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Incorporating Social and Emotional Learning into Literacy Instruction within a Kindergarten Classroom

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INCORPORATING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING INTO LITERACY

INSTRUCTION WITHIN A KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM

by

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DEDICATION

I wouldn't have made it where I am today without the support of my family. Thank you, mom for always giving me the confidence and guidance to tackle any obstacle in my journey. Thank you, dad for being my light-hearted side kick when I wanted to do a project or needed to go on an adventure. Thank you, Katie for being a role model and showing me that this goal is attainable and can be done. Thank you, Lily, Riley, and Roo for serving as distractions from times of stress.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

When I think of the word "learning" it has many definitions and can apply to many things in life, not strictly academics. Learning is the ability to take what is being taught in whatever setting and apply it to your own life. It is an ongoing process where people are continually taking in new information and growing with their understanding. However, learning goes much further than academics. Within my kindergarten classroom, especially early in the school year, my teaching focuses on social and emotional skills that many students come to school without any knowledge or experience with.

As a kindergarten teacher, I have observed increasing numbers of students starting school with lagging social skills. Students may have trouble communicating their feelings, regulating their emotions, problem solving, sharing, and playing with peers. In more extreme situations, some students are unable to control their impulses and emotions thereby interfering with theirs and their classmates' ability to learn. Some children are unable to calm themselves down when something does not go their way. This, in turn, creates an unsafe and challenging learning environment for their peers. At the beginning of the year, I work to create a classroom environment that is focused on getting to know my students and building trust. I strive to have strong relationships where I really know my students on a more personal level. I spend a majority of my instruction during that first part of the year modeling and practicing procedures and rules to provide consistency. I truly believe if time is given early in the year to practice routines it will, in turn, support

academic learning in the long run. Classrooms with less behavior issues provide more time for academic learning. Data has shown a "positive relationship between social and emotional learning (SEL) competency levels and academic achievement" (Rikoon et al., 2016, p. 20). To better support the connection between social and emotional learning and academics I want to research and answer the following question: *How can social and emotional learning (SEL) be incorporated into literacy instruction in a kindergarten classroom?*

Chapter One Preview

Chapter One will describe my experience with the growth of students lacking the necessary social emotional skills needed to be successful with academics. First, I will share my personal background and teaching experience. Next, I will explain my school's social and emotional curriculum and how I implement SEL within my classroom. Then, I will focus on how teaching literacy can support SEL. Last, I will explain my vision and goals of my research and share my rationale as to why this topic is important to me.

Teaching History

I am currently in my fifth year of teaching in a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota. This is my fourth consecutive year teaching kindergarten. I began as a kindergarten long-term substitute teacher for the first six weeks of the school year. The same week my long-term substitute position ended, I was hired full time as a first grade teacher in a different school in the district. The following year I taught a year in kindergarten before returning to the school I initially started teaching as a long term substitute. This is my

third consecutive year of teaching kindergarten at the school. The following section will explain my school's current SEL program.

School's Current SEL Programs

The year I began teaching, my district adopted a progress report for evaluating students' academic growth. Using a scale of 1 - 4, teachers assess their students on whether they have not met the benchmark, are approaching the benchmark, have met the benchmark, or are exceeding the expected benchmark. The district provided training for teachers, as well as classroom social and emotional learning (SEL) kits with a few texts, but stopped short of implementing a district-wide curriculum for use in the classroom. The second year of implementing the progress report, kindergarten teachers were only to grade social and emotional skills on the fall progress report. A standard curriculum utilized throughout the district has not yet been approved.

In addition to work on understanding and implementing new SEL standards and progress reports, the school district has also been working to increase teaching for all learners and to address achievement gaps. We read *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning* by Sharroky Hollie. Through Culturally Linguistically Responsive Teaching (CLRT) we have implemented strategies in the classroom to validate and affirm the child's values and norms.

Within my school, we have incorporated a variety of resources for meeting SEL of all students. We have a full time Social Worker, part-time School Psychologist, full-time resource paraprofessionals, and co-located health services provided by Ellie Family Services. A few years ago, we adopted a SEL Curriculum called Second Steps.

Each grade level team has a curriculum box that includes anchor cards for narration, puppets, songs, and role playing. Two years ago, we read *Growth Mindset* by Annie Brock and Heather Hundley. We have incorporated monthly themes for the students to practice having a flexible mindset. Each month we have an all school afternoon meeting known as Cardinal Jam. A different grade level hosts Cardinal Jam each month, which involves a greeting, sharing, and activity. Students are nominated and announced as students of the month. The next section will share social and emotional learning within my classroom.

My Classroom

I feel a school needs to be a place where students feel safe, respected, and cared for. They spend a majority of their day at school; it is like a second home. Some of my students are from families that are highly mobile and who may lack basic needs like food and safety. A safe classroom with a caring teacher is critical for all students, but especially those from less stable homes. When entering a classroom, students should feel a sense of relief and comfort seeing their teacher and peers welcoming them. Teachers need to create that safe space where a child feels valued for who they are, starting with day one.

The first couple months of school I spend building a strong rapport with my students, creating expectations, and practicing appropriate behaviors. On the first day, students are hesitant, overcautious, and nervous about school. For most students, kindergarten is their first real experience with school. "Providing a secure and predictable environment where students are clear on the expectations and acceptable behaviors provides the background

for encouraging growth in self-regulation and individual growth, both socially and academically" (Gambrell, 2015, p. 27). Early in the year, time is dedicated for getting to know one another and building friendships. Students are involved in the process of forming the rules and procedures to help build the sense of a classroom community.

The first twenty days I incorporate daily lessons using the Second Steps curriculum and read aloud books that are age-appropriate for my students. However, I truly believe it is not just about a curriculum, but rather lots of factors that take part and influence the ability to understand the needs of my students. I model expressing and communicating feelings with my students, especially when something causes them frustration. We practice expressing how we feel with our peers using "I Messages" ("I feel _____, when you _____, please stop"). When we have trouble communicating how we feel or unable to calm our bodies down I have a Calming Space near the library for my students. It is not meant as a "time out" or a place of punishment. Rather, it is modeled and practiced as a place for students to use tools to help calm themselves. In the Calming Space I have emotion cards, a mirror, breathing ball, weighted stuffed animals, sequin pillows, and sensory bottles for the students to use. Students are able to decide on their own if they feel they need a break. A timer can be used to help my students return with the rest of the class or when they feel they are ready. The following section will share my vision for this project.

Vision

Literacy is a large part of my kindergarten school day however, my students cannot learn Phonemic Awareness skills if their basic needs are not being met. I would

like to strengthen my students' SEL skills, which in turn will better support their academic skills. I plan to research the question: *How can social and emotional learning (SEL) be incorporated into literacy instruction in a kindergarten classroom?* I would like to connect the aspects of literacy and the teaching of social skills through a five-week interactive read aloud text set focused on social and emotional learning. The text set would be based on the five components of social competency and would include a read aloud story, prompts for discussion, and an assessment. A text set is literature used to convey a message, idea, or theme that is read aloud to students. When a text set is interactive, the students actively participate in sharing ideas and opinions with their peers in partners, small groups, or to the class as a whole. The next section will share the reasoning as to why I chose this project.

Rationale

The rationale behind my research focus question is that I have witnessed many students unable to regulate their emotions. One challenge in my classroom is the size of the problem. Some students lack the ability to understand their feelings, communicate their needs, and manage themselves in a typically developmental way. Perhaps some of the difficulty may be the lack of opportunities to practice communicating, problem solving, and interacting with people and other kids their age. Learning how to regulate one's emotions and behaviors is an important skill needed to be successful in life. Early learning experiences offer an important opportunity to teach these skills. I hope through my research I can support the social competency of my students by researching the most effective ways to teach SEL through literacy.

Conclusion

The world is different today with many different types of distractions that children are not being exposed to the fundamentals of interaction and communication. It is important for teachers to recognize the need for SEL within the classroom. I hope to find ways to support the growth of social competency by researching and answering the following question: *How can social and emotional learning (SEL) be incorporated into literacy instruction in a kindergarten classroom?* I plan to share my research with my team and other teachers that are seeking ways to better support the social and emotional growth in their students.

Capstone Project Outline

Chapter Two, the literature review, will define social and emotional learning and summarize the five competencies according to Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). It will explain Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their relation to being socially competent. The chapter will explain the positive impacts of incorporating SEL in the classroom, as well as challenges with implementation. It will include ways to support SEL in the classroom and examine various frameworks and curriculums. It will detail literacy components of a kindergarten classroom and explain how to incorporate social and emotional learning. This will lead to Chapter Three, which is the project description. The chapter will explain the choice of method and research framework. It will share the intended audience and setting for implementation. The chapter will describe the parts of the lesson including a rationale for

why those parts were included and provide a timeline. This will lead to Chapter Four, which is the conclusion. It will share the personal reflection and professional growth of the capstone project. The chapter will describe the profession benefits of the project, the implications, as well as the possible limitations. The chapter will conclude with next steps in research regarding the project implementation.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The research question and rationale were identified in Chapter One. Chapter Two will begin by defining and giving the background of social and emotional learning (SEL). It will examine Minnesota's steps in assessing and evaluating student's social competence. The second section will break down and define the five competencies of SEL according to Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) and their impact on student learning. It will explain the connection between academics and socializing with peers in the classroom. The third section will examine Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and explain ways of teaching to support a student who has experienced trauma. The fourth section will describe the positive impact SEL has on student success, school climate, and culture. The fifth section will evaluate challenges with implementing and assessing SEL. The sixth section will examine creating a classroom that is supportive and based on the principles of SEL. It will evaluate curriculums, assessments, and the development of SEL in students. The seventh section will share the daily components of literacy instruction in a kindergarten classroom. It will explain early literacy skills, shared reading, and read aloud text sets and their use in the classroom. The last section will make the connection between literacy and SEL. It will explain how to incorporate and provide opportunities for students to practice social and emotional skills through shared reading, text sets, and dramatic free play. The literature

review of the previous sections will fill the gaps in prior knowledge of SEL and help

guide the capstone project question: *How can social and emotional learning (SEL) be*

incorporated into literacy instruction in a kindergarten classroom?

Background of Social Emotional Learning

Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) was formed in

1994 as an evidence-based program for classrooms. It served as a guide for implementing

and providing opportunities for students to practice social and emotional skills. CASEL

defined SEL as "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.org). The first

part of this section will provide a background of SEL in the classroom and the

introduction of assessing skills other than academic skills in the classroom.

With the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, social and

emotional learning (SEL) became a larger focus in education once states were allowed to

include measures of non-academic areas in assessment (Rikoon, Brenneman, Petway II,

2016). ESSA also supported student learning by keeping students in the classroom, rather

than taking them out for detentions or suspensions (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Prior to

ESSA, teachers taught "soft skills" or interpersonal skills that students would need to

interact in a professional setting after graduation. A larger push for citizenship and the

necessary skills grew in the early 1990's (casel.org).

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, ESSA gave power to states

for creating standards and assessing SEL and for supporting schools and teachers with

implementation. Minnesota applied and became a part of CASEL's grant of Collaborating States Initiative where they received support with creating a framework for integrating SEL. The framework details how to create a school-wide climate supportive of SEL, by providing resources for teachers, including interventions and assessments in connection with the five competencies.

Five Competencies of Social and Emotional Learning

Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) created a list of five competencies a person would need to be a successful student, citizen, and worker. These competencies are: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making (casel.org). For a student to be competent they need to be able to label and regulate their emotions, show self-control and empathy for others, and problem solve conflicts by respecting the backgrounds of others (casel.org). This section will give an explanation for each of the five competencies and their connection to academics and socializing in the classroom.

Self-Awareness. Self-Awareness involves the ability of the child to understand how their feelings can influence how they act. They are able to express how they are feeling, recognize their strengths and weaknesses, as well as have a flexible mindset for things.

Self-Management. Self-Management involves the ability of the child to regulate their emotions. They are able to control impulsive thoughts and behaviors. They are able to motivate themselves and manage strong feelings.

Responsible Decision-Making. Responsible Decision-Making is a child's ability to reflect on and understand that actions have consequences. They make choices that respect the people, objects, and environment around them.

Social Awareness. Social Awareness is the child's ability to feel and show empathy for others. They understand where they are from and how their cultural norms differ from other people.

Relationship Skills. Relationship Skills refers to the child's ability to create and maintain healthy relationships with peers. They are able to listen, communicate, and ask for help when needed.

Below in Table 1. The five competencies are outlined, characteristics described, and defined as being either an interpersonal or intrapersonal skill.

Table 1. Characteristics paraphrased from casel.org

5 Competencies from CASEL	Characteristics	Skill
Self-Awareness	-Label feelings -Connecting feelings with behaviors -Understand one's strengths and weaknesses	Intrapersonal Skill
Self-Management	-Self-Control -Regulate emotions -Self-Motivation -Set and achieve goals	Intrapersonal Skill
Responsible Decision-Making	-Consider others when making decisions -Understand the possible consequences of actions -Follow norms and values in that environment	Intrapersonal Skill
Social Awareness	-Understand the feelings of others -Show empathy -Show respect for different perspectives	Interpersonal Skill

Relationship Skills	-Form and maintain relationships -Conflict resolution -Communicate clearly -Ask or offer help when needed	Interpersonal Skill

Being socially and emotionally competent is a process that takes time and is highly influenced. Some students may struggle with mastery of the social competencies because of external factors. The following section will examine trauma as one of the external factors that may inhibit one's ability to be socially competent.

Childhood Trauma in Connection to Social and Emotional Competence

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and can have lasting effects, including depression, suicide, alcoholism, and substance abuse. "Adverse childhood experiences include: exposure to violence; emotional, physical, or sexual abuse; deprivation; neglect; family discord and divorce; parental substance abuse and mental health problems; parental death or incarceration; and social discrimination" (Bethell et al., 2014, p. 2107). Trauma can induce stress. Complex trauma refers to repeated offenses of a child in an unstable environment (Terrasi & Crain de Galarce, 2017). When experiencing persistent stress, children are in a heightened state of arousal similar to a threat of danger. Ongoing stress can impact a child's neurological system and lead to physical and mental health problems. This section will explain how learning is affected for children who have experienced trauma. It will focus on how to promote a protective learning environment and describe the importance of teaching self-regulation.

Effects in Education. In the classroom, students with a high number of ACES may show withdrawal, lack of motivation, defiance, or appear to be acting out (Terrasi &

Crain de Galarce, 2017). Trauma has the potential to impact all aspects of student growth: social, emotional, and academical. For students who have experienced an adverse childhood experience, they may exhibit trust issues, have difficulty understanding the perspective of others, and struggle to interpret and communicate both verbally and nonverbally. Forming and maintaining friendships is especially difficult in the absence of trust. When completing a task, children who have experienced trauma may have trouble focusing and making decisions.

Creating a Healthy Classroom Environment. Early childhood and primary school teachers can serve as positive and protective adults for children who have experienced trauma. Creating an environment that is safe and predictable is very important in preventing stressful situations and remediating for those who have lived in stressful home environments. Teachers can support students by having a clear schedule posted, smooth transitions in between activities, day to day routines, and expectations followed by all students. Teachers should model how to manage feelings, by acknowledging, comforting, and assisting in the process of problem solving with the child (Sciaraffa et al., 2017).

Self-Regulation. Self-regulation is the ability to recognize, manage, and effectively communicate emotions (Sciaraffa et al., 2017). Children who have experienced trauma may lack the ability to self-regulate independently. The teacher can show students the idea of being resilient by modeling how to stay calm, process a problem, and determine possible solutions. It is important for the teacher to validate how the child is feeling and create an environment that is protective to students who feel

vulnerable when expressing their emotions. Mindfulness activities can help a child focus on what they are thinking and how they are feeling (Sciaraffa et al., 2017). To self-regulate is to be able to control one's feelings and reactions which is considered part of the competency of self-management. The following section will describe the positive implications of incorporating the five competencies of social and emotional learning.

Positive Effects of Being Socially and Emotionally Competent

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is explained as educating "the whole child" by improving both physical and mental health in many students (Brackett et al., 2012, p. 219). Being socially competent has many positive effects. This section will describe how SEL positively impacts the school climate and culture. It will explain how it enhances students' outlooks of themselves, their schools, and within their classroom.

School Climate. Schools that implement consistent SEL across grade levels and classrooms are more likely to show improved school climate, improved test scores, fewer behavior problems, and decreased use of substance abuse among students (Durlack et al., 2011). School wide SEL promotes a school environment where students have a stronger sense of community, a sense of security and safety, and encourages student independence. Students, in turn, feel more positive and report a sense of connectedness with their school (Haymovitz et al., 2018).

Student Outlook. Students who are socially and emotionally competent have a better sense of self and find success both in school and within society (Durlack et al., 2011). They experience less stress and anxiety because they are able to work through problems and are better able to handle conflict. Students are able to interact with peers,

communicate properly, and show empathy towards others. Students are able to set goals and make progress towards achieving them (Brackett et al., 2012).

    Social and Emotional Learning within the Classroom. Integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) within a classroom creates a nurturing classroom environment where relationships are highly valued. "Social and emotional skills play a role in determining how well-equipped children will be to meet the needs of the classroom" (casel.org). Students are given the responsibility to regulate their emotions, problem solve conflicts, and engage in collaboration with peers. SEL promotes positive social behavior and meaningful peer relationships. Students who are more socially aware and understanding of peers show a decrease of risky behavior within the classroom (Zakrzewski, 2016). Classrooms of children with fewer behavior issues are then able to commit more time to academic learning. Data has shown a "positive relationship between SEL competency levels and academic achievement" (Rikoon et al., 2016, p.20).

    Academics in the classroom require sustained engagement and focus on completion of tasks. Students need listening skills to be able to follow multi-step directions and complete tasks that may be undesired. Being socially competent, having a mastery of social skills, has a direct influence on peer relationships and academic success in the classroom (Selimović et al., 2018). Students who are given opportunities to practice social skills through interactions, games, and free play with their peers feel more confident. They are more likely to form and maintain friendships with peers, as well as ask for help from teachers (Ashdown & Bernard, 2011). Students who are socially competent can positively interact with peers, communicate their feelings, and

problem-solve independently. They are able to work collaboratively in small groups and are equipped with strategies for conflict resolution (Ng & Bull, 2018). Since the introduction of Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL), states, districts, and classrooms are still attempting to create a consistent system for implementing and assessing social and emotional concepts. The following section will explain some of the challenges that schools face with social and emotional learning (SEL).

Challenges with Social and Emotional Learning

SEL provides students with opportunities to practice the necessary skills needed for life-long learning. Students are then able to apply the social skills within school, their home, and in society (Yoder, 2014). However, SEL is a growing topic and still faces some challenges. This section will describe how SEL is representative of U.S. dominant culture, which causes a disadvantage for culturally diverse students. It will explain the need for consistency when implementing and the lack of current consistent assessments.

Representative of One Culture. "Our social interactions, behaviors, and emotions are intricate and fluid; moreover, they are heavily influenced by other factors, such as our cultures" (Snyder & Cook, 2018, p.1). Centered on the research conducted by Jagers, Rivas-Drake, and Borowski, the five competencies are considered to be based on the dominant U.S. cultural norms. The idea of Self-Awareness promotes individualism where a student's independence is valued. A student should strive to be self-sufficient and stand out among their peers. Alternatively, students who come from a Collectivist Culture believe in doing what is best for the group. A student should be dependable and

always consider the needs of the group (Zakrzewski, 2016). Self-Management and Social

Awareness emphasize America's core cultural norms of controlling one-self. Students

may be confused when trying to sort the ideas and standards of home versus the

expectations and rules emphasized at school. The focus is on the differences rather than

the commonalities between the two (Jagers et al., 2018). Relationship Skills and

Responsible Decision-Making are misinterpreted, which leads to a student or culture

being "blamed" for not cooperating, sharing, or engaging (Jagers et al., 2018, p. 7).

Implementation Challenges. With added pressure to meet state standards and

improve test scores, teachers are experiencing a lack of time to teach areas outside of

what is being assessed (Durlack et al., 2011). Historically, implementation of social and

emotional learning (SEL) interventions have been regulated to the teacher. The attitudes

and beliefs towards SEL, both positive or negative, are demonstrated by the teacher. It is

the responsibility of the teacher to be enthusiastic about, seek professional development

on, and commit to the teaching of social skills for their students. Consistent

implementation across schools and districts has been difficult. Lastly, social and

emotional learning curriculum has been criticized for being a "one size fits all" approach,

which is not applicable to meet the various needs of students (Brackett et al., 2012).

Assessment Challenges. Similar to implementation consistency, SEL assessment

has varied considerably from informal observations to self-reporting. Currently, three

assessments are most common for assessing SEL competencies: self-reporting, rating

scales, and direct game-stimulated assessments (McKown, 2019). In self-reporting,

students rate themselves on the competencies using a scale. It is reflective of student

voice, but can cause bias as students choose answers they believe are most wanted.

Rating scales involve teachers rating students based on observable behaviors. The

difficulty with rate scales is that they are subjective, based on the teacher's judgements of

behavior. Furthermore, some behaviors are difficult to observe. Direct assessments are

developmentally appropriate social and emotional tasks that are completed by students

that assess their mental processes. A disadvantage to direct assessments is that it is quite

costly and time consuming (McKown, 2019). Although social and emotional learning

(SEL) is facing challenges, some states have created individual frameworks,

implementation guides, and assessment benchmarks that are reviewed through an equity

lens (education.mn.gov). The next section will explain the implementation of SEL within

the classroom.

Social and Emotional Learning in a Classroom

Typically, the first six weeks of school are spent building a classroom community

where the teacher and the students work together to create rules and routines for the

classroom. When students have a sense of belonging, they feel connected, safe, and

comfortable with one another. Time that is dedicated to practicing the procedures early

on in the year allows for more time dedicated to academics later on (Buckley, 2015). This

section will share how teachers can create a classroom centered on the concepts of social

and emotional learning where students are comfortable taking risks with their learning

and the importance of incorporating Play-Based Learning (PBL) within the classroom.

Teaching Practices to Support Social and Emotional Learning. Kindergarten is

often a child's first experience with education. They are absorbing and taking in new

information daily. Ray & Smith (2010) share how young children experience anxiety when attempting to comprehend new information. Anxiety can be expressed in different ways, for example, by having a meltdown, anxiety attack, or completely shutting down (Yoder, 2014). Teachers need to create a nurturing space that allows for cooperative learning, includes student voices, and provides opportunities for self-reflection.

Students should be part of the process of creating the classroom goals and norms to feel fully invested in the procedures of the classroom. A classroom that is structured with routines and student choice will support student decision making and follow through. Students should be given opportunities to be "emotionally literate" where they are able to communicate their feelings and opinions (Yoder, 2014, p.11). Classroom discussions will allow students to communicate and practice listening and responding skills. While working in groups, students are able to work with peers to problem-solve and evaluate their progress. Students are able to think about the work of their peers, as well as their work ethic (Yoder, 2014). Teachers need to incorporate practices for calming down and regulating emotions in students. By observing when a student may be anxious or frustrated, a teacher can support the student by showing appropriate ways that the child can regulate their emotions (Ray & Smith, 2010). The teacher can serve as a facilitator for children by helping them cope with and work through problems within themselves or with their peers.

Play-Based Learning. "The essential purpose of Play-Based Learning (PBL) is for children to learn while playing" (Taylor & Boyer, 2019, p.127). Children learn through experience when playing with their peers. During designated time for free play,

teachers serve as a facilitator and offer learning opportunities while students are playing. When play is structured, directed, and controlled by the teacher, students lack the ability to play pretend and use their imagination. They rely on support from the teacher to help them problem solve and resolve conflict. However, free play time is an opportunity for children to practice many skills with the teacher serving more as an observer (Taylor & Boyer, 2019). Children are able to communicate and share ideas in collaboration with their peers. They can express their opinions and thoughts about the activity. They are given the chance to work through problems with their peers, share their feelings, and transition between activities (Taylor & Boyer, 2019).

Free play is a natural time for students to practice their social skills. The next section will explain the teaching of social skills through curriculums by examining some social and emotional curriculums.

Social and Emotional Learning Curriculums

Since the inception of Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) 36 years ago, there have been many social and emotional learning curriculums developed for classroom use. As research on topics such as bullying, mindfulness, self-regulation, inclusion, cultural diversity, brain development, and trauma have emerged, curriculums and strategies for teaching social and emotional learning (SEL) have adapted. Structured curriculums differ from frameworks or methodologies for teaching SEL. This section will review some of those curriculums and frameworks for teaching SEL.

Second Steps. Second Steps focuses on creating an environment that is safe, supportive, and accepting for all students. Referring to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, safety is second only to psychological needs like food, water, and sleep (Secondsteps.org, 2014). The importance of creating a positive environment where students feel comfortable taking academic risks. Second Steps is a curriculum that uses discussion cards, puppets, and role-playing to make learning social skills interactive and fun for students (Secondsteps.org, 2014). It aligns with Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning's (CASEL) five areas of social competency: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible Decision-Making, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills. Teachers can show they care for their students by interacting with them, asking questions, and sharing stories. Additionally, teachers can create a space that is supportive of taking risks (Yoder, 2014).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is a school-wide framework that promotes proactive classroom management in preventing disruptions within the classroom. The focus is on expected behaviors rather than consequences that evolve. It is organized into three tiers. Tier one is focused on consistency through the whole school, modeling expected behavior, and watching for student progress. Tier two is targeted support for students who need more focused attention. It involves small group interventions to practice social skills. Tier three support students individually who are experiencing highly disruptive behaviors (pbis.org).

Conscious Discipline. Conscious Discipline focuses on creating a school family. Students learn to control and regulate their emotions, starting with the teacher. It

expresses three states of mind: Survival State, Emotional State, and Executive State that children have. Survival State where the question, "Am I safe?" is considered in a "fight or flight" mentality (consciousdiscipline.com). The Emotional State is the ability to make connections that can help sooth emotional outbursts. However, it limits the ability to understand other viewpoints when focused on themselves. "Connection with others is the construct that literally wires the brain for impulse control. Disconnected children are disruptive and prone to aggressive behaviors" (consciousdiscipline.com). Last, the Executive State allows for problem solving and reflection. The Conscious Discipline curriculum promotes learning through seven disciplines: composure, encouragement, assertiveness, choices, empathy, positive intent, and consequences. The seven disciplines help students be more in control of what they are thinking, how they are reacting, and reason with how their actions can affect others (consciousdiscipline.com).

Yoga Calm. Yoga Calm utilizes yoga stretches, mindfulness, and social and emotional learning (SEL) games to help children manage emotions and improve social relationships. Originally developed 30 years ago for behavior classrooms, it has now since been incorporated in many classrooms, hospitals, and therapy facilities. Through yoga, children are able to learn the skills of resiliency and communication, self-control, concentration, and how to show empathy for others (yogacalm.org). Children need opportunities to move and express themselves. Yoga can serve as a release to help students get up and move. It reduces stress and improves focus and attention (yogacalm.org).

Social Thinking. Developed by Michelle Garcia Winner, Social Thinking is a methodology initially developed for helping children living with Autism Spectrum Disorder and executive functioning skill deficits. It has since been adapted for use with young children who struggle with the five competencies outlined by Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). The methodology utilizes strategies, curriculum, and therapeutic techniques in a play-based manner. "Our mind is designed to actively process social information in order to figure out how the social world works and how each of us can work better within that world" (socialthinking.com).

Responsive Classroom. The core belief of the Responsive Classroom curriculum is to ensure students are both socially and academically competent by "helping students develop their academic, social, and emotional skills in a learning environment that is developmentally responsive to their strengths and needs" (responsiveclassroom.org). According to Responsive Classroom (2020), cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy and self-control are the social and emotional competencies while academic mindset, perseverance, learning strategies, and academic behaviors are the academic competencies (responsiveclassroom.org). Along with creating clear routines and class-made rules, morning meetings, movement breaks, and quiet time are daily practices. This section explained how to support teaching social and emotional concepts through curriculums within a classroom. The following section will focus on literacy concepts taught in a kindergarten classroom.

A Literacy Rich Kindergarten Classroom

Children begin school with various levels of exposure to literacy concepts. According to Kaminski et al. (2015), children who lack the foundational literacy skills prior to starting school, will have a difficult time with making progress towards and meeting literacy goals. It is the job of the teacher to provide the exposure for students within the classroom. A literacy rich classroom is one that is full of print. A classroom library should be full of diverse texts, storybooks, nonfiction texts, and poetry available for students to self-select. Word walls listing high frequency words, anchor charts on the walls, and displayed student work allow students to experience the joy of reading and writing (Neuman, 2018). The classroom environment should convey a message of social, emotional, and academic support. This section will explain literacy instruction in a kindergarten classroom by defining early literacy skills and then focusing on shared reading and interactive read aloud text sets.

Early Literacy Skills. Prior to reading and writing, students need to understand the connection between letters and their corresponding sounds (Bear, 2018). For students to be able to read and comprehend a text, they first need to obtain foundational literacy skills starting with phonemes, individual sounds. Phonemic awareness involves being able to identify letter sounds, letter names, and make words. Students also need to be able manipulate phonemes together to form words and break words apart into individual sounds. Then students are able to identify word patterns, word chunks, and rhyming (Ray & Smith, 2010).

Once students make the connection with letters, sounds, and forming words they are then expected to read fluently. Students practice reading, writing, and automatically recalling high frequency words or sight words. The less decoding a student needs to perform while reading will allow them to use their energy understanding the content of what they are reading. If a student spends their time segmenting each individual sound in a word, not only are they likely to lose interest and understanding of the content they are reading, but it also interrupts their vocabulary development (Hasbrouck & Glaser, 2018).

Shared Reading. Shared reading provides an opportunity for teachers and students to communicate about a text through multiple readings. The teacher has a large book around the students' level that is used for instruction the whole week. Fountas and Pinnell (2020), state the goals of using a shared reading text are to engage students in literacy skills, as well as promote the enjoyment of reading (http://fountasandpinnell.com). The importance of shared reading is engaging students in conversation around the text. The teacher promotes conversation by prompting in text and beyond the text comprehension questions, as well as a focus on print concepts and reading habits. Teachers are able to use shared reading books as a venue to ask questions, provoke deeper thoughts, and allow chances for making connections (Brooke et al., 2006).

Interactive Read Aloud Text Sets. With the pressure of state standards, non-core subjects like science and social studies are being left out of instruction causing students to lack exposure to social issues and varying perspectives and views (Lupo et al., 2020). When introducing a new topic through a read aloud text, teachers should use a simpler

version to gain interest of their students. Students need to see the relevance as to why a certain text was chosen and be able to make connections to their own lives. **"**Text sets, or a collection of various texts on a common topic" provide teachers opportunities to integrate other subjects into literacy instruction (Strachan, 2014, p. 306).

Read aloud texts should include a variety of writing styles and genres and can be used to teach vocabulary, story elements and structure, as well as to teach recalling facts, retelling events, and comparing with other texts (Strachan, 2014). As teachers are using read aloud texts they should have a clear focus and pause during reading to model their thinking aloud. They should provide opportunities for students to ask questions, share opinions, and make connections. Through teacher modeling, students are able to learn and apply their strategies when reading independently (Strachan, 2014). This section explained early literacy skills and described the use of text sets and shared reading as literacy instruction. The final section will share how to connect the use of interactive read aloud texts with social and emotional learning (SEL) topics.

Connection of Literacy and Social and Emotional Learning

The relationship between social and emotional learning (SEL) and literacy is a natural one. Literacy skills and children's literature are helpful in teaching SEL skills. Conversely, SEL skills are needed for children to learn academic subjects. This section will reiterate the importance of interactive read aloud text sets. It will elaborate on the use of thematic texts for teaching skills in connection with SEL. It will describe the value of discussions for student oral development and vocabulary, and the idea of applying SEL skills while playing.

Interactive Read Aloud Text Sets. Read aloud texts can be used to enhance vocabulary, promote oral development, and ignite the motivation and passion for reading. Students can increase their vocabulary knowledge regarding print features (Neuman, 2018). Through many moments to pause, students can witness the teacher model their thinking aloud and provide feedback to students. Teachers can think aloud to promote the idea of making connections and comparing texts (Strachan, 2014). Students are able to hear various texts of similar content. By making connections to other texts and to their own lives' students are able to see the relevance of what is being read (Lupo et al., 2019). Students can share their personal connections and hear from other students in discussions centered on texts. Read aloud texts allow students to see different perspectives, communicate their understandings, and hear from their peers. This allows for students to have open conversations about social issues (Zapata et al., 2018).

Thematic Texts for Character Development. When selecting a text, teachers need to be intentional and purposeful. Teachers can use texts to focus on social issues and varying perspectives. It is important to teach social skills by starting with the ability to read facial expressions and increase the vocabulary to describe what emotions the character is feeling (Buckley, 2015). Students can participate in discussions to share different emotions and what causes people to feel certain ways. Students need exposure to stories with characters that problem solve. By reading texts over with a closer focus on a social and emotional learning (SEL) concept, students are able to focus their attention to better grasp the content (Boyles, 2018). Students can make connections with characters and their own lives.

Application of Skills through Play. Children should be given opportunities to apply what they have read and their personal beliefs in connection with peers (Boyle, 2018). As noted earlier, free play promotes interactions among students in the classroom. Through play children are able to independently initiate interactions, problem solve, and learn about the perspective of others (Kirk, 2017). They are given chances to read facial expressions, make compromises, and use their imagination. Teachers can oversee and facilitate when needed. "Play is a crucial feature in developing early literacy for young children because it helps them to interpret their experiences" (Neuman, 2018, p. 4)

Writing Connection. Writing is strongly-linked with SEL skills in connection with self-efficacy and motivation (Fisher & Frey, 2019). When writing does not come naturally some students can experience self-doubt and negative attitudes towards writing. Teachers should allow time for writing that is not strictly focused on grammar and handwriting practice. Writing is the process of conveying a message and can be interpreted in many ways. It often begins as scribbles, drawings, labels in pictures, and eventually portrayals of stories (Neuman, 2018). Students can also use writing to respond to stories or as a way to communicate with peers. This section described how literacy can include concepts of social and emotional learning (SEL).

In conclusion, being socially and emotionally competent is very important for social, emotional, and academic success. Students that come to school lacking prior knowledge or experience with communicating their feelings, coping with emotions, problem-solving, and self-regulation will be unable to interact with their peers and

participate effectively in the classroom. Through the use of literacy students are able to learn and apply social skills in their everyday lives.

Summary

Chapter Two provided an explanation of social and emotional learning (SEL) and the five competencies established by Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). Next it defined Adverse Childhood Experiences and examined the implications on learning for children who have experienced trauma. The positive impacts of SEL in the classroom were explored and its role in creating a safe and protective culture and climate were discussed. The challenges to SEL implementation and the lack of consistency with assessment were described. The chapter explained the importance of play-based learning in creating a classroom supportive of SEL. Literacy in a kindergarten classroom was detailed, including a focus on shared reading and interactive read aloud texts. Lastly, the chapter connected literacy instruction and social and emotional learning through text sets and free play within the classroom. The literature review strongly supports and answers the question: *How can social and emotional learning (SEL) be incorporated into literacy instruction in a kindergarten classroom?*

Chapter Three will provide a plan of how to incorporate SEL into a kindergarten classroom. The chapter will begin by giving an overview of the project. It will share the worldview that connects and research that supports the implementation of a read aloud text set. It will share the intended audience and setting. The chapter will provide a detailed explanation of the parts of the lesson plan. It will explain the use of interactive read aloud text sets when teaching social skills. The text set will consist of books that

teach, connect, and implement the five competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making formed by Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). The chapter will conclude by describing the timeline and sharing the connection and rationale for selecting the question: *How can social and emotional learning (SEL) be incorporated into literacy instruction in a kindergarten classroom?*

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Since I started teaching kindergarten, five years ago, I have observed an increase in students with self-regulation and attention issues. Based on personal experience, I feel students come to school with little knowledge or experience with social skills, which greatly impacts their ability to learn. I have observed students who lack the vocabulary to describe their emotions and then become upset to the point of tears. In extreme situations, I have observed students kick, scream, and yell when something does not go their way. These behaviors inhibit their ability to learn. They also impact the overall classroom environment, the opportunity for their peers to learn, and general safety. Based on my professional observation about social and emotional needs of kindergarten students, I chose to explore how I might best teach my students the social and emotional skills to regulate, process, communicate, and problem-solve with their peers through my research question: *How can social and emotional learning (SEL) be incorporated into literacy instruction in a kindergarten classroom?*

Chapter Three Preview

My research question and rationale were identified in Chapter One. In Chapter Two, I reviewed and synthesized resources in a literature review. Based on the information gathered through the literature review, I was able to create a text set with lesson plans for twenty texts centered on the five competencies of Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). Chapter Three will offer an explanation

of how to incorporate social and emotional learning into literacy instruction. An overview of the project will be described. The chapter will share the research framework and choice of method for the project. It will describe the setting and intended audience. The chapter will give a detailed explanation of the parts of the lesson plan, including a focus on the rationale, procedure, benchmarks chosen, and assessment. Lastly, the chapter will share the rationale of the importance of implementation at the beginning of the school year within a kindergarten classroom.

Project Overview

Read aloud texts are used frequently in kindergarten to teach story elements, character development, and vocabulary. They are also used to connect the content learned in the classroom with the lives of students. I felt it was important for students to learn about social skills through the use of read aloud texts where they could make connections, learn about other perspectives, and share with peers. I chose to design a literacy text set based on Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning's (CASEL) five competencies for social and emotional learning for my capstone project. The five competencies include: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making (casel.org). The competencies were separated into five weeks, where each week focused on a teaching and assessing a different competency. The text set included lesson plans for four texts for each of the competencies, making a total of twenty texts. The following section will provide a detailed explanation of the research that supports teaching social and emotional learning

(SEL). It will describe the use of interactive read aloud texts and free play opportunities in connection with SEL.

Research Framework

Since the passing of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, states were required to include assessments of areas outside of the core academics (Soland et al., 2019). This gave states the opportunity to create, implement, and assess social skills. According to CASEL, the necessary social skills have been categorized into five competencies. These competencies include: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making (casel.org). The competencies are needed to help the student be socially competent and in turn, promote academic success in the classroom.

Social and Emotional Learning Competencies in Connection with Trauma. To be socially competent takes explicit teaching, modeling, and practicing. External factors, such as trauma may inhibit a child's ability to be socially competent within the classroom. Trauma can be brought on by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and leave children with a lifetime of stress, anxiety, and lack of trust (Bethell et al., 2014). Children who have experienced trauma may lack the ability to control one's emotions and may seem disengaged. It is important for teachers to teach strategies for self-regulation. Self-regulation is the ability to recognize, manage, and effectively communicate emotions (Sciaraffa et al., 2017).

Interactive Read Aloud Texts. Through the use of interactive read aloud texts, teachers can use storylines and characters to assist students in learning by making

connections, relating to the topic, sharing thoughts, and applying what is learned in real-life interactions. Communication is also important during the process of reading aloud. Teachers can model their thinking, allow for classroom discussions, and provide feedback to students (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Using a variety of texts of a similar topic allows teachers to expand on skills, integrate other subjects, and expose students to different perspectives (Strachan, 2014). Teachers are purposeful and intentional when selecting texts for reading aloud. They can incorporate social issues and varying perspectives to allow students to see viewpoints other than their own.

Free Play Opportunities. Free play allows students to apply what they learned through stories. It provides opportunities for students to initiate play, compromise ideas, and share feelings (Taylor & Boyer, 2019). Giving students ample time to play not only supports the growth of their imagination, but also helps them develop friendships with peers. Through play students are able to make connections, grow in their confidence, and learn about people who have different values and beliefs (Crawford & Calabria, 2018). It is important to not only provide play opportunities, but also small group work time where students can apply and learn social skills through real life interactions. The following section will describe the Constructivist Worldview and how it impacted the choice of method for the project.

Choice of Method

The Constructivist Worldview guided the research for this project. Constructivists use their cultural norms and backgrounds when attempting to make sense of the world around them. Students who enter kindergarten have various levels of exposure to

education. The information they have absorbed is based on family norms of how to act

and treat one another. Constructivists "seek understanding of the world in which they

live" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 7). Constructivists use the interactions with

individuals to make decisions. Students get to know one another through interactions

based on playing, listening, and talking with their peers. The Constructivist Worldview is

closely connected with my research topic with how students interact with one another.

The social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies from Collaborative for Academic,

Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) promote social interactions, communication,

problem-solving with peers, expressing emotions and thoughts. As students are taught

social and emotional skills through read aloud stories, they are better prepared to interact

and effectively participate in the classroom and society as a whole. The next section will

share the setting for implementation of the project.

Setting

I teach in a small, suburban Pre-K through 5 elementary school in the Midwest.

The district covers seven cities and includes sixteen elementary schools, four middle

schools, and four high schools. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, the

population of my school consists of approximately 342 students. The demographics of

the school are as follows: 45% white, 18% Hispanic, 18% Black, 12% two or more races,

6% Asian, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native. The school qualifies for Title I

based on a free and reduced lunch percentage of 46.78%. Title I reading and math

support services are provided to students in grades K-2, 2-3, and 3-5. The school has a

part-time psychologist, full time social worker, and two therapists for pre-scheduled

appointments. Kindergarten has three sections with each class having around 20 students. The next section will share the intended audience for implementation of the project.

Intended Audience

The interactive read aloud text set was intended for kindergarten classrooms because of the importance of the use of picture books. Picture books are used as teaching tools to teach ideas, themes, and skills. Students are able to relate and make connections to the characters in stories. The chosen picture books were age appropriate for five and six year old students however, could be implemented as a review for other grades. The structure of the before, during, and after reading assisted kindergartners with thinking, making predictions, and questioning. Students were supported through modeling of assessments in a gradual release method. The gradual release method enabled the explicit teaching of material for kindergarten students where teachers slowly, step by step, release the control and independence to the students. The social competencies were connected to the Progress Report benchmarks for kindergarten.

Lesson Plan Description

I chose to make my own lesson plan so it could include all the components I wanted for an interactive read aloud. The figure below is the lesson plan template that I created when writing my lesson plans.

Figure 1. Lesson Plan Template

Title:
Author:
Illustrator:
Rationale:

Objective	
CASEL Competency	
SEL Benchmark	
ELA Benchmark	
Vocabulary	
Materials	
Anticipatory Set	
Procedure	-Before Reading: ● -During Reading: ● -After Reading: ●
Assessment	
Support/ Challenge	
Closing	

Rationale. The rationale at the top of each lesson gives an overview of the lesson. It provides an explanation of the text being used and the connection to a CASEL competency. The rationale is supportive for any teacher, or substitute, to pick up the lesson plan and use in the classroom day of. It is concise to provide quick clarity before teaching.

Objective. I used kid-friendly language in the objective to explain the benchmark. The objective is read as an "I can" statement that is shared with the students. The

objectives of the read aloud should be read at the beginning, during, and after reading. It allows students to be accountable for what they are learning from the lesson.

Procedure. I separated the procedure into three parts. Before reading, during reading, and after reading. The before reading part is meant to support students thinking by activating prior knowledge. Throughout the reading portion of the lesson I provided multiple questions prompts to support thinking while reading. Students were asked to make predictions and share personal connections with the text with their partners. Partner pair-share refers to two students communicating their ideas. By first sharing one-on-one, students feel less pressure and are able to grow in confidence to speak in front of the whole group. After reading serves as a check in for understanding. Students were able to revisit ideas of the text and make their own judgements or conclusions.

Benchmarks. My district prioritized the Minnesota standards to determine which standards teachers would assess students on and report data to families. The prioritized benchmarks are evaluated and included on each student's progress report. The progress report is used to formally communicate student growth to families three times a year (once in the fall, winter and spring). On the progress report a student will receive a score from 1-4 determining their mastery of such skill. Below, Figure 2 explains what each number represents when assessing.

Figure 2. Academic Performance Level for Kindergarten Standards

1	2	3	4
Not Yet Met the Benchmark	Approaching the Benchmark	Meets the Benchmark	Exceeds the Benchmark

Assessment. When assessing the mastery of a social and emotional skill, I feel it is best done through ongoing observations and documenting interactions during free play and work in small groups. In addition to ongoing observations, I included an assessment to track the immediate responses of the students in connection with the social skill for each of the lesson plans. The three assessments types include: Exit Slip, Discussion, or Writing Activity. The assessments serve as an informal check of content by gathering student feedback immediately after a lesson. The Exit Slips are informal assessments to be used at the end of a lesson as a way to track student responses. Whole class discussions focus on the objective of the lesson. Students first share with a partner during partner pair-share and then with the whole group. The Writing Activities are short responses written in a Writer's Workshop book or on writing paper. However, since the lessons were to be initially taught at the beginning of the year many of the writing activities were dependent on student ability and independence at the start of the year. Many of the writing activities included drawings with an oral sharing of what they drew.

Support/Challenge. The actual reading of the text was broken down into three sections: before, during, and after reading. Each of the sections serves as a way to support student learning. Specifically, the during reading part of the lesson plan allows teachers to pause and model their thinking aloud for students to see. For each of the assessments, it was suggested that teachers model the steps before having the students complete the assessment independently. Also known as the gradual release method, teachers model step by step, have the class try it together, and then the students work independently. The teacher can give additional support by explaining pictures or words as the assessment is

being taken. Since the project was planned to be implemented at the beginning of the school year, students' abilities may vary in independence. Students were asked to label the pictures with the beginning sound of each word or to stretch further, if able. The lessons can be revisited later in the school year, but the assessments will need to be adjusted based on student abilities at that time of the year. The next section will share the intended timeline for implementation of the text set.

Timeline

I consider the first six weeks the most important time of the year to be building a classroom community and supportive environment. Time is spent building trusting relationships and a strong rapport with students. Students are learning about each other and making strong connections. It is also a time to teach the rules and procedures of the classroom. As a group, the class determines rules for the classroom and then spends time modeling and practicing the routines. The implementation of the interactive read aloud text set fits in with the busy schedule of the start of the year. Each week would be dedicated to one of the five competencies. Students will learn more about themselves, how to communicate, and share with peers. Incorporating social and emotional skills will benefit a safe and supportive learning environment.

Summary

Chapter Three provided an overview of the project that supports the research question: *How can social and emotional learning (SEL) be incorporated into literacy instruction in a kindergarten classroom?* My interest in SEL grew as I saw an increased need for teaching my students skills to help them regulate, communicate, and interact

with their peers. The interactive read aloud text set I created will help students learn about the five competencies of SEL through age-appropriate read aloud books. Students will be able to relate to the characters and practice what they learned through free play and small group work with their peers. The chapter shared the worldview and research to support social and emotional learning and the use of text sets when teaching. It described the intended setting, and audience. The chapter shared a description of the parts of the lesson plan and the timeline for implementing.

Chapter Four will provide a detailed process of the creation of the lesson plans and the texts selected. It will describe my personal and professional growth in the field of SEL and academic writing. The chapter will share benefits, implications, and limitations of the project. It will conclude with future research regarding the interactive read aloud text set and next steps for incorporating social and emotional learning into all aspects of a kindergarten curriculum.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

As a kindergarten teacher since 2016, I have observed increasing numbers of students starting school with lagging social skills. Students have difficulty regulating their emotions, communicating their feelings, and problem-solving independently. They show an inability to play cooperatively, empathize with their peers, and struggle with forming friendships. Perhaps some of the difficulty may be based on the lack of previous education and practice with social skills. Through my experiences, I identified a need for explicit instruction in social and emotional learning and it led me to my research question, *How can social and emotional learning (SEL) be incorporated into literacy instruction in a kindergarten classroom?*

Chapter Four Preview

My research question and rationale were identified in Chapter One. In Chapter Two, I reviewed and synthesized resources in a literature review. Based on the information gathered through the literature review, I was able to create a text set with lesson plans for twenty texts centered on the five competencies of Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). In Chapter Three, I described the reason for the text set and the parts of the lesson plan. I included the intended audience, timeline, and setting for the implementation of my project. In Chapter Four, I will share my key learning outcomes in both my personal and professional life. I will describe the project and explain the profession benefits of the implementation of the interactive read aloud

text set. The chapter will share the implications and possible limitations, as well as future steps in my research regarding SEL and the use of literature to teach social skills.

Personal and Professional Growth

As I reflect on the completion of my capstone project, I feel I have grown both personally and professionally. Previous to my research methods course, I was unfamiliar with finding and then reading professionally reviewed articles. I grew in my ability to use Hamline's search database to find articles applicable to my topic. After reviewing numerous academic journals, my ability to synthesize the information improved.

The ability to successfully search, read, and synthesize information from academic articles will benefit my professional teaching career henceforth. Through my research, I have become more socially competent, which will in turn benefit relationships with students. I see the value of social and emotional learning (SEL) and am able to articulate the positive impacts of incorporating SEL into my daily lessons.

Another benefit from this project is a deeper understanding of the differences in the five competencies of Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) and what literature to use when teaching them. Prior to conducting research, I witnessed some of my students exhibiting out of control behaviors where they were unable to communicate feelings or use coping skills. I attempted, as best as I could, to teach the social skills needed using our SEL curriculum, but felt slightly removed from the scripted narratives I was expected to read. I knew when choosing a project I wanted to create something that was personal to me that could be applied daily within my classroom. Through my interactive read aloud text set I have formed a better

understanding of the importance of teaching social and emotional skills and the positive

effect they have on young children when in the classroom. The following section will

describe the text set and provide more information regarding implementation for this fall.

Project Description

The final product of the interactive read aloud text set regarding social and

emotional learning includes detailed lesson plans for twenty texts. I used CASEL's five

competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills,

and Responsible Decision-Making as the main categories for teaching social competency.

For each of the categories I found four texts to teach and provided an assessment for that

social skill.

The text set will be implemented at the beginning of this school year when a

majority of the time is dedicated to creating a classroom community. A large part of the

classroom community is getting to know one another and working together to discuss and

create classroom rules. The procedures are explicitly taught and practiced until students

are familiar with the routines. Along with the rules and procedures, students are growing

more comfortable and are able to practice communicating and playing cooperatively. The

interactive read aloud text set would be incorporated as the daily read aloud, in addition

to my school's Second Steps curriculum with the intention of being able to supplement

these texts throughout the year, as needed.

The interactive read aloud text set for social and emotional learning is a working

document in Google Docs. I have shared it with my fellow colleagues: kindergarten

teammates, principal, and social worker. The lessons can also be incorporated as both to

teach social and emotional skills and literacy skills. The lessons include benchmarks and assessments for both SEL and English Language Arts. The lessons can be implemented anytime throughout the year and although it is meant for kindergarten students it could be used by teachers at any grade level. The next section will examine the benefits of implementing the text set.

Teacher Profession Benefits

I have observed teachers feeling frustrated with students "acting out," and questioning how to best support their students. In some situations, teachers feel uncomfortable asking for advice from administration and attempt to handle the behaviors on their own, which can be an exhausting and daunting task. A single solution is not possible and I hope to educate the teachers at my school and give them the necessary tools to support their students. Through my research and project teachers will be able to do more than just define social and emotional learning. They will be able to identify, observe, model, support, and witness the positive impacts of having socially competent students. Teachers will better understand students who have experienced trauma and their inability to regulate their behavior in the classroom.

The lesson plans are easy to use in the classroom because they include objectives, detailed procedures, benchmarks, and assessments. The lessons are supported for diverse learners and include accommodations to meet various learning needs.

Literature Review

Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) is an evidence-based program that created a guide for implementing and practicing social and

emotional skills. It describes five competencies that a person would need to be socially competent. The five competencies are: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible Decision-Making, Social Awareness, and Relationship Skills. Possessing Self-Awareness, students are able to connect their feelings with their behaviors and express how they are feeling. Self-Management is when students are able to regulate and control their emotions and impulses. As students consider the consequences of their actions in connection to school norms they are practicing Responsible Decision-Making. Having Social Awareness, students are able to understand the feelings of others and have consideration of how what they do can affect others. Relationship Skills is when students are able to maintain healthy relationships by communicating and understanding others (casel.org).

Some students may struggle with mastery of the social competencies because of external factors. Adverse Childhood Experiences are traumatic experiences children have at a young age. They cause lasting effects that are observable in the classroom. Some students exhibit withdrawal, lack motivation, or seem defiant (Terrasi & Crain de Galarce, 2017). It is important teachers understand the impact of trauma and how to support students. Having a consistent routine with a schedule posted allows students to know what is expected for the day.

A school-wide implementation of social and emotional learning has many positive results. Students have improved test scores, fewer behavior problems, and also a decrease in substance abuse (Durlack et al., 2011). Students feel safe and have a more positive outlook on school and themselves. They have more confidence with who they are and

experience less stress and anxiety. Data has shown a "positive relationship between SEL competency levels and academic achievement" (Rikoon et al., 2016, p.20).

Social and emotional learning is strongly connected to literacy. Literacy can be used to teach social and emotional skills, while social and emotional skills are needed to learn academic subjects. Read aloud stories are used in kindergarten to enhance motivation, vocabulary, and ignite a passion for learning. Teachers are able to ask questions as they pause while reading, which allows students to think about the text. Teachers can think aloud to promote the idea of making connections and comparing texts (Strachan, 2014). Students can then share their connections and thoughts on social skills with peers. After reading, students can express themselves through writing. It often begins as scribbles, drawings, labels in pictures, and eventually portrayals of stories (Neuman, 2018). They can make connections with SEL topics in writing. The next section will share the implications of the interactive read aloud text set.

Implications

In the past few years my district has made significant investments in the area of social and emotional learning (SEL). They first prioritized SEL benchmarks to be used for assessing and reporting. Primary teachers were provided with some texts to use as a means of teaching the benchmarks. However, the texts were not age-appropriate and could not be used in a kindergarten classroom. The interactive read aloud text set that I created is designed with kindergartners in mind. The text plots are less complex and easier for kindergarten students to connect with. Students will be able to directly apply what they learned in the read aloud story to their lives.

I believe my project will greatly improve the social skills of students in my school. They will attain better communication skills, which will allow them to form friendships and express themselves more clearly. The school will feel more cohesive by incorporating similar texts and lessons that I have shared with my teammates and the school social worker. Students will see the connections of topics, texts, and conversations among teachers and grade levels with both SEL and literacy components.

By dedicating more time early on in the year for the education of social and emotional skills, more time will be available for academics as the year progresses. Students will have increased their social competencies, which in turn allow them to understand expectations at school. They will be better equipped with how to independently problem solve, work through problems with peers, and ask for help when needed. Students will have stronger relationships with peers and can collaborate when working and share when playing. The following section will share some of the possible limitations with incorporating SEL into literacy instruction.

Limitations

The topic of social and emotional learning (SEL) has some limitations. The first limitation is the idea of a consistent method for assessing. Unlike more common core subjects, SEL has no common state level grading system (standards). Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) has suggestions for grading systems and the state of Minnesota is in the early stages of incorporation. Having no standards causes a lack of consistency among districts and a variety of methods for assessing and reporting growth for students in SEL skills.

A second limitation within research was trying to find texts that were accurately reflecting my students. Many of my students come from diverse backgrounds and I want to honor that through literature. I want my students to see themselves, their families, and traditions in the stories I am reading however, literature by authors of color is limited. Finding texts and researching authors that reflected the cultures, traditions, and languages of my students was challenging.

The final limitation many teachers have experienced is a lack of money to purchase the books. School funding is often severely limited and it is difficult to secure funding to purchase items for classrooms, including classroom or school libraries. Many of the classroom texts I have received are either donated from retired teachers, donations by parents, or purchased with my own money. For this project, I purchased all the books for the lesson plans I created for the sum of $200. I found additional books for future purchases and created a Donors Choose grant request to fully fund the project. The following section, it will describe my next steps after implementing my project.

Next Steps in Research

Although I feel the uncertainty regarding the format for this school year I am excited to implement my interactive read-aloud texts. Since the area of social and emotional learning (SEL) is still pretty new, I feel confident that more research and texts will be made available in the future. That being said, I wanted my document to be one that was flexible and could be edited or extended with time. I plan to add texts and make adjustments while teaching the competencies using the read aloud texts. I plan to also continue to search for more texts to continue supporting the education of SEL skills.

I would also like to make it possible for my students to interact with the same texts and apply the same skills at both home and school. It is important to have consistency between home and school. Supporting the home-school relationships will allow students to have consistency between the places. It would be nice to provide families with education in social and emotional skills and share the texts we will be using in the classroom. Students can witness the positive impacts of being able to regulate emotions and express feelings with their classmates and the world around them.

The figure below will share the titles of the texts organized by the social competency.

Figure 1. Social Competency and Titles of Texts

Self-Awareness	Self-Management	Responsible Decision-Making	Social Awareness	Relationship Skills
Feelings/Emotions /Growth Mindset	Regulate emotions/Control impulses	Actions have consequences/reflective when making choices	Empathy for others/cultural norms/different perspectives	Create/maintain healthy relationships/active listening
-The Feelings Book by Todd Parr *-The Way I Feel* By Janan Cain *-Wilma Jean the Worry Machine* by Julia Cook *-Howard B. Wigglebottom Learns It's Okay to Back Away* by Howard Binkow *-F is for Feelings* by Goldie Millar	*-Waiting is Not Forever* by Elizabeth Verdick *-Bounce Back* by Cheri J. Meiners *-Waiting is Not Easy* by Mo Willems *-I'll Wait, Mr. Panda* by Steve Antony *-Charlotte and the Quiet Place* by Deborah Sosin *-My Mouth is a*	*-Rules and Responsibility* by Louis Spilsbury *-But It's Not My Fault* by Julia Cook *-I Just Don't Like the Sound of No* by Julia Cook *-Marvelous Cornelius: Hurricane Katrina and the Spirit of New Orleans* by Phil Bildner *-Howard B.*	*-Reach Out and Give* by Cheri J. Meiners *-Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts *-You, Me, and Empathy* by Jayneen Sanders *-I am Human* by Susan Verde *-Jamie Bubbie: A Book About People's Pronouns* by Afsaneh Moradian	*-Tessie Tames Her Tongue* by Melissa Martin *-Words Are Not for Hurting* by Elizabeth Verdick *-Forgive and Let Go* by Cheri J. Meiners *-Share and Take Turns* by Cheri J. Meiners *-We're All Wonders* by R.J. Palacio

-*Sometimes When I'm Sad* by Deborah Serani -*I'm Happy-Sad Today* by Lory Britain -*Worries Are Not Forever* by Elizabeth Verdick -*Cool Down and Work Through Anger* by Cheri J. Meiners -*Jabari Jumps* by Gaia Cornwall -*I am Enough* by Grace Byers -*When Sophie Gets Angry-Really, Really Angry* by Molly Bang	*Volcano* by Julia Cook -*Personal Space Camp* by Julia Cook -*I Can Handle It!* By Laurie Wright	*Wigglebottom Learns to Listen* by Howard Binkow -*What Does it Mean to Be Kind?* By Rana DiOrio -*How Full is Your Bucket? For Kids* by Tom Rath and Mary Reckmeyer	-*Listening with My Heart* by Gabi Garcia -*Jack (Not Jackie)* by Erica Silverman -*Rice From Heaven* by Tina Cho -*When the Cousins Came* by Katie Yamasaki -*Can I Play Too?* By Mo Willems -*All Are Welcome* by Alexandra Penfold -*My Friend is Sad* by Mo Willems	-*I Walk with Vanessa: A Story About a Simple Act of Kindness* by Kerascoet -*Joseph's Big Ride* by Terry Farish -*The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson -*The Breaking News* by Sarah Lynne Reul

Conclusion

In conclusion, my capstone project answers my research question, *How can social and emotional learning (SEL) be incorporated into literacy instruction in a kindergarten classroom?* Chapter Four shared the final details for the completion of my capstone project, highlighted my personal and professional growth in the area of SEL, described implications and limitations, and proposed my next steps moving forward.

The completion of my capstone project was challenging and rewarding. I have seen myself grow in so many areas. I am looking forward to educating people and applying what I learned to better support my students. The interactive read aloud text set

for social and emotional learning connects the ideas of SEL with literacy as a way to

teach kindergarten students. Through these efforts, I hope to better meet the needs of my

students by giving them the opportunity to learn through literature how to regulate their

emotions, express their feelings, share, communicate, play, as well as empathize with

their peers.

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