms are problematic when wealth and Whiteness are conflated and uncritically accepted as indicators of success. This fosters a sense of White racial entitlement and dominance, as well as negative biases and stereotypes about people of color and those from low-income backgrounds,” (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, Borowski, 2018, p. 4). Many SEL curricula provide scenarios, role playing, and picture posters to lead discussion on expected behaviors. Educators must be mindful that the message of appropriateness in the resources is modeled by students of diverse backgrounds, rather than only by students who are white. For example, the opinions of appropriateness around eye contact varies between different cultural groups. While one group of people may stress eye contact as an important, positive way to build relationships, other cultural groups may consider it inappropriate or disrespectful to make direct eye contact with others. If a SEL activity sends the message that

direct eye contact is necessary for building positive relationships, it does not take into consideration perspectives outside of the dominant culture. Therefore, educators should evaluate a SEL program for equitable, culturally competent messages of appropriate behavior.

As teachers evaluate SEL programs and, ultimately, choose one for implementation, it is important to center equity as each lesson is taught to children. Important self-identity work takes place as SEL programs guide educators and students through how to recognize and manage personal feelings and relationships. It is important that a chosen SEL program includes racial identity development. Classroom-based SEL intervention “must promote identity exploration for both youth of color and their White classmates. Additionally, there is growing evidence that brief interventions into stereotype threats can have positive academic and social impacts for various marginalized groups,” (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, Borowski, 2018, p. 11). Social-emotional programs that help explore and develop student identity allow students time for self-reflection around race, bias, and privilege. While students learn to navigate feelings and emotional responses, students dig more deeply into how emotional responses are influenced by personal life experiences.

With careful attention to equity when choosing a universal program, SEL can have a significantly positive influence on the development of social-emotional skills for students from marginalized groups. Social-emotional learning programs advance social and emotional competencies for children and youth through communal relations that encourage participation in diverse classrooms.

Jagers, Rivas-Drake, and Borowski (2018) argue the importance of identity development for children, especially those from marginalized groups. However, the researchers also state the

importance of developed social-emotional competencies within the educators. The researchers argue that educators should engage in personal, continuous social-emotional work that is based in equity in order to foster this development within students. As teachers practice and increase personal social-emotional skills, the researchers argue that teachers will be more equipped to engage with and empower students from diverse backgrounds equitably.

Lastly, the assessment of social-emotional competencies requires an equity lens. Most assessments ask teachers to complete rating scale surveys for students. These surveys include statements of various skills in which a teacher must rate students. Given that most teachers are white, middle class, women while student groups are increasingly diverse, perspective and bias may pose a problem as teachers complete these rating scales. It is imperative that educators are provided adequate professional development around self-identity in order to help increase the awareness of personal biases when completing the rating scales. Jagers, Rivas-Drake, and Borowski encourage schools to consider supplementing the rating scales with interviews and observations from many stakeholders, including a student's family and teachers. The hope is that by using a mixed-method approach to assessing social-emotional competencies, schools will have a more equitable, well-rounded picture of a student's needs.

Chapter 3: Project Description

The project consisted of developing a social emotional curriculum to support and increase the social and emotional competencies of high school learners. Specifically, the project sought to answer the following question: *What does social-emotional learning look like at the high school level, and how effective are these practices on student engagement and achievement?* The project created an approach to social-emotional learning (SEL) in high school that focused on emotional recognition and control, increasing self-identity, and building positive relationships. The project strived to determine the effectiveness of SEL on student engagement and achievement at the high school level, specifically the effects on marginalized groups of students. This chapter dug deeper into the specific steps of the project and the rationale behind the importance of the project. It described the project setting and participants, as well as the intended audience for the findings. Specifically, this project described the lessons created around SEL based on the research from chapter two. Therefore, it was considered a curriculum creation and implementation project.

Project Rationale

The rationale for focusing on the development of student social-emotional competencies was the increasing amount of stress and anxiety amongst high schoolers. According to Hussain, Kumar, and Husain (2008), stress and anxiety are as prevalent in teenagers as in adults. Stress and anxiety are caused by many factors including high academic expectations, negligence or abuse, peer pressure, and other factors. Students express this stress and anxiety through disengagement, aggressive behavior, isolation, and depression.

Due to the increase in stress and anxiety of high school students, this project determined the effectiveness of SEL experiences on student engagement and achievement. The project created a scope and sequence for enhancing the ability of students to recognize and cope with emotions in different settings, to better understand self-identity and bias, and to build positive relationships. The scope and sequence helped determine ways to increase social-emotional skills and decrease stress and anxiety.

The project used the research on various approaches to SEL from chapter two to create and implement SEL at no cost. While educators have long expressed a need and desire for social-emotional curriculum at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, one of the great inhibitors of implementing SEL is the cost. Many of these curriculums required a payment per student who accessed the curriculum, which often exceeded the available budget school buildings and districts could utilize for SEL purposes (Belfield et al, 2015). Therefore, this project used the most significant parts of the various social-emotional curriculums researched to create a new approach at no cost to the participating educators, students, or school. The ultimate goal of the project was to create specific lesson plans that help educators guide students through increasing social-emotional competencies.

Project Participants and Audience

The project participants included two classroom teachers; one social studies high school teacher and one high school English language teacher. The teachers served as co-teachers of the subject United States History. The co-teachers facilitated the project with 130 students in tenth and eleventh grade at a public high school in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The majority of the students in the classroom were English learners. The demographics of the student participants were the following: 51% black, 17% white, 16% Latinx, 11% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% Native American, and 2% students who identify as multi-racial. Lastly, 85% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch, and many students were considered homeless or highly mobile.

The intended audience for this project was high school educators interested in the social and emotional development of students. Specifically, the intended audience was social studies educators as this project attempts to align the incorporated social-emotional learning with the academic standards of tenth and eleventh grade social studies. The first goal of this project was to demonstrate to high school social studies educators that intentional social-emotional learning experiences in the classroom enhanced the learning of content standards. In this project, the inclusion of SEL in the high school classroom did not exist as stand-alone lessons, but rather served as opportunities to deepen the learning of content.

The project was also intended for high school teachers of all content areas whose administration does not support the incorporation of SEL activities into content area classes. Another goal of the project was to provide some evidence of how strategic social-emotional activities increased students' positive self-identity, healthy relationships, and engagement and

achievement in school. The study encouraged administration to support the time and resources needed to properly implement SEL with high school students.

Project Outline

Project Introduction. The initial steps of the project included the introduction of students to the classroom physical space as well as the members that occupied the space together. At the beginning of the semester, rather than jumping directly into the academic content of the class, this project suggested that teachers spend time allowing students to explore the classroom community as individuals. The students were guided through an exploration of the materials in the classroom in order to feel a sense of ownership in the learning space. The exploration of the physical space allowed the students to understand how and when to access paper, writing utensils, computers, and other resources. The project began with allowing students to provide feedback about the physical space. For example, the addition of lamp lighting and plants as well as music during independent work time were the suggestions of students as a result of the exploration of the classroom. According to Persaud (2014), the first step for students to feel safe in the classroom is for the students to find comfort in the physical space including seating, lighting, routines, and a sense of ownership.

Once the students felt more comfortable with the classroom learning space, the teachers guided students through ice-breaker games so the young adult learners could begin to feel more comfortable with each other. One example of an ice-breaker game the teachers and students played was Two Truths and a Lie. In this game, each person had to share two true statements and one false statement. The others in the room guessed which statement was false. This

allowed the learners and the teachers an opportunity to get to know each other better. Better understanding each other led to deeper trust amongst those in the classroom.

Next, each student completed a survey by identifying the strongest personal values. The learners were given a long list of attributes and ethics to consider, and ultimately chose the personal top three. As a whole class, the students developed a Wordle with each student's top three values in order to determine the words most commonly valued amongst the students in the classroom as a whole. The Wordle provided a visual for students to see what the group valued most because the values that were repeated appeared in larger text within the image. Using the Wordle, the class of students identified the top three values and wrote three essential agreements together. The essential agreements were their rules or guidelines to help drive the learning time and space together throughout the upcoming year. These agreements were created collaboratively by the students based on the common values and were posted in the classroom to be viewed by students throughout the school year. Creating a safe classroom environment allowed students to feel more open to the conversations on identity, bias, emotional regulation, and healthy relationships that were to follow.

Building Identity. Once the classroom environment had been developed and the essential agreements were planned, the next part of the project included a deeper look into student identity. Students began by creating an identity map. The educator provided the students with a blank piece of paper. In the center of the paper, the students wrote the first name. In the areas surrounding the name, the students recorded the pieces of personal identity that are of most importance. This may have included but was not limited to age, race and ethnicity, gender, family roles, languages spoken, religion, sexual identity, able-bodiedness, citizenships,

likes and dislikes, interests, strengths and weaknesses, and more. The creation of the map allowed students to discover more about identity by discussing the identity map with peers to find similarities and differences.

As students engaged in conversation about the identity maps, the first goal of this part of the project was to build connections amongst the students. The goal was to develop a space where students feel supported by peers and teachers to express the true self freely. It was the hope that through this part of the project, the students would increase engagement in the classroom due to feeling accepted. Lastly, the identity maps served as a tool for the classroom teacher to gather materials and resources that represented the students.

Throughout the semester, students participated in other identity exploration activities in this project. Another example of an identity lesson the participants completed was an I Am From poem. This poem was a template that asked students to fill in the lines with specific information about personal background, family, childhood, likes and dislikes. The I Am From poem allowed students to think deeply about personal identity and pieces of personal history. Students were able to explore how significant events or people impacted the ways in which the students approached relationships with peers, connections with teachers, and strategies to learning in school. Students were not forced to share the I Am From poems, as sometimes this activity requires students to revisit painful memories. Some students who felt comfortable sharing the poem with the class did so, which gave confidence to other students to share and helped the classroom of students build a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other. The teachers also demonstrated a vulnerability by sharing the teachers' own poems with the students, showing a mutual trust for the students as well. It was imperative that the student I Am

From poems were only shared amongst this specific class cohort of students on a volunteer basis, rather than with other class periods of students. The students needed to understand that the poems that are so deeply personal were safe.

Lastly, a final example of identity exploration students completed in this project was a list of the following seven words: race, gender, sexual orientation, able-bodiedness, citizenships, languages, and religion. The students were then asked to cross one of the words off the list every ten seconds until one word remained. The remaining word represented the word with which the student identifies the most.

Throughout this project, the lessons demonstrated how SEL can be integrated into the history content that already exists in the social studies courses. Therefore, this exploration of identity was linked to United States History Minnesota Standard 9.4.4.16.7 which focused on the “changing concepts of racial identity, gender roles, and family organization,” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011). As students learned more about colonization and settlement, the topic of racial, gender, and religious identity was important. As students were better able to understand their own personal identities, they developed the skills to critically think about how identities played a significant role in colonization and settlement.

Examining Bias. Another important aspect of this project was the examination of personal bias. As students worked to understand personal bias, it was the goal that students would develop self-awareness while building relationships within the classroom. In order to engage students in SEL the directly impacts relationships, it was important that this project helped students build an understanding of implicit bias. It was the hope that by understanding personal implicit biases, students would think reflectively while making choices in high school.

The exploration of bias first required the teachers to help students see that bias is developed overtime and has existed throughout history. One example of bias exploration in which the students participated connected to the United States History Minnesota Standard 9.4.4.20.2. This benchmark stated that students must “analyze how immigration and internal migration changed the demographics and settlement patterns of the United States population” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011). Students read passages from Howard Zinn which illustrated the tension between different ethnic and racial groups during the Industrial Revolution. After completing the reading, the students were given the Assumption Test. In the Assumption Test, students were given descriptions of twelve different fictional people to read. Each description included the fictional person’s name, age, ethnicity, and a short description of their actions. The students were asked to choose three of the fictional people to bring to a deserted island. After choosing the three fictional people, the students discussed with each other the reasoning for choosing each person. Lastly, the learners were provided additional information about the fictional people and discussed whether or not the assumptions about each person changed. This experience helped the learners better understand the benchmark of United States History Minnesota Standard 9.4.4.20.2.

Healthy Relationships and Consent. In order to develop the whole child, it was necessary to explicitly teach students the importance of healthy relationships. In this project, students specifically examined the role of consent in healthy relationships. Without overlapping with the lessons already taught in health classes at the high school, the purpose of this portion of the project was to help students practice using assertive voices to vocalize thoughts. The discussion around consent applied to romantic relationships that are growing and changing with

high school learners. However, it strongly applied to academic partnerships and equity of work completion as well as appropriate conversations in the classroom.

Students began by defining the word consent. Students participated in partner and small group discussion on what consent looks and sounds like, and students determined situations of when people must ask for consent. Students were further prompted to practice using assertive voices and body language for situations in the classroom when students do not give consent. The goal was that students would feel better equipped with the language and practice to use an assertive voice in situations in the classroom that feel uncomfortable.

The project strived to connect the social-emotional learning in the classroom to content from the social studies curriculum. One example of how this experience linked to the content study of United States History and World History was exploring when the settlers came to America, interrupting the life and land of the indigenous peoples. Students studied the lack of consent from the indigenous peoples as the settlers colonized, took over the land, introduced diseases, forced religious conversion, and ultimately murdered the indigenous peoples through United States History Minnesota Standard 9.4.4.16.1. This standard also allowed students to examine the lack of consent as men and women were taken from Africa against their will to begin enslavement. The benchmark of this standard stated that students would “analyze the consequences of the transatlantic Columbian Exchange of peoples, animals, plants, and pathogens on North American societies and ecosystems,” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011).

Project Timeline

This project was designed to take place throughout one entire school year. While the project began heavily at the start of the school as the teachers and students built a community and routine, the project continued throughout the school year as the teachers intentionally linked social-emotional learning experiences to the social studies standards.

While social-emotional lessons did not take place every day, this project ensured that the teachers focused on at least one of the SEL pillars at least one time per week.

Summary

The purpose of this project was to weave social-emotional learning throughout one entire school year with a group of high schoolers. Lessons that built student self-awareness, self-management, building and maintaining healthy relationships, responsible decision making, personal identity, and understanding of bias enhanced the learning of state and national social studies standards. The purpose of this project was to determine the effectiveness of social-emotional learning in high school on student engagement and achievement. The implications and limitations of this project will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The project outlined in this paper sought to answer the following question: *What does social-emotional learning look like at the high school level, and how effective are these practices on student engagement and achievement?* In the first chapter, this project explained the rationale for examining how anxiety and stress impact the learning of adolescent students today, and specifically, have negative effects on student engagement and achievement. The second chapter provided a deep literature review of social-emotional learning (SEL) by defining the pillars of social-emotional skills and investigating specific SEL curriculums that exist for elementary, middle, and high school learners. The third chapter incorporated the findings of the literature review to provide an outline of the project that focused on linking social-emotional skill development to the teaching of high school state and national social studies standards in order to increase the engagement and achievement of the students in a United States History course at a high school in an urban setting. The goal of this project was to identify ways to increase students' social and emotional skills in order to help the students manage the barriers that negatively impact engagement and achievement.

This chapter of the paper includes a reflection on the researching and project designing process. It looks more closely at the specific literature that influenced the project as well as the professional contribution of the project to the educational community. The limitations to the project are shared, and, lastly, recommendations for future use and further research connected to this project are provided. This final section serves as a summary of the research and project to better understand the importance of continuing to build social-emotional skills in the high school setting.

Reflection

Researcher. The researching aspect of this project was the part I was most anxious about because it was the step in this process with which I had the least amount of prior practice. I was initially hesitant to begin the researching phase of the project because I was worried about choosing the appropriate resources. However, once I began, this quickly became my favorite stage of this experience. As I began the research, I was excited and eager to learn more about the topic because I found that one source often led me to an additional source.

Prior to beginning the research, I knew that I valued the development of the whole-child. It was important to me when I began each year with my students that I spent time working to better understand who they were as individuals and what they needed from me in order to stay engaged and achieve their highest potential. However, I did not yet truly understand the vocabulary and layers associated with social-emotional development. The researching phase of this project allowed me to solidify my belief in the power of SEL while also teaching me the specific language and resources I needed in order to make my thoughts more valuable.

Writer. While I have often enjoyed writing, the technical aspects of writing to share research and knowledge proved to be challenging. I spent a significant amount of time striving to understand the appropriate flow within my writing to ensure that my reader understood the exact point in which I was trying to present. It also took me some time to better understand the appropriate APA formatting in my writing. I found that I relied heavily on the classmates in my base group to guide me to the appropriate format for my writing and citation.

My favorite part of the writing process was working with my peer reviewers. Both of my peer reviewers were educators I have worked closely with at different points in my career. I value their feedback greatly and enjoyed the opportunity to discuss the importance of social-emotional learning with them. I felt that my content reviewer specifically helped me enhance my vision of this project and narrow my specific research question. This truly helped me find an effective flow in my writing of the second chapter.

Learner. I consider myself a reflective person and I am always wanting to seek more knowledge from the resources around me. The experience truly provided this opportunity for me as a learner. I was able to engage not only with printed material but also with educators within my circle who have great knowledge of social-emotional development of learners. The experience of this project has sparked a desire to continue to learn more about the effectiveness of SEL in the high school to continue to fine-tune the project in years to come to reach the most effective way to enhance the social-emotional skills of high schools in the social studies classroom.

Literature Review

Pillars of Social-Emotional Learning. One of the most important aspects of the research included the definition of social-emotional learning. In order to properly implement a scope and sequence of lessons that developed these skills, the educator must understand the pillars of social emotional learning. According to CASEL (2019), social-emotional learning in the classroom included the development of five key areas.

The first two pillars of SEL was the development of self-awareness and self-management. Self-awareness included increasing a student's ability to understand their own feelings, motives, and desires. Self-management developed a child's capability of accepting responsibility for their own behavior and well-being.

The three remaining pillars built upon the personal awareness of the student and applied the knowledge to social settings. For example, the third pillar was social-awareness developed students who understood social and ethical norms, and they were able to empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. The fourth pillar helped students understand how to build and maintain healthy relationships. Finally, the fifth pillar of SEL increased students' ability to make responsible decisions.

Social-Emotional Curriculum. Throughout the research of this project, the following social-emotional curriculums were evaluated: Zones of Regulation, Second Step, Responsive Classroom, Teaching Tolerance, and ONEder. While each curriculum took a slightly different approach based on the grade level of the participants, all focused on the development of all five pillars of social-emotional skills. One common benefit of the curriculum was that each allowed students to build their own identity and self-awareness while forming relationships with their peers and teachers. The curriculum provided specific materials needed for the development of

these skills. One challenge with the curriculum researched was the monetary cost associated with receiving the materials needed to fully implement the curriculum. Budgetary restraints often prohibited school districts from implementing these social-emotional curriculums with fidelity.

Social-Emotional Learning and the Brain. The research throughout the project found that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) negatively impact a child's social-emotional skills because these often traumatic experiences change the brain. The research also showed that ACEs disproportionately affect children from marginalized groups (Jamieson, 2018). However, the research in this project showed that building social-emotional skills can build new pathways in the brain, positively impacting children who have experienced trauma, including those from marginalized groups. With repetitive and intentional practice of self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, maintaining healthy relationships, and responsible decision-making at all grade levels, the brain can change resulting in a child's increased ability to manage their feelings, build connections to peers, and stay engaged in their learning.

Impact of Project

Implications For High School Students. Adolescent students continue to develop throughout high school both academically and social-emotionally. Therefore, this project had a significant impact on high school students as factors both in and outside of the school setting affected the engagement and achievement. High school students were positively impacted by this project as it required the educators to view the whole child through the implementation of the scope and sequence. High schoolers were provided class time to enhance their

social-emotional skills which built trust between classmates and teachers and decreased the negative impacts of anxiety and stress.

Implications for High School Educators. At the school where this project was implemented, many of the high school educators showed support for the development of the social-emotional skills of their students. This project suggested that teachers should be provided time within the content area classes to continue the development of social-emotional skills. Therefore, this impacted high school educators at this school by demonstrating ways in which content from the standards could continue while being taught alongside social-emotional skill development. This impacted educators because it proved to the administration the value of this work and the need for time and space to commit to these experiences in the classroom.

Implications on Policy. As schools at all grade levels continue to increase the focus on social-emotional skill development of the learners, this project may have an impact on district policy. Specifically, the Minnesota Department of Education Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board determined that the renewal procedure for teacher licensure must include professional development in the areas of mental health and suicide prevention. As stated in the second chapter, the development of social-emotional skills, specifically for children who faced adverse childhood experiences, increased their ability to cope with anxiety and stress, thus improving mental health and decreasing suicide ideation and acts. Therefore, school districts may require teachers to demonstrate an understanding of social-emotional development of students in the classroom in order to fulfill the licensure renewal.

Limitations of Project

One limitation of this project was that while extensive research existed around the development of social-emotional skills in the elementary school setting, very little research was published about SEL at the high school level. While some research existed to promote specific curriculums for SEL in the high school, there was very little research specifically about the ways in which high school educators could incorporate the development of social-emotional skills into the current content of the classroom. It seemed as though the research gathered promoted stand-alone lessons to be followed step-by-step through a specific scope and sequence rather than effective ways to include SEL development across subject area classes.

Additionally, a significant amount of the research provided recommendations for specific social-emotional curriculums to be used in the classroom. These recommendations specifically included the promotions of Second Step, Responsive Classroom and Zones of Regulation at the elementary and middle school levels as well as Teaching Tolerance and ONEder Academy in high schools. However, minimal research examined the true effectiveness of these programs. The majority of this project is based on the recommendations of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and other experts in the field. More research is needed to determine the effectiveness of these SEL curriculums to determine specifically how these practices influence high school engagement and achievement.

Lastly, one limitation of this project is that it was designed to positively impact a specific group of students at one specific school. The research in the second chapter showed us the importance of looking through an equity lens as social-emotional experiences are created in the classroom in order to ensure that the messages are appropriate for all cultural groups involved. Therefore, if the project were to be implemented at another school, it would be important for the

educator to look thoroughly at each lesson and adapt as necessary to guarantee the benefit for students from marginalized groups in their specific school setting.

Communicating Results

The participants of this project were communicated with throughout the experience. Through formal and informal feedback, the researcher provided the participants with results based on their participation and progress throughout the experience. Final results of the project were shared with other content area teachers within the same school who expressed an interest in also increasing their students' social and emotional skills through short discussions and the sharing of lessons and resources from within the project to be attempted in other classrooms.

Future Research

While this project provided a significant amount of evidence on how to implement social-emotional learning at the elementary level, further research is needed to understand the effectiveness of SEL in high school. Future exploration of how social-emotional learning impacts young adult learners in the high school setting. As the brain develops throughout adolescence, further research is needed to determine whether or not SEL remains effective in high school classrooms.

Further research is also necessary to truly determine the effectiveness of social-emotional learning experiences specifically on engagement and achievement. The next steps in the research would be to track the feelings and progress of students based on student surveys, attendance, work completion, and formative and summative assessments results. Further

research is necessary to compare the results of this data from students who receive SEL in high school as compared to those who do not. With more future research and data gathered on the effectiveness of social-emotional skill development, further questions that examine how the size of the class as well as the role of the specific content area in which the SEL is intertwined affect the results is needed.

Summary

The purpose of this project was to determine how improving the social-emotional skills of high school students affected their engagement and achievement. The project reviewed research-based methods for improving students' social and emotional skills, and incorporated the most important aspects of each curriculum into one scope and sequence. This project came at a time unlike any other in my teaching career. With COVID-19 forcing educators to completely recreate how to reach students through virtual learning, it proved to be an extremely important time to focus on the social-emotional health of students.

It is the hope that this project will provide an example of ways that content teachers at the high school level can interlace their content state and national standards with opportunities to increase the social and emotional skills of students. The purpose of this project is to build the following skills within high school students: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, maintaining healthy relationships, and responsible decision-making. The goal is that by providing SEL opportunities through content teaching, students will build a community where they feel recognized and supported by their peers and their teachers, ultimately increasing their engagement and achievement in school.

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