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THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN THE
CLASSROOM

By

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts In Education

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The word “school” is strongly associated with academics in the minds of many people. Students come to school in order to gain the skills they need to be successful in the “real world”. In school, we expect our scholars to learn how to tell time, how to count money, how to read, etc. These are skills that are expected to be taught to our scholars. However, if the ultimate goal of schooling is to prepare our students for life after high school, we are missing out on crucial skills that will benefit our students more greatly with life skills and academics. According to Tate (2019 article), students are dealing with more distractions, pressure, and mental health conditions more than in previous decades. Teaching students to work cooperatively with others, to manage their emotions, and to be responsible, along with other social and emotional skills that need to be prioritized in the school setting helps our students regulate themselves and focus on their studies.

Some schools are focusing too much on academic skills and not enough on students’ personal development. As children get older, they need to learn basic skills, such as mathematics, writing, and language arts, in order to be successful. However without the ability to show compassion to others, manage priorities, and work cooperatively with others, children will not be able to reach their full potential. The McGraw-Hill Education Applied Learning Sciences Team (2017b) shared a survey that was completed by the World Economic Forum which identified 87% of classroom educators have a strong understanding of the importance of including social and emotional learning (SEL) into the

classroom. Yet, there seems to be a barrier in adding social and emotional learning (SEL) into the classrooms.

There is tremendous pressure to “teach to the test” and it has been growing over the years. This has had a great impact on educators and the learning experience (Nixon, n.d.). Standardized testing not only adds pressure to students but to teachers as well. Teachers may feel their evaluations are dependent upon how well students perform on these tests. Annual funds for supplies and materials can increase or decrease depending on how a school does as a whole. Also, having to focus on preparing students for standardized tests can limit teachers in trying new strategies and implementing creative lessons and project-based learning, as these have the potential to impact test preparation.

Pam McNull, a CEO of a SEL curriculum, chimes in on why there is not more SEL in the classrooms. She stated, “It takes time, effort, and money to teach SEL, and I fear the stress of today’s modern school day is at fault” (McWhirter, 2019, para. 15). Educators seem to have enough trouble being able to teach every standard for their grade level as it is; adding in SEL may make teachers feel like they will be failing their students by taking away precious learning time. Therefore this project intends to address the following research question: *How can implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) help meet the needs of students’ social, emotional, and academic well-being?* In order to answer this question, I have created a professional development presentation for elementary educators and a collection of free-standing SEL lessons that can be implemented in the elementary setting.

Our schools need to include SEL in the classroom. SEL is defined 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” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020d, para. 1).

I firmly believe that it is our responsibility as educators to provide students with SEL skills, as well as academic skills, in order to provide them with the best possible education. It has been proven in K-12 schools that if SEL is happening in the classrooms you will have better academics, fewer disciplinary incidents, and students will have a greater awareness and understanding of their emotions (McWhirter, 2019). Even as adults, we have experience with finding ourselves thinking of stressors in our lives when we are supposed to be focused on something, such as a meeting at work for example. The same thing happens to our students, only they don't have the skills or experience to pull their attention away from their thoughts and back to their academics as adults who have worked on building their own SEL skills. SEL will help shape those skills in our students to help keep their focus on academic standards. There are curriculums available to teachers that focus on SEL though it can be difficult to find the time to integrate such lessons into our already busy schedules. If students are not regulated socially and emotionally, that can also result in students being sent out of the classroom, resulting in loss of academic time and a negative feeling about the classroom.

The rest of Chapter One discusses my personal background and how social and emotional skills affected me during my childhood. I reflect on experiences, situations, and

values that were instilled in me as I grew up. I continue by digging into my professional experiences and what I have seen and learned in previous school settings that have given me such an interest in SEL. I rationalize why including SEL into our daily curriculum is so pivotal in our schools. Finally, I provide a preview of what literature was researched in Chapter Two to help show the success SEL has had in the school setting.

Background

Personal Experience

I grew up in the Twin Cities area surrounded by a wide variety of opportunities that were available to me and others. I grew up in a household with a father who worked outside of the home, a mother who stayed at home for most of my childhood, and an older sister. I was lucky enough to stay in the same school district, Roseville Area Schools, from Kindergarten all the way through twelfth grade. From a young age, I was taught the importance of education, that we should treat others the way we want to be treated, that there is joy in doing things for other people without expecting anything in return, and many other values.

Growing up with a stay-at-home mother gave me many opportunities that, at the time, I took for granted. My mother took on many roles in my childhood that in turn helped to make me the person I am today. She took on the role of Girl Scout leader, where I was taught how to be a problem solver and how to work with others. We attended and volunteered at our church, which helped to teach me leadership skills and empathy. Through her role as a ‘room parent’, what our elementary school called the person who put

together our holiday parties, my mother encouraged me and instilled in me the importance of an education and always trying my best.

Reflecting on all of the experiences I was privileged to have growing up, I now realize that not everyone was given the same opportunities. I realize now that not every child has a role-model around to teach them how to treat others. Not every child has parents that are invested in their education and are a constant source of encouragement. Not every child is taught how to be responsible and respectful towards others. Not every child is exposed to effective ways to deal with strong emotions, how to problem solve, or even how to make the right decision. Some children were just expected to know these things when they arrived at school and that expectation still exists today.

Professional Experiences

Throughout my teaching career and my practicum placements during my undergraduate program, I saw a wide range of schools and students. I have been in small-town schools where there is only one classroom per grade level to larger schools with three sections per grade. I have experience in charter schools, public schools, and Catholic schools. At each of my experiences, I have felt prepared for teaching academic skills such as how to read, when to multiply in word problems, and what animal life cycles are. I have had classes and professional development on absent narratives, how to run effective guided reading groups, and how to teach towards multiple intelligences. I feel considerably less prepared to teach SEL skills in the classroom.

Throughout my various practicum placements, all of which were in small-town schools, I saw students that were eager to learn. I saw students that were focused on their

work for the most part, and who were able to work together and make responsible decisions on their own or with little redirection. The focus of the teacher seemed to be mostly on teaching academic skills with a few social interruptions. When I entered my first classroom in the Twin Cities, for my student teaching placement, I still saw students who were eager to learn, made good decisions, and were building relationships with each other. However, there were also students who had trouble regulating their emotions, refused to do their schoolwork, and in return disrupted the norms of the classroom stopping academic learning. For the first time, I experienced students being removed from the classroom and brought to a behavior room.

During my student teaching placement I realized, even more, the importance of creating sincere relationships with students, making sure to have engaging lessons, and how to problem-solve with a student. It was overwhelming at first, but nonetheless, I quickly learned from my cooperating teacher and through personal experiences how to work with students to get them excited and focus on their schoolwork. I will always remember the first student I worked more closely with to help him be successful at school. All this student wanted to do was read, no math, no writing, just read his favorite books over and over again. If he was redirected to work on a different assignment, he would become dysregulated emotionally and typically had to be removed from the classroom for a period of time. We ended up putting this student on a behavior chart, helped him learn the importance of education, and provided him with skills that would help him regulate his emotions when he needed it. He would earn additional time to read based on how well he

was participating in other areas. By the end of the school year, he had matured so much and was able to set his own goals.

The first school in which I taught full-time was located in a high-poverty area and many of the students had struggles outside of the classroom. I soon realized that the content of the lessons, the planning, and the ability to understand the curriculum was not enough to provide these students with the skills to be all-around successful. According to Duchesneau (2020), children in high-poverty areas are shown to have even a greater risk of struggling if SEL content is ignored. Through this experience, and many more in the years to follow, my eyes were opened to what my previous training had failed to teach me. Students are children and children have social and emotional needs that also need to be met. I had students that refused to do their assignments, students who would randomly leave the classroom, and students who would resort to throwing objects such as chairs and books around the classroom. I know now that these students need instruction on how to regulate their emotions in order to be ready for the academic demands of school.

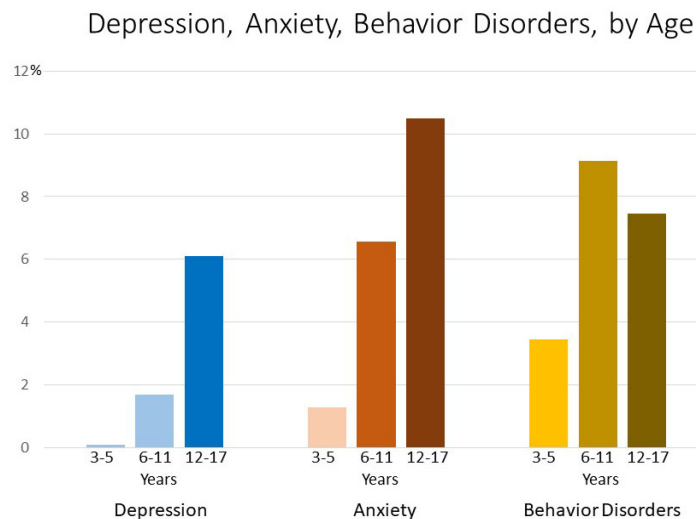
In my undergraduate studies, I was taught about multiple intelligences, the different types of lessons, and how important it is to create relationships with my students. I remember being told the reason for this is to show your students that you care about them and incorporate their interests into the academic lessons. What they do not tell you is that there is another reason to get to know your students on a more personal level: to know when their minds are ready to accept the content of the lessons and when they may have some barriers. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds and their home lives impact their day at school. In the past, when students had issues at home they were sent to

the counselor’s office to discuss and problem solve. However, there are many more students who need emotional and social support and students are missing out on a large amount of class time in order to meet with other adults, such as counselors, who also do not have enough time to address all the students and all of their needs. We also know that there are many students who do not act in ways that are disruptive to their class, but would benefit greatly from growing their SEL skills as well.

Many students lack the effective SEL skills to interact with others and navigate the quickly-changing world around them. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), “1 in 6 U.S. children aged 2-8 years (17.4%) had a diagnosed mental, behavioral or developmental disorder” (CDC, 2020a). Figure 1 (below), taken from the CDC’s website for children’s mental health, shows the percentage of children diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and behavior disorders according to their age. There are most likely more children who have undiagnosed mental health disorders as well.

Figure 1

Depression, Anxiety, Behavior Disorders by Age



When students have mental health struggles, diagnosed or not, those struggles find their way into the classroom. Students struggle to resolve conflicts with friends, show their understanding of how to talk to others, and struggle to focus on their academic work. Students who experience emotional dysregulation in the classroom disrupt both their own and their peer's academic learning. Their peers feel unsafe, are distracted, or completely unable to focus on academic learning that is currently taking place in the classroom and they can even be pulled into disruptive behavior. Students learn from each other, and educators often see students who have never exhibited behaviors considered unacceptable in a classroom copying their peers for various reasons. The teacher is forced to stop their lesson and conference with the student in order to redirect them, attempt to de-escalate the situation, and call for additional support if necessary. In some instances, other classrooms that had previously been engaged in their learning become affected if the disruption is loud or brought into the hallway. Too much time is being wasted on redirecting students instead of being focused on academics. Providing SEL for students is a proactive approach that will help them increase their ability to deal with their personal struggles and gain the ability to focus more on their learning before behaviors become counter to what is effective in a classroom.

Rationale

In order to help students become well-rounded citizens, we need to set them up for success. This means not only educating students on academic skills but bringing SEL into our daily lessons as well. Educators cannot assume that SEL skills are effectively and

explicitly taught outside of school. We know that SEL skills are essential for both a student's time in academics and beyond school. The absence of SEL in our schools greatly impacts individual classrooms and the community itself. When students are aware of and can control their social and emotional well-being, the classroom and school climate will change in a positive way. In the classroom, behavior problems will decrease and student motivation will increase as they are able to focus on the lessons that are being presented to them.

Today, life for our students is much different than it was for previous generations. A greater number of students is included in our school population as all are legally guaranteed a free and appropriate education. There are a number of components that contribute to this change. Home dynamics have changed in terms of who lives in modern households. Some examples include, but are not limited to, single-parents or blended families. While blended families can be a blessing, they have many dynamics which must be carefully explored and intentionally kept healthy in order for children to thrive. More people are further away from extended family who often serve as support systems, necessities are more expensive, more are unable to own their own homes due to policies designed to keep populations in poverty. There are also more families that have multiple parents working outside of the household or working multiple jobs. Family values and beliefs have changed, which can impact how children are raised and what experiences they have. Additionally, Duchesneau (2020) expresses the added differences that can impact children which includes socioeconomic status, systemic racism, and poverty to name a few.

Students who are taught how to be effective with their social interactions and emotional well-being are more able to set goals and utilize study habits that will enhance their learning experience. Students will be more efficient when they work together collaboratively and have a common goal, making learning happen not only from their teacher but from their peers as well. They will learn problem-solving skills that can enhance their lives in many positive ways. The problem-solving skills can translate into solving academic problems when students are able to work through conflicts with others in a respectful manner, and push through challenges with confidence and poise. Students will begin to feel safe, respected, and supported in their classrooms translating into a positive school climate throughout the building. This type of learning environment will help set students up for success, boost their self-confidence, and help them feel the acceptance they deserve in the school setting.

The community surrounding the school building will benefit from students' social and emotional knowledge and use as well. Whether kids are out in the community playing or when students graduate from school and enter the world as adults, the skills and knowledge they gain will help the community to thrive as more young adults are able to navigate social and emotional situations in their places of work, play, and residence. Mental health is important to a person's overall health and this topic has not always been seen as acceptable to discuss openly. We need to instill the idea of talking about feelings, thoughts, and needs as a way of taking care of yourself. That is one of the goals of SEL. It readies students to show empathy towards others, problem-solve in many different situations, and

how to disagree respectfully with others. The community as a whole will thrive when our youth bring their social and emotional tools to their everyday lives.

Conclusion

SEL provides students with the tools and power to decide how they will react positively and effectively during a difficult situation. In order to be successful in life, you must not only have the skills needed to perform your job, you should be able to regulate your emotions, be responsible for your decisions, and work well with others. According to Walker (2016), there is a discussion on the confusion about if a school's main purpose is to prepare students academically, for work, or to be good citizens. No matter which main purpose you see school having, SEL will make a positive impact on helping our students reach each and every goal.

In this chapter I discussed the purpose of my capstone project: the benefits of explicit SEL teaching and the positive impacts for students and their communities. I reviewed my personal experiences both inside and outside of the school setting that have helped shape me into the person I am today. I have explained how I have seen the repercussions in the school environment when students are not provided with SEL skills and the effects it has on those students as well as others around them. I have expressed my concerns for students and the fact that we are doing a disservice to them by not providing them with a well-rounded education, including both academic skills and social emotional skills.

Chapter Two will discuss the literature review conducted about what SEL is, ways of implementing SEL, and the impacts it can provide for students. Chapter Three will

discuss the project I created based off of the literature review. Finally, Chapter Four will provide insight to what I have learned throughout this process.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this capstone is to show the importance of having social and emotional learning (SEL) as an essential part of the classroom. The project will provide influential information about SEL, implementation strategies, and prove why it is important for both students and the community as a whole. The review of the literature will report the existing findings in relation to the research question: *How can implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) help meet the needs of students' social, emotional, and academic well-being?* This chapter will consist of three main sections that contain multiple subsections each.

The first section will discuss what contextual factors can affect both student behavior and the perception of behavior based on an adult's perception. Next will be a discussion about what (SEL) is, digging deeper than what was introduced in Chapter One. It will consist of a more concrete look into what SEL is and a look at the five competencies. These competencies focus on different aspects of social and emotional skills that, when combined, will create a greater sense of social and emotional well-being for our students. The next section will consist of various ways to implement SEL into the classroom. Options include adding in various activities and strategies, using an SEL curriculum, or using a combination of both techniques. It will also address a number of barriers that can prevent teachers and schools from implementing SEL in the first place. Finally, the last section will reveal the impacts and benefits of teaching SEL in the classroom when

implemented consistently. This section will look into the benefits of social and emotional well-being, how academics can change, and the lifelong changes that can be found in the community and in the workplace.

Social and Emotional Learning

SEL occurs when children and adults alike learn how to manage and understand their emotions, set personal goals, demonstrate empathy, create positive relationships, and understand how to make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020d). This section will start by taking a deeper look into SEL and the core competencies that make up the areas of SEL. The second section will further discuss the core competencies and define each. It is important to have a thorough understanding of the concepts in order to implement them into the classroom effectively and to their full potential.

Definition

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a growing focus within education; however, it has been a point of discussion for longer than most may think. The term social and emotional learning made its first appearance in literature in 1994 during a discussion on how to make sure children are developing healthily. A number of policymakers, educators, scholars, and education researchers joined together to create a group by the name of CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, who helped break SEL into the five competencies (Dunn, 2019, p. 15; CASEL, 2020d). These five competencies are as follows: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These are the building blocks which

the SEL curriculum is based upon. These competencies are outlined by CASEL (CASEL, 2020c), as shown in Figure 2, below.

Figure 2

CASEL Wheel and Competencies



As seen in Figure 2 above, it starts by teaching SEL in the classrooms. Secondly it moves out towards schoolwide practices. This includes, but is not limited to, the cafeteria workers, janitorial staff, and bus drivers. Finally, the last ring consists of family and community. This is where these skills come into play at various stores, place of employment, and during other social interactions. As shown by the outer rings, SEL skills

impact our students in multiple settings, not just while they are in school. It goes beyond the classroom and makes a huge impact on their daily life. It is developmentally appropriate to start teaching and modeling these skills for our students at a younger age to make a lasting impression.

Self-Awareness

This competency provides people with “the ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior” (CASEL, 2020c). This area of SEL has students focus inward and learn to identify what is happening within themselves. These skills include, but are not limited to, identifying their emotions, recognizing their strengths, and having accurate self-perception. Asking students to keep a journal about their day or teaching them effective ways to voice their feelings are some ways to support students in gaining self-awareness.

Self-Management

According to CASEL (CASEL, 2020c), self management is “[t]he ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations.” This is another area where students are focusing on themselves by participating in learning how to set goals, both personally and academically. Learning how to control their impulses and manage their stress are two ways to focus on self-management. Teaching students various breathing techniques, providing students with checklists or rubrics to use as a way to manage their goals, or providing a time and place for students to self-evaluate their progress can increase their self-management abilities.

Social Awareness

This competency focuses on empathy and respect for others. Social awareness is “the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures” (CASEL, 2020c). Being able to understand the norms that apply to families, schools, and communities are built from people being aware of their surroundings and those who are included in these surroundings. Using stories, discussing role-playing options, and understanding how your actions can affect others is what this competency focuses on.

Relationship Skills

The target of this competency is to look at students’ “ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups” (CASEL, 2020c). Students have many relationships in their lives: with their peers, family, friends, and when they are out in the community. Students will learn skills such as working together effectively, communicating productively, and asking for help when it is needed. Storybooks are a great resource for teaching students about relationship skills., Another way to practice this skill is having students work on projects and assignments together and encouraging them to have respectful conversations if there are disagreements.

Responsible Decision-Making

The last competency is having “the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms” (CASEL, 2020c). This area focuses on helping students identify and solve problems and on thinking critically. Focusing on scenarios and having conversations

around possible solutions, helping students deal with peer pressure, and giving students options are ways to help promote responsible decision-making.

SEL Summary

For success both inside of school and out in the workplace all five of the competencies are critical to teach our youth (McGraw Hill, 2017b). Think about the types of skills that are helpful when trying to gain new employment: critical thinking, communication skills, the ability to work together. Including SEL in the classroom provides a whole-child approach by teaching students academic skills along with social and emotional skills. The following section will discuss more ways to include SEL into the classroom.

Contextual Factors

While it may seem as though respect, decision-making, and other social and emotional skills are black and white, that is not the case. Educators need to make sure they are focusing on having an equity focus while teaching SEL in the classroom instead of simply reinforcing the norms of a white, upper-middle class lens (Duchesneau, 2020). There are many factors that need to be considered beyond SEL, including but not limited to, cultural backgrounds, racism, and sexism (Duchesneau, 2020).

Every single person grows up having different experiences, which include inside and outside of the classroom. For example, students of color may not be as motivated or confident in their school abilities based on the subtle signs of not being welcomed into the classroom or that they struggle to keep up with the academic rigor (Duchesneau, 2020). This can be a result of educator bias concerning ‘appropriate’ or ‘responsible’ behavior. An

example of this is if a student puts up their hood because they are chilly in their classroom or they are trying to block out distractions, a teacher may see this as a sign of disrespect. When teachers see things only through their lens, they are limiting their understanding of the students in the classroom due to their assumptions (Duchesneau, 2020). Teaching SEL skills in the classroom is absolutely essential for short-term and long-term success, as long as biases and assumptions are being taken into consideration.

Implementation

This section will discuss the research on how to best implement SEL in the classroom in two different ways. First, there will be an explanation of a couple of different SEL Curriculums that are already available to educators. It will lay out how to use the curriculum, discuss the time that should be dedicated to its use, and outline what materials are needed to accompany the curriculum. The research will also go into various daily and weekly activities that can be implemented without the use of a curriculum. Additionally, changes that can be done at a school or district level are explained and some barriers as to why SEL hasn't already been implemented into the classroom will be addressed.

Curriculum

One of the ways that educators can implement SEL into their classrooms is by using a pre-made curriculum that is solely geared towards teaching social and emotional skills. There are various curriculums that have been released over the years in order to support teachers in addressing all the needs of their students. The curriculum is geared towards different age groups and can be used in various ways. Information will be

presented about two curriculums, however, there are many more for educators to choose from.

Second Step. A nonprofit organization by the name of *Committee for Children* partnered with researchers, policymakers, and thought leaders from all around the world to create the Second Step curriculum (Second Step, 2020d). The program is “rooted in social and emotional learning (SEL) that helps transform schools into supportive, successful learning environments uniquely equipped to help children thrive” (Second Step, 2020d). The curriculum has lessons already created for teachers to use in their classrooms and require little prep before teaching. Decades of research and experience have been conducted in order to make Second Step useful for veteran teachers and first-year teachers alike. CASEL and the Department of Education, along with other organizations, have endorsed this curriculum (Second Step, 2020d).

Second Step offers three different curriculum options depending on the age group that it is intended for. The first curriculum bundle that is offered is geared towards Preschool students. They learn how to get along with others and how to focus on what their teacher is saying and instructing them to do. The curriculum includes many visual supports such as weekly theme cards, feeling cards, and posters. It also includes puppets and songs to interact with the students at their level. Activity lengths are kept short, five to seven minutes, with units that include, but are not limited to, emotion management, learning skills, and transition to kindergarten (Second Step, 2020a).

The second curriculum bundle focuses on students from kindergarten to fifth grade. Units for this age group include bullying prevention and child protection. There is training

available for teachers online in order for them to make the most of the curriculum. (Second Step, 2020b). The curriculum uses games, activities, and videos to teach different SEL skills to help create a learning-friendly environment.

Lastly, there is a curriculum focused on the social and emotional needs of middle schoolers, sixth grade through eighth grade. Middle school can be a difficult time and a hard transition for a large number of students. Second Step offers a special curriculum that includes many units, which include recognizing bullying and harassment, mindsets and goals, and more. (Second Step, 2020c).

Each of the curriculums offered through Second Step provides age-appropriate activities and learning strategies to help regulate students' social and emotional well-being. The lessons give students examples of when and how to use skills, opportunity for discussions, and gives them a chance to practice their skills. Each curriculum also provides home activities to continue to support students, and their families, and keep open communication between home and school (Second Step, 2020d).

MindUP. The MindUP program was founded by the Goldie Hawn Foundation, a not-for-profit organization, in 2003, two years after 9/11, to help with the epidemic around the world of the aggression, anxiety, depression, and suicide response (MindUP, 2020). Their focus is on finding a way to promote positive mental health and well-being and was built upon four pillars that the foundation created: neuroscience, mindful awareness, positive psychology, social and emotional learning (MindUP, 2020). When students are distracted by outside of school factors, they are not able to take in the academic learning that is taking place. By providing teachers with curriculums that are pre-made and only

need to be adapted to fit the needs of their students. Students are provided with lessons and activities to help boost their SEL skills and help them take away some of the outside pressures and focus on their academics.

The Goldie Hawn Foundation completed research in the field of neuroscience. It is the area of science that “seeks to understand the structure and function of the brain and nervous system” (MindUP, 2020). In the programs, students will learn about the brain and the fact that this is where our emotions are managed.

The next pillar MindUP focuses on is looking into positive psychology and what individuals add to their communities. It is used to help students boost their well-being and grow upon what they already know about themselves as a person.

The third pillar is mindful awareness or mindfulness. The term mindfulness is also used in a therapy called Dialectical Behavior Theory which focuses on many of the same aspects that SEL does. The intent with mindfulness is to be aware of what is going on in the present moment, be non-judgemental, and give yourself control of your mind. It provides students with skills that will help them by observing and describing what they are noticing around them and within them.

The fourth and final pillar in MindUP is social and emotional learning; referring to being able to collect “knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors needed to develop the skills for self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making” (MindUP, 2020). This pillar focuses on the five competencies that CASEL has broken SEL down into making it a CASEL SElect program.

The MindUP program is focused on providing a curriculum for students in preschool through eighth grade. Getting Focused, Sharpening Your Senses, It's All About Attitude, and Taking Action Mindfully are the four units you will find available to teach the pillars to students (MindUP, 2020). This evidence-based program provides lessons that are based on themes and can be implemented with content standards because they are adaptable. Lessons are comprised of activities that focus on the four pillars and build upon the social and emotional abilities of our students as well as their cognitive abilities. There are also brain breaks included which are considered a core practice used to help keep the classroom calm and focused and are done three times a day (MindUP, 2020).

Weekly and Daily Routines

Incorporating SEL into the classroom does not have to be done through implementation of a curriculum. There are many different activities that can teach students SEL skills just as well as curriculums can. According to Dunn (2019), it is believed that SEL is proven to be the most effective method. Through the use of a variety of approaches, such as but not limited to, free-standing, explicit instruction, cooperative and project based learning, and integration into academic content areas (Dunn, 2019). The following sections will explain some of the options educators can use to support their students' social and emotional well-being.

Relationships. An important part of life is giving children at least one, if not more, adults that they can look up to, that they admire, and that they can trust in times of need. Teachers have the power to be one of those role-models for their students. As stated earlier, relationship skills is one of the competencies included in the SEL framework of CASEL.

There are many ways that teachers can positively influence the students in their classroom. Creating relationships with our students begins to set up success when it comes to SEL in the classroom. One of the competencies is relationship building, so by building authentic relationships with students you are providing them practice to SEL and modeling this without students even realizing it.

Dr. Pamela Cantor, who is the founder and senior science advisor of Turnaround for Children, spent time explaining how a close relationship between students and teachers, providing students with a sense of consistency and trust releases oxytocin which has a positive effect (Borovoy, 2019b). It has been determined that when students see their teacher in a positive way and feel a sense of community and worth in their teacher's eyes, they are more likely to put forth the effort in their school work, they are happier and willing to help out in the classroom more, and they are more apt to asking questions when in need of help. Aiden, an eight grader in the video *The Power of Relationships in School*, explained how his work ethic and confidence increase when he likes his teacher (Borovoy, 2019b).

Another important way teachers can aid their students with social and emotional skills is to be willing to be vulnerable in front of their students. Students are quite familiar with making mistakes and have many different emotions when they are made. If teachers take the opportunity to show to their students that they too are human and make mistakes, it can break down some of the barriers that students may have against their teachers. In order for this to be successful and educational, teachers need to use their mistakes as teachable moments for their students (Borovoy, 2019b). This is yet another time for educators to

model the use of SEL skills to students and provide evidence that the skills are efficient and worth using in their daily lives.

Teacher-Guided Supports. Throughout the school day, there are many supports that teachers can add into their classrooms that make a difference in the social and emotional well-being of students that are explicitly taught. It is easy to simply say ‘hello’ to each student as they walk in, and imagine the difference a pupil will feel if their teacher makes eye contact, using their name, and asks how they are doing. Greeting students authentically each and every morning not only builds on the relationship, but it also creates a little more attachment between students and teachers. Building healthy attachments can aid in creating a place for students to take risks and explore, in a safe environment, as it drives learning (Borovoy, 2019b).

Something that most teachers do automatically is praise and encourage the students in their classroom, and some even continue to do so as the students move to higher grades. When we praise our students for the great work they are putting forth, they are gaining confidence to build their self-awareness. McWhirter (2019) discussed the importance of encouraging students for not only coming to the correct outcome, but focusing on supporting students throughout the process regardless of their outcome. Another support that most teachers already implement in their classrooms are read alouds. These stories give students real life examples of problems and how characters handled the situation and they provide opportunities for cross-age mentoring or as I have heard it called buddies (CASEL, 2020a).

Class Contracts. Another competency SEL covers is the ability of being able to make responsible decisions. One way to help students grow in this area is by creating a class contract, or class rules, together as a community. Instead of students being told what the expectations in the classroom are, include students in creating the class expectations. This provides students with a sense of empowerment, ownership, and agreeance (Borovoy, 2019a). Students are more likely to follow the expectations when they are involved in their creation, are consistently reminded both verbally and visually of the expectations they agreed upon, and if they are phrased in a positive manner.

A fourth grade student, by the name of Jaylee, had the opportunity to be a part of this process and has said that she sees the class get along much better than in classrooms that rules were told to them (Borovoy, 2019a). Working together and holding each other accountable will increase instructional time and help with students' social and emotional well-being. Students are working on their SEL skills in various competencies while working on creating a class contract. Part of being a responsible student, and later a responsible adult, is being able to make decisions of doing the right thing and knowing what the consequences are.

Integration. SEL strategies can make a positive impact in single classrooms and will be able to reach even more students if the strategies are implemented school-wide. When schools can make changes such as student led clubs, low lighting, and calming colors it creates an even larger sense of community (Grisman, 2018). Providing students with strategies, places, and time to practice SEL skills will help imbed them into students' memories and help make them effective default strategies.

When children are having conflicts with their peers a great way to help build upon their SEL skills is to model the skills in real time by discussing strategies to help find a solution. Hold classroom meetings to have free-standing lessons or to problem solve a situation that is happening frequently in the classroom (Poliz, 2018). Integrate different skills into the standards and content that are already being taught in order to maximize instruction time. There are many locations within the school where quick mindful activities can be taught and used with students to help reground them and prepare them to jump back into academic learning (Prothero, 2019).

School and District Level Changes

Individual schools and districts can also make changes in order to help their students and schools become more SEL focused. Districts have the ability to include policies, standards, and support for their staff in order to make SEL a priority just like academics are (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Many schools and districts have a goal of creating safe and nurturing environments which SEL skills strive to achieve. Providing their educators with SEL standards, providing SEL programs, and developing a SEL vision and long-term plan will help reach the benefits SEL has to offer students (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Lastly, an initiative to monitor progress and outcomes from implementation of SEL skills is taking place, more focus can be placed on this type of instruction (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016).

Barriers

There are many ways that SEL skills can be implemented into the classroom. However, there are still barriers that are keeping schools and teachers from doing so. With

such a large importance and focus on standardized testing, the social and emotional well-being of students can be forgotten. Jennifer B. Rhodes is a licensed psychologist and relationship expert who was asked the question why SEL isn't being implemented in schools. She responds by saying "Good teachers already know that social and emotional development is key to a child's success. However, if a teacher's job is connected to students' test scores, there is very little time to do this type of teaching" (McWhirter, 2019, p. 3). With the looming pressure of student scores on standardized tests, 100% of educators' focus seems to be centered around teaching to and for the test.

McNall, CEO of Respectful Ways, also chimed in on why she believes SEL is not being taught in the classrooms more consistently. Her response is as follows:

Fear, time, stress, and money. Fear that if administrators admit to a problem, they're setting themselves up for criticism or, worse, a lawsuit. Time, because by prioritizing standardized testing back in 2001, we tilted the delicate balance of teaching both EQ [emotional quotient] and IQ [intelligence quotient].....Stress - spend a day at your local school and you'll see just how difficult it is to get anything done. And money - a stressed-out school is more likely to spend the rest of its budget at the end of the year on stockpiling office supplies than finding a quality SEL curriculum and training educators (McWhirter, 2019, p. 15).

The licensed psychologist has brought up many of the barriers that prevent SEL from being a consistent and effective part of the classroom and school communities. Even with these barriers, there is ample research providing the many benefits to implementing SEL into the classroom. Knowing what the barriers are is valuable for this project and for educators. In

order to bring SEL into the classroom, teachers need to know what they are up against in order to problem-solve and find a solution to the problem.

Implementation Summary

Implementation of SEL skills is essential to helping students build their social and emotional skills and teaching them to be confident and capable human beings (TEDx Talks, 2017). Whether a school or educator chooses to use a curriculum that is geared towards SEL, chooses to combine SEL skills with what is already happening in the school day, or chooses to use a combination of curriculum and free-standing lessons, students will be able to increase their social and emotional well-being and their academic performance. Studies about neuroscience have shown that 75% of a child's brain development happens between the ages of three and seven which is where implementation of SEL strategies should really begin (TEDx Talks, 2017). Just like with academic skills that build upon each other at each grade level, SEL strategies should be doing the same. The following sections will discuss the benefits and impacts of SEL implementation in the classroom, both for students' social and emotional well-being and their academic achievement, as well as the lifelong perks students will have.

Impacts and Benefits of SEL

Research on the effectiveness and achievement levels of students in various areas may help motivate educators and schools to implement SEL into their classrooms as well. The first section will focus on the advances that students have made in regards to their social and emotional well-being. These areas include managing emotions, creating and maintaining varied relationships, and making responsible decisions. The second section will

target academic achievement in students. Research will be conducted on disruption, suspension, and office referral rates, as well as how learning standards have either increased or decreased. The third section will look into the outcomes that the community will receive and how students' futures will be impacted by having explicit SEL instruction during their school years.

Social and Emotional Well-Being Impact and Benefits

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has many benefits when it comes to students' social and emotional well-being. Through not only teaching SEL skills, but also providing students time to practice these skills, students will be able to feel safer, more cared for, and supported by those around them (Grisman, 2018). Fall-Hamilton Elementary School in Nashville, Tennessee implemented SEL into their classrooms and their school as a whole. Skills were provided for both students and teachers alike in order to help the social and emotional well-beings of all. Through their various ways of implementation, they were able to decrease their student behavior referrals by 76% in about three years of consistency (Grisman, 2018). The school has a large number of students, 98%, who feel that there is at least one adult at school that truly cares about them (Grisman, 2018).

Schools that have implemented the MindUp curriculum have seen strong benefits from their students in many areas as well. 86% of children reported feeling a boost in their well-being and 83% of children have pointed out improvements in prosocial behavior (MindUP, 2020). Students have been shown to have better interactions with their peers, more empathy towards others, and be able to problem-solve more peacefully (TEDX Talks, 2017).

When students have been exposed to SEL, especially consistently and for an extended period of time, reports have shown that students have a decrease in levels of stress, reduced anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Dowling et. al., 2019). Students have been taught and use coping strategies to regulate themselves and have less emotional stress (PBIS Rewards, 2020). Suspension rates have been known to decrease as well. An elementary school made up of about 380 kindergarten through sixth grade in Sacramento piloted a program from EASEL (Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning) which provides icebreakers for students and gets them critically thinking. Before the Kernels program was put into place, there were 120 out of school suspensions in the 2016-2017 school year. After just one year of using Kernels, they dropped down their out of school suspensions to 66 in the 2017-2018 (Prothero, 2019). With students in school more often and having more of an ability to focus on lessons, academic achievement has been able to see improvements too.

Academic Impact and Benefits

Young scholars go to school with the expectation that their teachers will provide necessary instruction for them to learn content intended for them at their level. As stated before, there are many more skills that students should be learning while gaining their education. “Ignoring social and emotional skills development will have an adverse effect on academics” (PBIS Rewards, 2020). Students arrive at school coming from a wide diversity of backgrounds, some coming in with extra stress or trauma that they are expected to simply set aside and focus on their academics. Sadly, this isn’t possible for students unless they are taught how to do so.

The U.S. Department of Education completed a study on the benefits of academic performance based on the application of SEL in the classroom. Students who have been exposed to SEL have been shown to be 54% more likely to finish school and twice as likely to move on to higher education and obtain a degree (TEDx Talks, 2017).

SEL provides students with effective skills to cooperate with others, problem solve, and think critically. These skills have been proven to help decrease bullying and school suspensions while at the same time increasing students' engagement in their academic learning (McGraw Hill, 2017b). When students feel a sense of belonging and community at school they want to be at. Research has shown students with SEL in their academic day have a better attendance record (Prothero, 2019). Additionally, McWhirter (2019) describes that there have been reports of an 11% increase in academic improvement when pupils have had SEL informed curricula. With students' academic achievement being higher, they are more likely to have better futures even after they have graduated from high school.

Lifelong Impact and Benefits

Whether graduates decide to go into furthering their education or towards a career path, SEL proves to continually benefit those who have studied such skills. "...40 years of research show[s] that kids who master core life skills will succeed in the classroom and beyond.." (Poliz, 2018) making SEL another set of skills that will benefit our students for a lifetime. Students gain an education to further their lives and eventually find a career path. Those who have SEL experience have shown to be more likely to find full time employment (TEDx Talks, 2017). Not only would this be more applicable for students due

to their high academic achievement and better overall mental health, but SEL has shown to help shape the skills that employers covet the most.

Inc Magazine published the top ten most desired skills by employers by the year 2020 according to the World Economic Forum. All ten skills are taught through the application of SEL at school (TEDx Talks, 2019). When you apply for employment, the application itself asks about your qualifications and academic component of what is needed for the job. On the other hand, when you go in for an interview, common questions asked by the the employer typically include “Tell me about yourself” which discusses your various skills such as leadership, critical thinking, and working well with others, and “where do you see yourself in five years” which shows that you make goals for yourself and are determined (Haden, 2006).

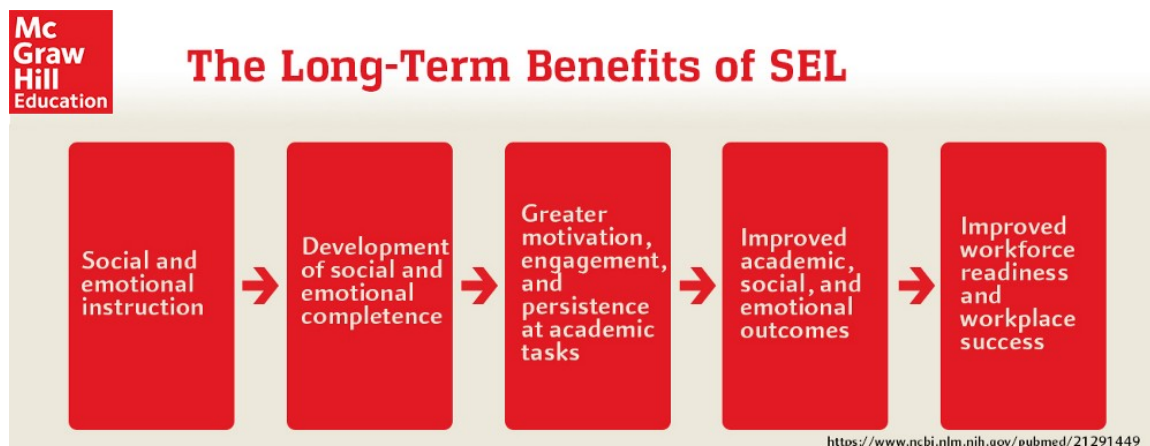
There are other long term benefits for students who have been exposed to SEL during their education. When pupils enter adulthood with this skill set, they are less likely to live in public housing, to need public assistance, and there is a 10% decrease of the chance of having a substance abuse (McWhirter, 2019). SEL skills give students the tools to make responsible decisions, have a higher work ethic, and make goals for themselves that will follow them to adulthood when higher stressors can come into their lives. Research has shown adverse effects when students are not exposed to SEL such as a 67% of a higher chance of being arrested in early adulthood, a 82% higher chance of illegal drug use, and 82% higher chance of needing welfare benefits (TEDx Talks, 2017). What scholars learn in childhood and are repeatedly exposed to will help them create a positive future for themselves.

Impacts and Benefits Summary

If an individual is proficient in SEL skills, they tend to have better mental well-being, greater success in their futures, and high income levels than their peers who are less proficient (McGraw Hill, 2017b). There are a multitude of impacts and benefits for implementing SEL in the classroom. When taught consistently, SEL has proven to help students in both their present and their futures because it can be a significant part in a student's overall educational experience (PBIS Rewards, 2020). The figure below shows the many advantages individuals will receive in the long-term when provided with SEL instruction.

Figure 3.

The Long-Term Benefits of SEL



There are many beneficial aspects of promoting social and emotional learning in the classroom and proof that it is valuable. Educators have an extremely important role in children's lives and that is to teach them skills that will help them academically, socially,

and emotionally. Caige Jambor expressed the idea of a ripple being created across an entire pond from one small pebble (TEDx Talks, 2019). It is time to stop focusing solely on preparing for standardized testing and time to teach our future generation skills to become self-aware, self-managed, gain social awareness, have productive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

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Chapter Two Summary

This chapter consisted of research that supports the importance of implementing social and emotional learning into the classroom. It started by highlighting the contextual factors that impact SEL instruction. It continued by discussing more thoroughly what SEL is and the five competencies that CASEL has developed to help with social and emotional skills. It also explained the various methods of implementation, explored a couple of curriculums already designed to help teachers teach such valuable skills, as well as listed examples of free-standing lessons and activities teachers can use to increase these skills in students' lives. Lastly, this chapter discussed the many benefits that SEL can have on

students. It dug into the social and emotional impacts, academic impacts, and the lifelong benefits.

Chapter Three will take the research findings to create a professional development presentation for educators to learn more about the importance of SEL. A description of the project created will be provided, as well as the timeline for implementation, and the intended audience and setting. A description in detail of what the presentation sections will look like and the activity guide that is connected will be given.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

This project focuses on the importance of bringing in social and emotional learning (SEL) into the classrooms to aid students in their overall well-being. The guiding question for this project is as follows: *How can implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) help meet the needs of students' social, emotional, and academic well-being?*

Chapter Three will give an overview of the project and the details that went into its creation. It will include the paradigm used to guide the project and the rationale behind the choice. Next, a detailed description of the intended participants and settings will be provided. Lastly, the chapter will outline the process and timeline for the project.

Project Overview

The objective of this capstone is to show how the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) in the classroom helps students' social, emotional, and academic well-being. The research conducted has shown the importance of SEL in the classroom and the benefits students experience after gaining these skills. Educators seem to be aware of the importance of incorporating SEL in the classroom, however, there are barriers that are preventing this instruction from happening. The most common barrier is the need to focus on academics and preparing students for standardized testing. By providing educators with evidence of the academic impacts of SEL instruction and offering free-standing lessons and activities, this should encourage more SEL instruction in the classroom. My project consists

of a professional development presentation consisting of three sessions and ten free-standing SEL lesson plans.

Research Framework

Educators have a difficult task of finding the best way to present academic standards to students. The same dilemma presented itself when it came to preparing a project based on the research that I found and what I would like to see happen with the results. There were two ideas that came to mind to best present the importance of SEL instruction in our classrooms. One goal I had was to create free-standing lessons and activities to provide educators ways to teach students SEL skills without having to purchase a full curriculum, which happened to be another barrier to implementing SEL into the classroom. The second goal I had was to show teachers and other educators that SEL has a strong connection to not only the social and emotional well-being of our students' but also to their academic achievement and in their lives beyond their school years.

Robinson (2019) stated that if you want to invest in yourself as an educator you will be making growth towards your own career and the academic growth for your students. Educators strive to be life-long learners and are given professional development opportunities to provide continued learning experiences. The article continued to list the benefits of professional development such as setting up teachers for success, expanding the knowledge base of the teacher, and providing teachers with opportunities to set their own goals and work towards achieving them (Robinson, 2019). Developing a professional development presentation will expand the knowledge of teachers on what SEL is. Teachers

can also set their own goals for implementation in their classrooms based on the benefits SEL provides students.

The field of education is not the only section of the workforce that offers professional development opportunities. Doctors, CEOs, and managers also attend conferences and seminars to increase their knowledge in their perspective fields. Learning does not, and should not, end after graduating from college or high school. When professionals continue to learn, it keeps their mind sharp, helps keep them interested in their work, and can help boost workplace morale (Crawford, 2016). Professional development also contributes to educators improving their lessons, showing more organization and better planning skills, seeing greater student outcomes, and, as noted before, it is a place where teachers gain new knowledge (Queens University of Charlotte, 2020). As stated in Chapter Two, mental health cases in adolescents have grown over the years and if we do not start addressing the need for students' social and emotional well-being, it can be predicted that this number will continue to rise.

Malcolm Knowles is an American Educator that has coined the term andragogy which is "the art and science of adult learning" (Pappas, 2013). Teaching adults is different from teaching children for multiple reasons according to Knowles. Adults have more experiences which creates more of a memory reservoir to refer to, are more self-directed, and have a different perspective (Pappas, 2013). Since they learn differently, it is important to keep those factors in mind while creating professional development opportunities for adults. More motivation and interest will be provided when the adult learners feel the

relevancy of the topic and can see how it can connect to their life, whether it be their personal life, work life, or both (Pappas, 2013).

In creating the stand-alone lesson, I used a format that includes the following stages: grade level, duration, SEL competency, lesson prep/materials, learning targets, anticipatory set, lesson activities, reflection/wrap up, and extensions. By providing the grade level, duration of the lesson, SEL competency, and lesson materials and prep, an educator can look at the lesson, decide if it is a right fit for their classroom and know what is needed to be prepared for the lesson. The learning targets set the stage for what the students will be able to do after the lesson has been presented. Providing students with an anticipatory set will pull students' engagement into the lesson. The lesson activities include any presentations, videos, discussions, or hands on activities that will make up the lesson. The wrap up and reflection is a time for students to think about what they have learned and apply it. Finally, there is a section for extensions if there are follow up activities that would complement the lesson and need more time to do so.

Audience and Setting

Audience

The audience for this project is mainly focused on educators that teach students in kindergarten through sixth grade. As an elementary educator, I have knowledge of these grade levels and their developmental level. The extent of the teachers' knowledge of SEL may vary depending on what professional development opportunities they have had, the focus their school has had on social and emotional education in the past, on the undergrad or graduate courses they have taken, and on the length in which they have been teaching.

The presentation can be adapted to give a brief overview of what SEL is or left with a more in-depth look, depending on the needs of the audience.

It would also be beneficial for support staff, administration, specialist teachers, and any other teacher that works directly with students to be a part of a presentation. It is strongly suggested this be the same presentation that classroom teachers receive, but could also be an adapted version as well. The implementation of SEL works best when the entire school is on the same page and using a common language. When students hear the same strategies given by multiple adults in their lives, they are more likely to remember the skills and this will lessen the confusion about what to do in certain situations.

As mentioned before, the presentation is geared towards elementary educators teaching grades K-6. However, this presentation could be used with little to no adaptations as most of the content pertains to all grade levels. The activities provided, on the other hand, are not developmentally appropriate for older students and would need to be either adapted or recreated entirely.

Setting

The setting for this project is for any elementary school whether that be a K-6 school or a K-5 school. The professional development presentation can be provided for all teachers, support staff, and administration. The activities are developmentally focused for kindergarten through sixth grade students. The information from the presentation can be used in all types of school settings which include, but are certainly not limited to, public schools, private schools, and Title 1 schools.

Project Description

This project is designed to be presented to the entire staff of an elementary school. It consists of three different sections that are each an hour long. The purpose of the presentations is to provide educators with the background knowledge of what SEL is, why it is important to implement into their classrooms, and how to get started on implementation. The first section of this presentation consists of digging deeper into what SEL is and the different competencies that CASEL has to offer to help break SEL down into smaller areas. Participants will be able to explain to others what SEL is and the different areas it includes. The second section included all of the impacts that incorporating SEL into the classroom has on students' social and emotional well-being, their academic gains, and their lifelong benefits. This section also dug into the barriers that have been preventing implementation for teachers in the first place. Participants will be able to explain the reasons why SEL is important and how it affects our students in the present and in the future. The last section of the presentation focused on the different ways of implementing SEL into the classroom, both curriculum and free-standing lessons. This transitioned into various free-standing lessons and activities that can be implemented immediately in the classroom. Participants will be able to implement free-standing SEL lessons that were shared with them and be able to create their own.

The presentations would work best if provided at the beginning of the school year to set educators up for success and start implementation as soon as the first few weeks of school. The sections have the option of being presented separately or combined, depending on the schedule of the school holding the professional development. Paper copies and

electronic copies are available at the attendee's convenience. Before beginning the first section, a rationale was provided for the audience as to why SEL is important in the classroom and includes some statistics on adolescents' mental health. When the third section was presented, all attendees were provided with a shared Google Folder of the free-standing lessons and activities that were presented. The hope of the shared folder is that teachers will create their own free-standing lessons and activities and add to the folder as a collective resource for everyone.

Assessment

Presentations start with a pre-assessment, or pre-survey to check in to see what knowledge they already have before they take part in any learning activities or discussions. This pre-assessment includes questions such as what is Social and Emotional Learning, do you already implement SEL into your personal classroom, and others. This will help me gauge where my participants are at with SEL knowledge and see where we may need to spend more time throughout the sessions. At the end of presentations, a post-assessment is provided to see what learning has taken place. This includes, but is not limited to, questions such as what is SEL, what are the competencies CASEL has broken SEL into, and to list some ways that SEL can be implemented in their classroom.

Educators will also be asked to make observations and assessments to how their students are responding to SEL lessons in their classrooms. They will reflect on what they notice about students' behaviors, reflect on how successful they believe the lessons are and how they may need to be adjusted to become more effective, and if they notice the benefits on both student social and emotional well-being and their academic achievement.

Timeline

The idea for this project has been a passion of mine since I became a teacher and started working more closely with students in the classroom. I have always thought that SEL instruction has had a place in the classroom, yet it seemed to be a struggle to find in any of the schools I worked in. It sparked my interest in finding out more about SEL and the impact it had on students. In the Fall of 2019, I began to construct the idea of how I can find out the significance of SEL in the classroom and began some research for an action research course through Hamline's Masters of Education program. In the Summer of 2020, I continued to work on this idea as I progressed through Hamline's MAED program where my heavy research really began. I conducted extensive research into what SEL is, the ways it can be implemented into a classroom, and the various areas of impact SEL can have on a student. The project was completed in the Fall of 2020 with creating the professional development presentation, starting the collection of SEL lessons and activities, and completing the capstone paper. It will be available for use in the Spring of 2021.

Summary

Chapter Three laid out my plans for a project to help educators realize the importance of including social and emotional learning in the classroom. Based on my research question: *How can the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning help meet the needs of students' social, emotional, and academic well-being?*, I made a plan to create a professional development resource available for educators to learn more. The presentation will explain more in-depth about what SEL is, the competencies based on CASEL's work, the impacts on students' social and emotional well-being, academics, and

the lifelong skills students will obtain. The last piece of my project will include various activities that teachers can use in their classrooms as free-standing lessons that incorporate SEL.

Chapter Four will be a conclusion of my capstone and the process of both my research and the creation of my project. I will reflect on what I have learned, the benefits other teachers can have based on my project, and how my project can be used in the future by myself and other educators.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Introduction

When I began the road to creating my capstone, I knew that Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) was a topic that I was passionate about. I thought about ways that I could turn my passion for SEL into a capstone project to share the importance of these skills with other educators. I strive to find activities that will help my students enhance their social and emotional skills, boost their academic achievement, and help them focus on learning while at school. With that in mind, I created a starting point by researching the following question: *How can implementation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) help meet the needs of students' social, emotional, and academic well-being?*

As educators, our goal is most likely to help our students become well-rounded citizens and be successful in whichever path they choose in their futures. Academic skills are essential to start the process of helping students create a profitable future. Social and emotional skills, in my opinion, are equally important to be able to provide students with skills including decision making, healthy relationships, and managing themselves.

Now that I have gained more information on SEL, ways of implementation, and the benefits that can be received from consistent implementation and have had the opportunity to reflect on my learnings, this chapter will highlight aspects of what I have gained through this journey. I will start by discussing how the literature review provided in Chapter Two that framed my presentation and the creation of the free-standing lessons I created. I will continue by illustrating the possible implications the project may produce in a variety of

schools. Then, I will discuss where I hope I have for this project in the future and what some possible next steps could be. In conclusion, I will end this chapter with a personal reflection of my overall learning throughout this process, the researching process, writing process, and creation of my project.

Relevance of Literature Review

When creating my presentation and planning for my free-standing lessons, reviewing literature helped to guide my decisions. I have taught at multiple schools and through my experiences I have seen how all students could benefit from SEL instruction. CASEL (2020) describes Social and Emotional learning as children and adults learn how to manage and understand their own emotions, how to set goals for themselves, how to show empathy, work on creating positive relationships, and how to make responsible decisions. Dunn (2019) and CASEL (2020) also provide the five competencies, which include self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness, that help create a well-rounded SEL experience. These definitions and areas are included in both my presentation and show the lesson areas that need to be created.

Another section of the professional development presentation includes the benefits and impacts of SEL instruction. This helps provide educators why SEL implementation is essential to our classrooms and why SEL matters to them. Grisman (2018) and Prothero (2019) were effective in providing evidence of schools that have implemented SEL into their schools as a whole. The most beneficial research that can persuade educators to be more inclined to implement SEL includes seeing other schools having success when put in

place. McWhirter (2019) also provides evidence of the academic achievement that schools can see when they partner academic learning and SEL learning together in the classroom. Lastly, I found the TEDx Talks (2017; 2019) that I viewed to be helpful in promoting SEL in the long-run by providing evidence of how these skills will be beneficial in student's future searches for careers and how when students reach adulthood, they will be more capable of providing for themselves without the help of government.

Second Step (2020) and MindUP (2020) were helpful to give my research a glimpse into what a pre-made SEL curriculum looks like. The websites included types of activities that were provided and how the curriculum continues and evolves for multiple age groups. While researching what activities can be considered free-standing lessons, I discovered activities such as class contracts, teacher guided supports, and building relationships that were helpful to provide simple ways teachers can include SEL into their daily activities (Borovoy, 2019a; Borovoy, 2019b; McWhirter, 2019). Many teachers are already including these types of activities into their daily routines and can boost a teachers confidence in their ability to implement SEL into their classrooms. These resources were most helpful when I began my work creating free-standing lessons and having sample lessons for session 3 of my presentation.

Implications

My capstone project is broken up into two sections; the professional development presentation and free-standing SEL lessons. The professional development presentation is meant to benefit many groups of educators. My hope is that the presentation will be the

stepping stone to a school starting to look closer into making time for SEL instruction in their daily routine.

Free-standing SEL lessons provide a low-cost, yet highly creative and effective way of including these skills into daily routines. By creating lessons in each of the competencies, I created a collection of lessons for myself so I do not have to reinvent the wheel every year. Instead, I can locate the already created lessons and make adjustments and accommodations as I see necessary. The same is true for other educators, they will have a starting point of lessons for their collection and can add in their own ideas. My ultimate goal is that schools, or grade-levels, will share a common drive where they have the ability to create, share, and recycle each other's SEL lessons that have been created.

Limitations

While creating my project, I did not run into any unexpected occurrences that impacted my final project. The vision that I had from the beginning of my process was able to be completed to my full expectations. Looking at the free-standing SEL lesson plans, it is important to remember that this is simply a start to the lesson library and is not completed. My vision is that multiple teachers will use what they learned through the presentations and continue to create their own SEL lessons and add them to the library. The ten lessons I have created consists of only a small sample of what possibilities are available. For each grade level, that is only five lessons created. In order to make the impacts and benefits of SEL a reality, more SEL instruction needs to be put in place than what is presented here.

Moving Forward

Now that my project is complete, I feel like it is even more important to share my findings with my colleagues. I have created several initial free-standing SEL lessons that I can share and continue to grow. Although I do not have a classroom of my own currently, I am excited to share with those I work with and hopefully be able to implement into my own classroom sooner rather than later. During my interview for my paraprofessional position, the principal and assistant principal at my school informed me that the school is adding SEL into their expectations. When discussing my project, they showed interest in me presenting and sharing my professional development presentation with my fellow colleagues.

When thinking about the future, I do not see this as being the end. My project has the potential to continue growing indefinitely. As I continue to teach, I plan to continue creating free-standing SEL lessons that I will continue to add to my SEL library. Also, as I start to share my lessons with my colleagues, my hope is that we begin a shared library where we will all continue to create our SEL lessons and share them in a space where we can grow and learn with each other. The lessons in the library are geared towards certain age groups, however, adjustments and accommodations can be made to meet the needs of other age groups.

As time goes on, I believe that more research will be published in regards to SEL. Further steps will include staying up to date on current research on SEL research in order to keep lessons and information relevant to the current data. As more research becomes available, adjustments to the professional development presentation and ongoing lessons

can be added. An area that would be helpful to dig further into would be the various contextual factors and how to make SEL instruction meaningful for all students involved.

Personal Learning

Throughout the process of writing my capstone and completing the research, I not only reinforced my passion for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) being a part of the classroom, I also made new discoveries that I was not expecting. This entire process gave me the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone, dive into research, and really showcase why SEL is an important aspect to have in the classroom. As I have stated multiple times, I believe the skills offered through SEL instruction are as important as the academic skills students receive. The research completed in my capstone supports this by stating how SEL skills and academic skills work together to provide a well-rounded education for our students and provide a more positive outlook for students' futures.

While completing my research, there was not any information that completely shocked me, but research opened my eyes to different aspects of how SEL is important for students. It resonated with me that these skills are not only important for everyday life at school or in the workplace and that they are essential for the interview process itself. Without being able to work cooperatively with others, make responsible decisions, and be able to regulate your own emotions, among many others, it would be difficult to create a life of success. It also resonated with me that when students are able to control their emotions, manage their time and responsibilities, and problem-solve with others that they would gain more academic achievement.

I learned about myself, the writing process, and APA formatting as well throughout my journey of earning my Master's of Education degree. Previously, I felt doubtful regarding my professional writing abilities and was unsure how to appropriately express my ideas to others professionally. I know what I want to say and struggle with how to say it in a more professional manner. This writing process and getting feedback from peers and professors have given me more confidence in my writing abilities and it does not seem like it is such a chore anymore. At the beginning of this process, I was not sure if I wanted to continue to further my education knowing I was expected to write such a large paper, something that I have never done before. APA formatting is one of the aspects that I was unsure of the most. However, as I continued to practice and learn from my professors, I feel I have a stronger understanding of how to properly cite information via this format.

Though it has been overwhelming at times, I feel proud of myself for sticking to the program, learning more about the writing process and formatting, and researching to learn more about one of my passions when it comes to education. Reflecting on my personal life and my professional life helped me realize where this passion stemmed from.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I revisited the essential information I've learned throughout the process of answering the question: *How can implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) help meet the needs of students' social, emotional, and academic well-being?* I continued by discussing the implications of the project and how I would like to see my project expand and continue to grow. Lastly, I reflected on the learning that

occurred throughout the process through researching, writing, and creating my capstone paper and project.

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