Equity in Social and Emotional Learning in the Elementary Classroom: An Introduction for Educators

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EQUITY IN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM: AN INTRODUCTION FOR EDUCATORS

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This capstone paper and project seeks to answer the research question: what are the most equitable approaches to teaching social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom? This question stems from my work with second and fifth grade students in an underserved community, but the lessons learned throughout this project can apply to any elementary teacher teaching any population. In this chapter, I outline my personal background and how it relates to social and emotional learning. Additionally, detail is provided about my professional background, and experiences with teaching social and emotional learning in the elementary school classroom. These narratives provide a context for my passion and subsequent research of social and emotional learning and equity. Furthermore, my own personal context provides the foundation for the development of a curriculum that can be used to teach social and emotional skills in an equitable way.

Personal Background with Social and Emotional Learning

I grew up in a family system that did not discuss difficult emotions. In my family, we were conditioned to hold big emotions inside so as not to be a burden on others, and to not make others uncomfortable. Looking back, these seem to be pretty typical characteristics that Jones and Okun outline in order to define White Supremacy Culture (2001). My family did not perpetuate these behaviors knowingly or willingly. Their aversion to big emotions was simply the continuation of a cycle.

As a result of this cycle, I struggled greatly in high school, college, and early adulthood to find healthy ways to regulate my own emotions, and to manage personal relationships. I have
identified this research question and area of focus, in part, because social and emotional learning have been, for me, the foundation of everything in life. It is difficult to be successful in life without a few healthy tools for regulation and navigating relationships. It is for these reasons that I chose to research social and emotional learning, and create this project.

In addition to my own personal history developing social and emotional skills, I have experience with teaching social and emotional skills to my students, and have therefore seen the positive effects these skills can have on young people.

**Professional Background with Social and Emotional Learning and Equity**

My professional background is important to this process because it highlighted inequitable messages given to teachers about their students’ social and emotional needs. It also exposed me to the fact that in order to teach social and emotional learning, one must have a strong grasp on the basics of social and emotional skills and must be doing that work in a continuing way. In the district in which I worked the populations served ranged from affluent to below the poverty line. Social and emotional learning was spoken about differently to teachers in different neighborhoods. Subtle messages about which students needed social emotional learning more were present in professional development. In addition, the resources provided to teach social and emotional learning presented white, dominant culture views of what it meant to be regulated (and, in turn, well-behaved), and how to relate to others.

I taught second grade students, and then fifth grade students. The social and emotional learning curriculum that was used in this district was Second Step (Second Step, n.d.). Responsive Classroom (Center for Responsive Schools, 2014) was also implemented as a classroom management system that added some key ideas as far as social and emotional
learning. I spent many planning sessions trying to determine the foundational social and emotional skills my students might be missing. I spent countless hours crafting the perfect lesson to help my specific class. I spent many hours working to make social and emotional lessons relevant to my students. After teaching for seven years, using both Responsive Classroom and Second Step, I was left with the feeling that teaching social and emotional skills in an effective and equitable way can only be successful and impactful if those who are teaching it (but in particular, white women teaching black and brown students) have begun and continue to do their own equity work, and have begun and continue to do their own SEL work.

I felt frustrated when teaching these skills because some of the lessons felt inauthentic, or it felt like I was meant to be teaching my students how to fit into a white normative society. Because I had not begun my own equity work, I felt uneasy teaching these lessons at face value.

I created this project because I feel that the curricula available contain the important foundational aspects of social and emotional learning, but that educators are missing the key components of teaching through an equity lens and personal social and emotional work.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter One outlined my own personal and professional context for choosing to focus on equity and social and emotional learning in order to answer the question: *what are the most equitable approaches to teaching social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom?* In Chapter Two, literature was reviewed pertaining to social and emotional learning, current social and emotional curriculum offerings, and equity and culturally responsive pedagogy. Chapter Three describes, in detail, the project that was created based on the research gathered. Finally, in
Chapter Four, I reflect on the process of developing and implementing the project that was created.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This section seeks to answer the research question: *What are the most equitable approaches to teach social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom?* Three questions emerged while literature was reviewed in order to answer the question. First, what is social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom? Second, what is currently available as far as curriculum and management systems that teach social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom? Finally, what is the most equitable approach that has emerged to teach social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom? The answers to the first two questions provide context for the third. Most importantly, it helps determine equitable approaches that can be used in the classroom.

This literature review helped to create a course that assists teachers, in any elementary classroom in laying a strong social and emotional foundation for their students and beginning their own work with equity.

It is important to first consider social and emotional learning as a concept that is explicitly taught in the classroom. The first section explains the definition of social and emotional learning. Next, the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and its comprehensive outline of core competencies for social and emotional learning are discussed. This section also discusses the instances where and how current social and emotional curricula fall short in the classroom.
Second, there are currently many different curricula available to school districts to help facilitate social and emotional learning. Most of these curricula are also marketed as classroom management systems that improve behavior and academic performance (Simmons, 2017). This section outlines a few popular and widely used systems: Second Step, Responsive Classroom, and RULER.

The third section discusses teaching with a focus on equity. This section also explores how social and emotional learning has been historically marketed to underserved communities as a *magic bullet* to close the achievement gap, and opportunity gap, and meet the societal needs of students (Simmons, 2017).

**Social & Emotional Learning**

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), is the basis for how social skills and emotion management are taught. When searching for the most equitable approaches to teach SEL in the elementary classroom, it is important, first, to be familiar with the concept of SEL, as well as the basic components of a social and emotional curriculum in the elementary classroom. Brackett and Simmons argued that social and emotional learning was responsible for huge improvements in school climate, teacher retention, and academic achievement (Brackett & Simmons, 2015, p. 27).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL] is an organization at the forefront of research and resources related to education about SEL. CASEL created the definition of SEL that is used today.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL] (2017):
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.

**CASEL’s Five Core Competencies**

In the 2013 CASEL Guide: Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs, SEL skills were divided into five core competencies. These core competencies are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The competencies are defined as follows:

**Self-awareness:** the ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.

**Self-management:** the ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.

**Social awareness:** the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

**Relationship skills:** the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly,
listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.

Responsible decision making: the ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others. (CASEL 2012, p. 9)

The five core competencies provide structure around what must be mastered during an SEL curriculum, and where to start that learning. In addition to defining SEL, CASEL reviewed the top curricula options for teaching SEL in the classroom ranging in offerings for pre-k through high school.

**Why is SEL important?**

There are many classroom and general life implications of holes in foundational SEL knowledge for students (Durlak & Weissberg, 2011). Students who have experience with work in the five core competencies are better able to make positive choices personally and socially (Carstarphen & Graff, 2018, p. 32). Greenberg, Domitrovich, Durlak, and Weissberg view SEL as an approach to public health, stating that the effects of strong instruction have positive implications for students in college and beyond (2017, p. 13).

It is important to remember that classrooms in the United States serve typical learners as well as learners with exceptionalities. The SEL learning trajectories and needs around instruction and intensity can vary greatly depending on the population of a classroom. According to the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), there are three populations that are historically
underserved in society and educational systems (Beyer, 2017, p. 4). These groups are students with disabilities, English language learners, and youth involved in the juvenile justice system. An effective social and emotional curriculum is one that supports every type of learner. Children start developing social skills from birth. There are a lot of factors that could contribute to missing foundational skills that have detrimental implications later in life (Cohen, 1999). Students who have foundational holes in the knowledge or acquisition of social skills need targeted interventions (Beyer, 2017).

CASEL’s Criteria for a Well-designed SEL Curriculum

Many curricula exist to help elementary age children learn social and emotional skills. Some are more effective than others. It is important to review each curriculum to determine which approach is the most effective for the group with whom one is working. Strategies may be more or less effective depending on the age group taught, or level of trauma experienced by students.

According to CASEL (2012), an SEL curriculum is well-designed when it covers the five core CASEL competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). CASEL broke up a curriculum’s classroom approaches into three important categories: explicit skills instruction, integration with academic curriculum areas, and teacher instructional practices. Additionally, for a curriculum to be successful, there must be ample opportunity for students to practice the skills they have learned. Furthermore, a successful SEL curriculum has a framework for implementation in all four contexts of a student’s life; in the classroom, in the school as a whole, within family systems, and in the community. Finally, an SEL curriculum should have a way to assess student progress in using
the skills presented. This assessment can happen in the form of student self-reflection, teacher observation of student behavior, and collecting data about student behavior. CASEL measures the effectiveness of an SEL curriculum by conducting randomized controlled studies, as well as studies where there is a control group, and a comparison group (CASEL, 2012, p. 10).

**Summary**

An equitable approach to teaching SEL can only be developed with a strong background of research in the area of SEL. Now that the importance of social and emotional development in the elementary classroom has been covered, there is a basis for understanding the current curricula offerings that teach SEL in order to answer the question: **what are the most equitable approaches to teaching social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom?**

**Common Curricula Available for Elementary Classrooms**

There are hundreds of programs available to teachers and school districts in order to teach SEL in the classroom. Two popular curriculum choices that were used in the large metropolitan area district in which this project took place are Second Step and Responsive Classroom. Another viable curriculum, that is also widely used, developed by Yale’s SEL department is entitled RULER. This section describes the research and evidence of success of these three options in the elementary classroom, according to CASEL.

**Second Step.** Second Step is a curriculum designed by the Committee for Children. Founded in the 1970s, the Committee for Children began creating lessons around helping survivors of child sexual abuse. The current iteration of the Second Step curriculum was revised in 1996 to form a suite of units tailored by grade level, and intended to give students a foundation of SEL. The Committee for Children marketed Second Step as an easy-to-teach
curriculum that included lessons that require very little prep from the classroom teacher (https://www.secondstep.org).

According to CASEL (2012), Second Step was tested in both urban and suburban settings. The students in the study were diverse, with 20-75% of students receiving free and reduced lunch. Second Step was tested with a quasi-experimental design. Overall, evidence from the study showed that Second Step increased positive social behavior and reduced conduct problems in students. It also reduced students’ emotional distress. A study completed by Eckman concluded that behavioral incidents in the classroom decreased after implementation of the Second Step curriculum (Eckman, 2019). It should be noted that Second Step did not improve academic performance (CASEL 2012, p. 27).

**Responsive Classroom.** Responsive Classroom combines building a classroom community with very specific routines and procedures introduced over the course of the first six weeks of school. The program was meant to be implemented school-wide so that teachers had a common language that could be built on from grade to grade. Supplemental materials included books about making classroom spaces function well, the language used when speaking with children, and the developmental characteristics of each age from birth to eighteen years. Responsive Classroom laid out specific procedures for introducing materials, moving around the school, and defining clear expectations for students that included student voice and choice (Center for Responsive Schools, 2014).

According to an efficacy study completed in 2014, Responsive Classroom increased gains in student achievement in math and reading through an increase in academic choice,
positive teacher-student interactions, and discussions during math (Responsive Classroom Efficacy Study, 2014).

As discussed in CASEL’s 2013 guide, Responsive Classroom was tested in an urban setting with a diverse population. The curriculum did not include explicit social and emotional skill lessons, but provided multiple opportunities to practice the skills taught, and in all contexts of a student’s life. Data showed that Responsive Classroom did improve academic performance (CASEL, 2012, p. 58).

**RULER.** RULER is an approach to SEL that spanned pre-kindergarten through grade twelve (Brackett, Bailey, Hoffmann, & Simmons, 2019). It was created by researchers and practitioners of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. The goal of this curriculum was to encourage and develop a growth mindset in addition to teaching an organized set of skills. The creators of RULER described it as an approach because it included principles to live by, in addition to systematically taught skills and activities (Brackett, Bailey, Hoffmann, & Simmons, 2019, 145). RULER included adult learning and building proficiency in social and emotional skills first in order to support student mastery of the same skills.

Among this curriculum’s key takeaways were its Four Foundational Anchor Tools. The first tool is the Charter; a document created by students based on their ideal and sought after school climate. The second tool is the Mood Meter. The Mood Meter is a four quadrant color grid used to make emotion identification more concrete. The third tool is the Meta Moment; a process to use in the moment when feeling a big emotion. Finally, the fourth tool is the Blueprint. The Blueprint is a set of questions that help to guide students and adults through problem solving and conflict resolution while building empathy. In order to solidify the use of
these tools, there were Core Routines built into the approach so that students would have many opportunities to build the habit of using the Four Foundational Anchor Tools (Brackett, Bailey, Hoffmann, & Simmons, 2019).

RULER was recognized by CASEL as an effective SEL program for elementary schools. According to CASEL’s curriculum guide, RULER improved academic performance and increased positive social interactions (CASEL, 2012, p. 59). A key to its success is the identification of teachers who buy into RULER’s message and approach early on in the adoption process (Brackett, Bailey, Hoffmann, & Simmons, 2019).

Summary. With knowledge of the concept of SEL, as well as an understanding of what is currently offered as far as curricula and approaches to teach SEL, there is a foundation for the exploration of the research in order to answer the question: what are the most equitable approaches to teaching social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom?

Teaching SEL with a Focus on Equity

SEL programs and curricula are often marketed as a one-size-fits-all, panacea for all behavioral issues. In practice, these programs often fail because they lack responsiveness to the teaching setting, possible trauma experienced, and cultural variations that are present in every school and classroom. A culturally competent and responsive curriculum needs a diverse representation in authorship, a way to gauge the already present social and emotional strengths as well as the foundational deficits, and buy-in from the classroom and community (Simmons, 2017). In addition, educators must be engaged in their own equity and social and emotional work.
**Culturally responsive pedagogy: A mindset.** There are many materials available to teach social and emotional skills, but few that approached SEL with a focus on equitable strategies and considerations. Without considering and focusing on equity, further damage can be done to communities that are already underserved; particularly communities of color.

Ladson-Billings (1995), defined culturally responsive pedagogy as the following:

A theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate. (p. 469)

Often, when educators talk about culturally responsive teaching, they mean teaching students of color. This is a harmful misstep in identification. When educators use the term “culturally responsive teaching” exclusively to signal education of students of color, and further state that our students are in desperate need of “culturally responsive” SEL, it is implied that students of color need something more intense than their white counterparts. This is a problem. According to Simmons (June 2017) this is the danger of implicit bias in education, as it creates the story that students of color need to be saved. It is critical to uphold the definition of culturally relevant pedagogy as Ladson-Billings intended it: as a model for teaching each child that they are accepted for who they are despite their culture, but because of it.

This messaging can be extremely harmful to underserved communities and marginalized populations because it promotes the idea that a student who experiences trauma because of poverty can simply learn a few social and emotional skills and make their way out of the system
in which they live (Simmons, 2017). The societal structures of white supremacy culture and institutional racism make it nearly impossible for many marginalized populations to change their circumstances (Berman, 2018).

White Supremacy Culture is upheld when whiteness is seen as the dominant behavioral ideal or standard. In order to effectively teach SEL to everyone, there must be a shift in the skills that are valued in a society (Jones & Okun, 2001). When a school curriculum, or the culture of a district only values one way of learning, or one way of navigating life, those who do not fit into a very specific and limiting framework are oppressed (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019).

**An Equitable Approach to Teaching Social and Emotional Skills.** Based on the sources available, and synthesizing all the evidence, an equitable approach to teaching social and emotional skills must include the following things. A successful and equitable approach must first have educator buy-in (Elias, Bruene-Butler, & Blum, 1997). There must be time and space for educators to learn and practice social and emotional skills both personally and professionally (Berman, 2018). The approach must include systematic skills to be taught with ample opportunities for students to see skills modeled, and to practice using skills. Most importantly, social and emotional instruction must be culturally responsive and inclusive for every student. An approach to SEL can only be considered successful if it meets the needs of all students and does not harm its stakeholders.

**Chapter Summary**

Through a review of the literature available on the topic of SEL, it can be concluded that SEL is an integral part of elementary education. It is also important to note that the way SEL is currently taught is ineffective and culturally insensitive to a large part of the population, in
particular, underserved communities, and communities of color. These findings affirm the need to find an answer to the question: *what are the most equitable approaches to teaching social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom?*

Chapter Three details the course that was created based on the research described in this chapter. It describes the components of the project and identifies the intended audience and setting. Furthermore, it discusses the rationale behind the project and outlines the timeline for its implementation.
CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the project developed, based on current literature and personal experiences, and driven by the question: what are the most equitable approaches to teaching social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom? This project seeks to meet the needs of educators who teach all students--regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and language--so that they may engage in their educational practice in a culturally responsive and equitable way. This is important because currently, the issue of inequity in social and emotional curriculum lies not with the current offerings, but with the educators themselves. In order to approach social and emotional learning in an equitable way, educators must engage in their own work around equity in education, and they must explore how to dismantle white supremacy in the classroom. Additionally, in order to effectively teach social and emotional skills, educators must have a framework for their own continued social and emotional learning. This project was created to meet the needs of the educators of students in an elementary classroom to help them teach social and emotional learning in an equitable way.

In this chapter, the project is described based on the previously stated research question. The literature reviewed in creating the project is discussed. In addition, the rationale for choosing social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom, and the audience and setting for which the project is intended is described in detail. This chapter also describes the process that was used to create the project, the frameworks selected for adult learning, the components of the curriculum, and the timeline over which it was developed and implemented.
Project Description

The project that was created is a self-paced course for educators that focuses on equity, driven by the question: what is the most equitable approach to teaching social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom? The course that was created consists of eight weeks of readings, discussion questions, and assignments designed to start an educator’s work with recognizing white supremacy in their teaching practice in addition to focused work with the five core competencies as outlined by CASEL. Within the supplemental materials, there are lessons specifically for teachers to practice healthy social and emotional skills, as well as ample opportunity for reflection on teacher proficiency in the weekly focus, level of cultural responsiveness in teaching, and equity in instructional approach.

This approach includes learning objectives and reflection for teachers and staff. This component of the project utilizes the Self Directed Learning Model (Merriam, 2001). This framework/theory is appropriate for this project because it merges already accepted and researched social and emotional learning concepts with multiple opportunities for skills to be modeled and practiced. The content was based on the five core competencies as outlined by CASEL (2012), and a compiled list of equity resources mainly focusing on Robin Diangelo’s book White Fragility (2019).

Rationale

This topic was selected because the current offerings for teaching social and emotional learning were lacking in impact due to improvement needs in culturally responsive pedagogy, teacher proficiency in and modeling of social-emotional skills, as well as teacher buy-in.

Audience & Setting
This project took place in an urban school district in a major metropolitan area in the upper midwest. The district served approximately 36,000 students, and employed over 3,000 teachers. Within the school district, the student demographics were 35.4% White, 35.3% African American, 17.4% Latino or Hispanic, 5% Asian American, 3% Native American or Alaska Native, 0.1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 3.8% who identified as two or more races. In this school district, approximately 57% of students received free and reduced meals.

The school in which the project took place served 350 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The school demographics were 57% Latino or Hispanic, 16% African American, 16% East African, 5% Native American, 3% Asian American, and 3% White. The school received Title 1 funding with 94% receiving free and reduced meals. English Language Learners made up 64% of the school’s population. The school used two frameworks to guide SEL instruction. The first being a schoolwide curriculum called Second Step. Second, the district had recently introduced an initiative to teach SEL based on the five core competencies as defined by CASEL (CASEL 2012, p. 9).

A committee made up of teachers, support staff, and administration met twice a month to discuss behavior data, and to focus on how the school was implementing social and emotional lessons. There were a variety of differing viewpoints among staff about the best practices for teaching SEL, as well as a variety of levels of proficiency among staff on personal social and emotional skills. Each month, staff members received an hour of professional development focused on teaching social and emotional skills as it pertained to equity and engagement.

The classroom in which this project was piloted was an upper elementary classroom. Out of twenty-seven students, two were Native American, five were African American, five were
East African, and fifteen were Latino or Hispanic. The class was taught a weekly SEL lesson, which was consistent with the teaching in similar classrooms in the school.

**Project Outline & Timeline**

In September of 2019, this capstone project began with the creation of the research question: *what is the most equitable approach to teaching social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom?* Chapters one through three were written during the months of September through December of 2019. The current literature was gathered through resources and databases provided by Hamline University. The work of syllabus development and course writing began in January of 2020. The syllabus was revised during April of 2020, and can be found in the appendix. Additionally, Chapters One through Four were revised during April of 2020. The capstone was completed by the end of April 2020. The project was piloted with a team of upper elementary teachers over the course of the 2020-2021 school year.

**Measure of Assessment**

In order to measure the effectiveness of this course, educators who participated were asked to read the assigned texts, reflect on their own, and then to bring their reflections to a group discussion with focused questions intended to guide the discussion and highlight new insights. In addition to small group discussion, educators were periodically asked to identify something in their teaching practice to notice, document, and, eventually, modify to create more equitable conditions in their classroom, or in their interactions with their colleagues.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter Three provided an outline and overview of the development and creation of this capstone project based on the previously stated research question: *what is the most equitable*
approach to teaching social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom? This project was created to meet the social and emotional learning needs of elementary students with a focus on equity. The project was described in detail, as well as the intended audience, and setting in which the capstone was implemented. The implementation timeline was discussed, and measures of effectiveness and assessment of the curriculum were outlined.

Chapter Four includes key learning takeaways from this process in the form of a personal reflection. Chapter Four shows how the previously stated research question is answered through implementation of the research project.
CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

In chapter one, my personal background was discussed as well as my professional background that drove the question: what are the most equitable approaches to teaching social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom? Chapter two outlined the literature that supported the question. In chapter three, I described the project that was created in response to my research question. I identified the intended audience as well as outlined a timeline of implementation. In this chapter, I reflect on the process of creating the course for educators focusing on equity and social and emotional skills. I discuss what surprised me, how my focus changed, and my key takeaways from the process.

Reflection

In this capstone, I sought to answer the question: what are the most equitable approaches for teaching social and emotional learning in the elementary classroom? While reviewing literature and writing about equity and social and emotional learning, I learned a great deal. I expected to critically explore available SEL curricula, and from there I planned to write my own. In my research, and through important conversations with my support team, I came to the conclusion that I was moving in the wrong direction. There was not anything wrong with the way we were teaching social and emotional learning, but instead there was something missing in the emotional competence and equity work (or lack thereof) of the teachers teaching the curriculum.
I fell into the trap of thinking that I had the special answer that would solve this problem for my students who are growing up in underserved communities. My intention became to reverse the damage that white supremacy culture, and more specifically, white women have done to equity in education. This is one of the indicators of white supremacy culture as outlined by Jones and Okun (2001).

Based on this realization, I knew I needed to rethink my project. Instead of creating a curriculum for my students, I wrote professional development for teachers that centered around equity, dismantling white supremacy culture, and anti-racism. The course also provides teachers with the opportunity to evaluate their own proficiency regarding the five core competencies outlined by CASEL.

**Key Literature**

I outlined three main themes in order to organize my literature review: social and emotional learning, current curricular offerings available to educators, and equitable approaches to education. I began by determining the definition of social and emotional learning, according to established experts, and summarizing its importance. I included CASEL’s five core competencies, upon which many SEL curricula are based. I went on to explore how a social and emotional learning curriculum is put together with the help of CASEL’s 2013 guide that evaluated the effectiveness of many widely used approaches, systems, and curricula meant to teach social and emotional learning.

In the second theme of the literature review, I examined two approaches to social and emotional learning that I am most familiar with in my teaching practice. I also examined an approach that was developed by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. In this literature
review, I found that the foundations of social and emotional curricula are largely the same, and the variety comes from language choices or systems created within. This finding sparked the shift in my project development from one of social and emotional curriculum creation for students, to the creation of a syllabus that compiled sources focusing on both equity in education, and social and emotional work for educators.

I assembled the majority of my literature review before coming to the conclusion that I needed to change the focus of my project. After reviewing current social and emotional curricula available to elementary educators, I reviewed sources that confirmed that the messages I was receiving about my students needing more social and emotional work were indeed problematic. I explored many sources that posited that educators must do their own equity and social and emotional work in order to best be able to teach students social and emotional skills. A key takeaway from these sources was also that social and emotional learning is important for every student and not just students who have survived trauma or live in underserved communities.

The literature that proved to be the most important for my capstone were the resources about white fragility and white supremacy culture. As I dove deeper into these concepts, it became clearer that I was headed in the wrong direction, and needed to course-correct into something that could truly make a difference in the disparity of equity in education.

Limitations

Honestly, the limitations of my project are that there just did not end up being enough time to put together something comprehensive. Along that same vein, though, it would be silly and counter-productive to work to create the definitive resource on equity in education as this is an ongoing, lifelong work.
Because this must be an ongoing process, my recommendation for teachers who find these resources useful is to keep seeking out resources that put the focus of work on those in power to change the course of equity in education. Those who are in the dominant culture need to do this work until there is no longer a dominant culture. In addition to doing the work, we in the dominant culture must listen to those in non-dominant cultures about the realities of inequity in education, and the presence of, and damaging nature of, white supremacy culture.

**Next Steps**

The project I have created will impact both my future work in education, and has the potential to impact the larger teaching profession. I created a resource that is user-friendly, and allows educators to ease into work with social and emotional skills and equity in a way that scaffolds support and allows teachers to choose their own accountability partners. Because this is meant to be used in a setting with a small team of teachers, it will be more likely to have an impact than a professional development where the conversations are in groups of people who don’t know each other as well, and are therefore less likely to engage in this work as it feels higher risk.

I have created this in order to encourage more educators to do this work for themselves so that all students have access to equitable social and emotional learning. The nature of the reflections, and the last week of the course, is spent identifying who the syllabus can be shared with next. Team members are encouraged to continue their work with equity and social and emotional learning, as this is the key to equitable changes in teaching practice.

In addition to impacting education in general, I will absolutely use these resources myself to reflect on the ways that I perpetuate racism and white supremacy in the classroom. I will test
this in my own professional setting during the 2020-2021 school year with my team. In addition, some of my friends and colleagues have expressed interest in using the course I have created to either begin, or further, their equity and social and emotional skill work. I will offer this as a resource to the administration at my school in order to spread the impact of this project even further.

**Summary**

This has been an invaluable process that has taught me a lot about my own social and emotional skills, and my work with equity. It has highlighted, for me, the ways in which white supremacy sneaks into my personal and professional lives. This research, creation of a project, and reflection are experiences that will spur me onward in my equity and social and emotional work. I truly believe that education is the place where seeds are planted to dismantle oppressive systems.
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