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**WHAT EFFECT DOES SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING HAVE ON
ELEMENTARY STUDENTS USING THE SECOND STEP CURRICULUM?**

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree of
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ABSTRACT

“Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020). This capstone was developed around the guiding question: *What effect does social and emotional learning have on elementary students using the Second Step Curriculum?* Due to the lack of teaching SEL in our district even though they purchased Second Step curricula in 2017 for kindergarten through fourth grade students; I wanted to know more about why they chose Second Step and the effects it would have on elementary students. Due to my finding on the positive effects teaching SEL to elementary students the project I developed was a professional development for my staff to help them understand the importance of teaching SEL but also show how they can easily use the Second Step resource provided to them. The project consisted of a google slides presentation, explanation of Second Step curriculum resources, and handout. Development and implementation of this work in 2020 lead to a greater understanding of social-emotional learning and the use of Second Step curriculum. Potential further impacts of this work include a professional on Second Step curriculum shared and taught through a distance learning platform.

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CHAPTER ONE

Social-Emotional Learning and Second Step Curriculum

Introduction

Social-emotional learning (SEL) skills are critical to students' success, beginning as early as preschool. Even though children attend preschool, we as educators have children who are coming into school without knowing how to solve challenging academic problems, self-regulate when faced with new or changing situations, show empathy towards someone in their classroom they don't know very well, ignore distractions happening around the classroom, or solving basic disagreement such as who goes first. From my experience, this lack of education on social-emotional learning skills results in more off-task and disruptive behavior in students as they get older. When I think of the off-task and disruptive behaviors that relate to social-emotional skills that I see being displayed in a school setting. They start out with just small arguments on the playground or a show of frustration during a challenging problem, and escalate into disagreements every day on the playground, and slamming the computer or breaking a pencil, to then storming out of the room because the problems are too hard to solve. Eventually, student

just shuts down and gives up on themselves because they don't have the skills to solve the problem or recognize they are frustrated and need a break. I believe it is important to help students develop SEL skills in their elementary years so they can apply the skills as they move into middle school, high school, furthered education, starting a job, and adulthood.

The Second Step Curriculum supplies educators with an “instruction in social and emotional learning with units on skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, friendship skills, and problem solving.” (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020). It is helpful for teachers to administer this because it has separate scripted lessons to teach from, building off each other from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade with a common language. I am focusing on it because I believe the units Second Step focuses on are needed to be taught to students so they know how to learn to the best of their ability, show empathy to others, manage their own emotions, create friendships that last, and use problem solving skills. By using the Second Step Curriculum's sets of lessons for each grade, we as teachers are able to teach social and emotional learning skills on; empathy, emotion management, friendship, and problem solving. This results in a positive environment where students can grow as learners and be successful citizens in the world.

There is a high need for educators to teach social and emotional learning to their students, especially in elementary years. Students come to school with a variety of needs that must be addressed before learning can begin. Instructional leaders need to get social and emotional learning resources in educators' hands to help direct students' development

of social-emotional learning skills. This leads me to my question: *What effect does social and emotional learning have on elementary students using the Second Step Curriculum?*

Overview

Throughout this chapter, I provide a rationale for this course of study and describe why this research and project is significant to me as an educator. I also provide an explanation of why this research and project is important to other educators. In conclusion, I share some of the challenges I faced as an educator that led me to this research question and inquiries about social-emotional learning and the use of Second Step Curriculum.

Rationale

As a 3rd grade teacher, it seems that each year I see more students coming into the classroom and around the school building that have a lack of social-emotional skills and tier two and three behaviors. The Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (2019) has created a tier system that places students into three different tiers based on how they can learn during core instruction without showing negative behaviors. Most, if not all students in a classroom are in tier one, which is for students that are a part of the mainstream classroom and receive no special education services. The core instruction gives them what they need to be successful. Tier two has students that need support with improving specific SEL skills to help them become successful during core instruction time. Usually an intervention is put in place and administered by the classroom teacher to track if the support chosen is helping the student or not. Tier three typically contains only a few students in the classroom that need intensive support,

both in the classroom and outside, to become successful during core instruction. (PBIS, 2019). Some of the negative behaviors I have seen from students in tier two are continual interruption of others' learning by slamming the classroom door, tipping over chairs, throwing class supplies, hitting others, climbing on lockers, running away from school, and cursing at other students.

SEL is now a critical piece of students' education. Students must be taught how to use skills for learning, showing empathy, managing their emotions, building and maintaining friendships, and practicing problem solving. Learning these skills helps students become successful in core instruction by teachers.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to describe the different effects of teaching social-emotional learning to elementary students. I also hope to learn how Second Step Curriculum corresponds with current social-emotional learning guidelines through Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the effectiveness of the curriculum.

“The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) is a trusted source for knowledge about high-quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL). CASEL supports educators and policy leaders and enhances the experiences and outcomes for all PreK-12 students.”

By learning about the effectiveness of the Second Step Curriculum, I will be able to create a professional development and inform our staff on this curriculum, which my district first bought for use during the school year of 2017-2018.

In the following paragraphs, I highlight the components of my personal journey as an educator that allowed me to identify the need for social-emotional learning skills in elementary schools.

Personal Journey

I started teaching in 2013, and over the past seven years I have noticed a significant change in the students' social and emotional needs and their ability to solve problems. My first year of teaching, I was at a charter school teaching first grade. For the past six years I have been teaching third grade at a public elementary school in a north metro suburb of the Twin Cities in Minnesota. This section will be taking a look at my past five years more in depth and how it led me to this project.

My first year of teaching at this school, I was educated on the teaching skills I needed to teach academics and manage a classroom, but I did not realize the depth of the social and emotional needs the students would have. I was not informed during my undergrad program about how a teacher should go about teaching social-emotional learning. There was a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and well as ethnic backgrounds in my building. The school, which consisted of about 540 students in the building, was 5% Asian, 8% Hispanic, 37% Black, 41% white and 9% 2 or more races. I learned that I could not just expect to teach, but had to develop a relationship with the students. I also spent many days just working on problem-solving skills as students

worked on group projects and didn't have the skills to cooperate. These projects resulted in students arguing and leaving the classroom to meet with a counselor. It was through my first year that I learned that students need much more than academics taught to them. They also needed social-emotional learning skills, but our school had no curriculum to use. Thankfully the next year the district bought Second Step SEL Curriculum for teachers to use.

During my second year I knew that I wanted to try out the Second Step Curriculum the district had bought, so I did the first unit on skills for learning and really liked how the students applied it within the classroom. As the year continued, there was more pressure to fit in our daily 90 minutes of reading and 90 minutes of math along with our social studies and science mini-units, so Second Step faded out, as there wasn't enough time for everything to be taught in a day. Come mid-year, I had students' negative behaviors escalating, and students were not able to work together with partners or groups again. So I looked into the Second Step Curriculum and found the problem solving unit. This unit was very helpful, but I realized I should've done it sooner rather than later in the year so the students had the skills and were practicing them in a smaller setting before needing them for the large project at the end of the year.

In my third and fourth year, I continued seeing more tier two and three actions with students. I had a large group of students with autism and emotional behavioral disorders in my room, most of the day with a paraprofessional to help support those students during core instruction. I really wanted all students to succeed in my classroom no matter their learning style or ability. I felt I did a good job of developing a relational

and strict loving structure for all to follow, but when it came to unexpected or uncontrollable changes at school or at home, a few students would struggle with focusing and showing negative actions toward learning, resulting in the rest of the class not being able to learn to their full potential. It was then that I was in my masters program and thinking about my capstone project, and I wanted to know more about the effects of social-emotional learning. I also want to know more about the Second Step Curriculum and how to effectively teach it, as we had never had professional development on it, even though my school purchased it for us to use.

Summary

Social-emotional learning is something I view as a priority that should be a part of daily instruction. Throughout this paper I conduct a literature review on the effects of social-emotional learning and Second Step Curriculum. This information will help me to develop the professional development that will be presented to the staff at my school, or can be used for any school using Second Step Curriculum. In chapter two, I review the literature that supports my capstone project. In chapter three, I outline my project and explain how I choose a professional development to present what I have learned. In chapter four, I discuss the implementation of the project, review my capstone project by revisiting the research question, and outline the project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social-emotional learning (SEL) as, “the process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to recognize and manage their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging social situations constructively” (Massari, 2011, p. 9). This chapter discusses what Second Step Curriculum is, as well as identifies the effects that teaching social-emotional learning skills to elementary students has on them, therefore supporting my research question: *What effect does social and emotional learning have on elementary students using the Second Step Curriculum?*

In this review of the research literature, the key components of Second Step and social-emotional learning (SEL) were explored. It uncovered all the components of Second Step curriculum including the history of how it was created. Making connection

to CASEL and its five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Sharing a figure 1.1 of the connections between CASEL and Second Step curriculum alignment of the core competencies. Next, I researched the approaches to teaching social-emotional learning to make a curriculum effective and supporting how Second Step aligns with those approaches. Then, I shared different assessments to use on students to see where they are at developmentally on SEL. After I listed the effects of SEL in the classroom/elementary school, on emotional intelligence, preventing bullying, academic achievement and future success. Many important ideas uncovered during the review process indicated that Second Step is a quality SEL curriculum to be taught consecutively from preschool to eighth grade. It also uncovered that teaching social and emotional learning (SEL) at “an elementary school level enhances students’ abilities to understand and mandate their emotions, set and achieve personal and academic goals, show respect and empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible and ethical decisions” (Dusenbury, 2017, p. 2).

Second Step Curriculum

Second Step Curriculum is a social-emotional learning curriculum that teaches students from preschool to eighth grade skills for learning, empathy, problem-solving, and emotional management. “Social-emotional learning is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make

responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2020). When students are able to demonstrate these social-emotional skills it can lead to academic success (Williams, p. 20).

The first section I looked back at history to learn about how Second Step curriculum was developed. Finding that Second Step also aligns with Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) core competencies.

History of Second Step Curriculum

Second Step was developed from a nonprofit organization called Committee for Children (2020) that recognized the need for an SEL curriculum. They began a Steps to Respect program to address bullying in schools. Committee for Children did a review of research on the Steps to Respect program which focuses on bullying and friendship to show that friendships protect children from the harmful effects of bullying (2005). CASEL stands for the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020). By visiting their website, you are able to see the social-emotional standards they have set, due to their mission which is to help make evidence-based social-emotional learning a built-in part of education from preschool through high school (2020). Due to this research and creation of standards, the Committee for Children (2020) revised the Second Step SEL Program into a program that can teach all five core competencies from CASEL. Definitions from CASEL SEL Framework are as follows:

Self-Awareness: Self-awareness is the ability to recognize how behavior is influenced by personal emotions and thoughts, as well as values. Self-awareness

also includes being grounded in a sense of confidence and optimism as well as looking at one's strengths and weaknesses.

Self-Management: Self-management is defined as the ability to control your emotions, behaviors, and thoughts across different situations. The ability to control urges or impulses and manage stress while also self-motivating and setting personal goals is considered a piece of self-management.

Social Awareness: Social awareness is one's ability to recognize others' perspectives and empathize with others. Another piece of social awareness includes respecting differences in others' diverse backgrounds and cultures, and recognizing and understanding different sets of ethical and social norms.

Relationship Skills: Relationship skills include the ability to start and sustain healthy relationships from those different from you as well as similar to you. Relationship skills also include being able to communicate effectively with others through listening, cooperating, and making appropriate choices as they relate to potentially negative peer pressure.

Responsible Decision-Making: Responsible decision-making includes one's ability to make respectful choices about social interactions and one's own behavior, as well as to consider social norms, safety issues, and ethical norms.

Also important to responsible decision-making is the ability to assess the potential consequences of one's actions, as well as consider the impact those decisions will have on others.(CASEL, 2020. p.2)

Second Step is a curriculum that teaches four skill areas: skills for learning, empathy, emotional management and problem solving. Committee for Children (2016) aligned CASEL's five SEL core competencies with the four skill areas of Second Step (see Figure 1.1). CASEL's five SEL core competencies are self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Second Step is a program rooted in social-emotional learning. CASEL recognized Second Step as a CASEL-SElect program in their guide to preschool and elementary programs (2016).

Figure 1.1*Alignment Chart: CASEL Core SEL Competencies*

Second Step Program Element	Key Skill(s) Developed	CASEL Core SEL Competencies
Brain Builder Games (K-3)	Executive-function skills	Self-Management
Skills for Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus attention • Listen with attention • Identify and use self-talk • Be assertive • Remember directions • Stay on task • Ignore distractions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Management • Self-Awareness
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and understand one's own and others' feelings • Build vocabulary of feelings words • Begin to take others' perspectives • Listen to others • Have empathy • Show compassion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship Skills • Responsible Decision-Making • Self-Awareness • Social Awareness
Emotion Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and understand one's own feelings • Recognize strong feelings • Calm down strong feelings • Use the Ways to Calm Down 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible Decision-Making • Self-Awareness • Self-Management
Problem Solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendship skills • Calm down before solving problems • Describe the problem • Think of many solutions • Explore the consequences of the solutions • Pick the best solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship Skills • Responsible Decision-Making • Social Awareness

Note. “Alignment Chart: CASEL Core SEL Competencies.” Adapted from Committee for Children, 2016.

<https://app.secondstep.org/Portals/0/common-doc/k-5-CASEL-alignment-second-step.pdf>

. Copyright 2016 by the Committee for Children.

Not only can we see that Second Step aligns with CASEL standard but here was also a brief done by Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R. (2017) which recognized Second

Step as a program that demonstrates significant positive effects. For at least two years and has narrative reviews of three separate studies, demonstrating effectiveness (p. 5).

Second Step is a curriculum embedded with social and emotional learning to help schools become learning environments that are supportive and successful. The curriculum has a holistic approach that provides help for educational professionals, families, and the larger community to have an active role in social-emotional growth and children's safety (Committee for Children, 2020). Due to the curriculum's holistic approach, it helps with effectiveness in promoting social-emotional development.

In the second section I researched the best approaches to teaching social-emotional learning skills for all curriculums. Then researching if and how Second Step followed these approaches.

Approaches to Teaching SEL

In Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R. (2017) brief they share four approaches that create an effective program. One approach is having lessons that provide a step by step instruction to teach (2017). Second Step provides weekly lesson cards that build upon each other throughout the curriculum and grade levels (2020). This is very important for elementary years, as this is when executive function skill develops rapidly. These executive function skills are crucial to students' self-regulation, the ability to focus attention, shift attention, and resist distractions. Teaching these step-by-step lessons also helps establish regular deep breathing and attentive listening to promote self-regulation (Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R, 2017).

The second approach that is supported in the Second Step Curriculum is encouraging school partnerships with and involving families. Second Step encourages this by including following-through cards and home links for parents to do at home. The home links connect with the lesson being taught at school and allow the parents to discuss and integrate the skill at home. (Committee for Children, 2020). Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R's brief shares that school-family partnerships with SEL activities are especially helpful when there is two-way communication with families and teachers and family involvement at home and at school.

A third approach in teaching SEL that is important in its curriculum is that they are culturally and linguistically sensitive (2017, p. 8). Second Step approaches this within the classroom curriculum. It teaches preschool through eighth grade students through age-appropriate lessons, games, activities, and media. The topics taught are emotional management, situational awareness, academic achievement, bullying prevention, and child protection (Committee for Children, 2020). "More importantly in multi-ethnic contexts teaches awareness, openness, and respect for all of the cultures represented in their classroom, and their skill in effectively engaging the whole student in learning" (Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R, 2017 p. 9). As teachers practice this, the lesson provided can engage students' learning through weekly lesson cards, following-through cards, home links, brain builder activities, student handouts, puppets, songs, posters, and videos (Committee for Children, 2020).

The final approach is to establish a school-wide organization of structures (Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R., 2017). Through buying the Second Step curriculum

you are able to buy it for grade pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. When doing this you create a school wide organization and structure the common language on SEL skills being taught.

Teachers have reported that the Second Step program is engaging for both teachers and students through the videos, interactive puppets and shared materials across grade levels. It is also flexible whether they want to follow the scripted lesson cards or customize it to fit in the classroom; both showing positive results. Teachers also shared that the program is relevant and has real scenarios that connect with their building and community. It is also simple to use and has results that show improvements in active use and participation in the classroom (Committee for Children, 2020).

In the third section I will research the assessments Second Step uses to show progress on learning of social-emotional learning skills. The different methods and ways that a teacher can implement it into their own classroom.

Second Step Assessment

There are two ways that you can assess Second Step SEL. There is a more formal way called randomized control trial (RCT) or a more casual way of asking for feedback. The teacher should pick an assessment tool that relates to their goals. When a teacher chooses what assessment they want to use, they need to think about a few things before they choose an assessment goal. They should consider the implementation fidelity, find a foundation of their students' social-emotional competence, create a summative assessment and formative assessment, and then decide how the program will be evaluated (Committee for Children, 2020).

Second Step offers four providers that have formative and summative assessments. The four providers include Aperture, Panorama Education, Youth in Mind, and Devereaux. Each provider focuses their assessments on a specific age group, is formatted for online use or can be used with paper/pencil, takes three to thirty minutes to complete, and is for the teacher or student to do. Based on what a teacher is looking to assess, they can use a different Second Step assessment (Committee for Children, 2020). There are a variety of formal SEL assessment tools, and leading experts recommend two things. The first is to use direct measures of students' social and emotional skills to inform the teaching and learning process. The second is to consider using student surveys to measure the school climate and learning opportunities (Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R., 2017, p. 3). Through different studies and assessments done in elementary classrooms, researchers have found a number of positive effects that assessments can have on a child.

In my fourth section I broke down the effect teaching social-emotional learning has in the classroom/elementary school, emotional intelligence, preventing bullying, academic achievement, and future success.

Social-Emotional Learning Effects

I found through research many ways in which teaching social-emotional learning skills has an effect on many different areas of a student. In the following paragraphs I will break down each effect and the positive effects it has on students receiving the teaching of Second Step curriculum. It will start with effects in the classroom/elementary school. Then share about the emotional intelligence that students gain. Next, how it

helps prevent bullying. After that the result of academic achievement. Ending with the future success they will have in high school, further schooling, job field, and relationships with those around them.

In the Classroom/Elementary School. Second Step and the teaching of social-emotional skills have been shown to have many different effects on students, including elementary students. Durlak (2011) states that “schools have an important role to play in raising healthy children by fostering not only their cognitive development but also their social and emotional development” (p.406). When students have a greater understanding of social-emotional learning they perform better at school. In contrast, if social-emotional learning is not understood, it can lead to difficulties in personal, social, and academic areas (p. 406). “Unfortunately, many students lack social-emotional competencies and become less connected to school as they progress from elementary to middle to high school, and this lack of connection negatively affects their academic performance, behavior, and health” (Blum & Libbey, 2004, as cited by Durlak, p. 405).

This is why teaching social-emotional learning at an elementary level is important. “At the elementary school level, social and emotional learning (SEL) enhances students abilities to understand and mandate their emotions, set and achieve personal and academic goals, show respect and empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible and ethical decisions” (Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R., 2017, p. 2). In an evaluation of the elementary version of Second Step, they found that the benefits of Second Step were mostly seen in children with below-average social and emotional understanding than their average peer. It is also

important to recognize that the children who had average or above-average social and emotional understanding were able to maintain those skills (Low, 2015, p. 474). In another study, trained observers of preschool classrooms (McMahon, Washburn, Felix, Yakin, & Childrey, 2000) and elementary school playgrounds (Grossman et al., 1997) found decreased levels of physically aggressive or disruptive behavior in children participating in the Second Step program (Frey, 2005, p. 3). When quality SEL instruction is done, it provides students with opportunities to contribute to their class, school and community and experience the satisfaction, sense of belonging, and enhanced motivation that comes from such involvement (Durlak, 2011, p. 406-407).

On Emotional Intelligence. Social-emotional learning also affects students' emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is defined as “the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and defuse conflict” (Smith, 2019). In other words, students need to be able to identify their feelings and learn how to address them in a positive way. The Second Step program is designed to both decrease aggressive behavior and increase empathic, socially responsible behavior by (a) fostering children's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills; (b) reducing maladaptive beliefs about aggression and (c) promoting positive social goals and values (Frey, 2005 p. 3). Each of these all help to support the growth in emotional intelligence.

Studies have been done that prove students who have been taught social-emotional learning have increased emotional intelligence. One of these studies was done by the University of California (2009). They looked into the effects on 741 third

through fourth-grade students in five different schools. The results of their study showed nearly two-thirds of students showed significant positive changes in at least one of the variables of the Impulse Control and Problem Solving Unit (Hart, 2009, p. 106). Another randomized, controlled trial done by Low (2015) found that “8 out of 11 outcome variables indicated that the intervention produced significant improvements in social and emotional competence and behavior for children” (2015, p. 463).

Low took some time to look into “the effects of Second Step learning program and how it addressed the relations between social cognitions and prosocial and antisocial behaviors” (Frey, 2005, p. 171). Antisocial behaviors “tend to be self-focused, threat sensitive and aggressive, and use tactics of bullying, threatening, and intimidating subordinates, or even injuring/killing competitors” (Gilbert, 2019). “In contrast, prosocial behaviors create a relaxed and secure social interactions that enable sharing, cooperative, mutually supportive and beneficial relationships” (Gilbert, 2019). Frey recognized that teachers spend a significant amount of time resolving arguments between scholars. This shows evidence in antisocial behavior with students and a need to grow in prosocial behaviors in students. As a result of the study, Second Step showed revealing benefits in student behavior, goals, and prosocial behavior. Students also showed less aggression and antisocial behavior (2005, p. 192).

On Preventing Bullying. Educators are aware that SEL understandings are critical to addressing issues of bullying. Massari (2011) states that we need to take a look at what is going on in the hearts of kids. They are receiving mixed messages from the media, politicians, and even parents. Schools are responsible for correcting that behavior.

Embracing SEL will help schools meet this challenge. “Recognizing that the true challenge is eliminating bullying lies in our ability to redefine adolescent norms in the minds of the kids themselves” (p.10). Through CASEL, SEL has five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (2020). Students with a greater understanding of these five core social and emotional competencies are less likely to be aggressors, targets of bullying, or passive bystanders (Massari, 2011. p.10). The following breaks down how each of these categories play a role in preventing bullying:

Self-Awareness and Self-Management. Bullies and victims both lack effective self-awareness and self-management skills. Hyperactivity and emotional outbursts are factors that students reported as things that encourage teasing and bullying. Through teaching these skills in SEL, students will be able to self-monitor and regulate themselves. Once “students begin to pay attention to, care about, and take responsibility for their own actions” incidents of school bullying will subside (Massari, 2011, p.10).

Social Awareness. Bullies and passive bystanders have a lack of empathy, and as a result, justify bullying. Opening the eyes of students to a “more complex world of tolerance, appreciation and acceptance of others” (Massari, 2001, p.10) will bring bystanders into action.

Relationship Skill. Teaching SEL curriculum helps students learn how to begin and strengthen friendships, which can impact a student's entire social, professional, and personal future. (Massari, 2011, p. 11)

Problem-Solving Skills. Massari found research that shared that both the bullies and the victims lack problem-solving skills. They both tend to react to their emotions before thinking of the consequences. By teaching problem-solving skills, students will be able to learn procedures on how to control their impulses and make more thoughtful decisions.

On Academic Achievement. Much of the research reviewed showed that when students are taught social-emotional learning, they are more successful academically. There are multiple factors at play here. Teaching SEL curriculum, the competency of SEL curriculum taught, classroom management, and who is conducting the intervention can all play a role in academic achievement.

Hart's (2009) study found that teaching SEL curricula was associated with an increase in student test scores, social-emotional skills, and positive attitudes about self and others (p.105). The interventions being consistent with expectations can result in a significant increase in the knowledge that students acquire (p.109). A brief done by Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R. (2017) demonstrated that students who received SEL programs performed better than students who did not, with an 11 percent gain on measures of academic achievement (p. 5). Durlak (2011) also found that when comparing students to the other student control groups, students demonstrated deepened SEL skills, attitudes, and positive social behaviors thus resulting in academic performance significantly improving (p. 413).

Durlak (2011) found studies that connect social-emotional competency to academic performance. If a student is able to be self-aware and confident in their

learning, they will show more persistence and problem-solving skills when faced with challenges. A student that can make responsible decisions about school, such as studying and completing homework, is more likely to do better academically. Also, “students who set high academic goals, have self-discipline, motivate themselves, manage their stress, and organize their approach to work, learn more, and get better grades” (pp.417-418).

Researchers have spotlighted how classroom management of instruction and environment can play a positive role in school performance. There are four ways this can happen: (1) high expectations and support from friends and adults (eg. teachers, parents); (2) teacher-student relationships that show compassion and encourage commitment to school; (3) teaching styles that are engaging and demonstrate proactive classroom management and cooperative learning; and (4) a classroom environment that is safe and supports positive classroom behavior (Durlak, 2011, p. 418).

Finally, academic performance can be affected by who is administering SEL curricula. Durlak’s study also found that students’ academic performance significantly improved only when school personnel conducted the intervention rather than non-school personnel. School personnel means regular school staff, such as teacher, counselor, etc, and non-school personnel is a university researcher and outside consultants (2011).

On Future Success. Social-emotional learning has an impact on the classroom, emotional intelligence, academic performance, and prevention of bullying. It can also play a crucial role in improving children’s lifelong learning (Goleman, 2004, p. 3). Brotto states that the development of core competencies like self-awareness, emotional stability, openness to others, and agreeability can be as important as cognitive intelligence

when determining future employment. By developing these core competencies that social-emotional learning provides during the elementary years, students can directly improve their success as an adult. SEL can also lead to students' own happiness. As educators take the time to combine SEL skills with academics, they "create high-quality learning experiences and environments that empower students to be more effective contributors in their classrooms today and in their workplaces and communities tomorrow" (Brotto, 2018).

Conclusion

Chapter two included a broad explanation of the history of Second Step, its curriculum and assessments, and shared definitions of SEL and how CASEL and Second Step objectives align with each other. Also delineated were different effective approaches to teaching SEL within Second Step. Lastly, this chapter reviewed studies on the effects SEL has on elementary students in the classroom, emotional intelligence, preventing bullying, academic achievement, and future success. All of the topics researched aimed to inform the research question: *What effect does social and emotional learning have on elementary students using the Second Step Curriculum?*

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

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

The literature review allowed me to learn, digest, and synthesize an abundance of information about Second Step Curriculum and how it aligns with CASEL's SEL five core competencies. It identified ways to assess Second Step Curriculum, and it informed me of the effects of teaching SEL in an elementary classroom. The information collected resulted in the implementation of the project. I elaborated on the details of the actual project that was completed for this capstone. The research question that drove this project was: *What effect does social and emotional learning have on elementary students using the Second Step Curriculum?*

Chapter Three explains how this project incorporates Second Step Curriculum and its effects on elementary students into professional development for educators. It begins with an overview/description of the project which identifies the goals, structure, and learning objectives, followed by the rationale for the structure of professional

development. Next, the project audience and seeding are discussed. Lastly, the framework for the implementation for the project is given.

Project Description

The resulting project is a one-hour workshop of professional development. The workshop presents participants with the multiple positive effects that teaching social-emotional curriculum has on elementary students, followed by sharing the resources Second Step Curriculum has available online and within their binder/box. Each binder/box has picture lesson cards with step by step instruction, teaching materials binder that goes along with the lesson cards with printables for take home worksheets and in-class practice sheets, posters, and puppets. Ending the PD with time for participants to explore and make plans to plan and implement a lesson into their classrooms.

Project goals. This project seeks to accomplish four goals in the professional development of mainstream elementary educators who provide direct instruction for students. The goals are as follows:

1. Develop an understanding of the importance of social-emotional learning at an elementary age.
2. Provide resources of Second Step Curriculum online and within each grade level box/binder.
3. Inform teachers of the variety of assessments they can give on the curriculum.

4. Give teachers a plan of implementing a Second Step lesson within the next 2 weeks.

Presentation Structure. I will use Google Slides to present the information, along with a variety of interactive collaborative activities that correspond with the Second Step Curriculum. An online and paper handout that states the effects of social-emotional learning in elementary years and a guide to the resources of Second Steps online and binder/box sources will be provided for each participant. There will also be time at the end of the session to reflect and look at teachers' own grades online, and for teachers to use the box/binder curriculum to plan a lesson they want to start teaching in their own classroom.

Rationale

As identified by research, the teaching of social and emotional learning at elementary level enriches students' abilities to understand their emotions, to personally set and achieve academic goals, to show others respect and empathy, to develop and sustain healthy relationships, and to responsibly make ethical decisions (Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R., 2017). As informed by my research findings outlined in chapter two, the rationale behind this project is to provide resources for teachers to enlighten and expand their knowledge on the effects of social-emotional learning in an elementary classroom, and explain how they can implement Second Step Curriculum to help them accomplish this.

The delivery of this professional development is centered largely around one theory, but includes two other theories to be able to engage a blend of adult learners and

their experiences. The main theory is Malcolm Knowles' Theory of Andragogy. The Andragogy approach states that adults learn better from experience: they must be able to apply learning to solve a specific problem, they are interested in learning things that have immediate relevance, and they need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction. The goal in professional development is to create connections and applicability to the participant's own teaching experience in order to promote the teaching of Second Step Curriculum.

In addition, the project draws on David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory. According to Kolb, experiential learning requires a hands-on approach that puts the learners at the center of the learning experience. Each participant will need to be engaged in thinking about how they can personally apply what they learn into the classroom.

Lastly, the project pulls from Reg Revans' Action Learning Theory. The Action Theory involves improving a problem by first asking a question about the problem, which engages the group in solving the problem and finds a solution to the problem. Lastly, the theory involves taking action on the problem. I will do this within my project by stating a question at the beginning and allowing groups to discuss and form solutions that align with the data presented.

Audience

The primary audience for this project is elementary educators. The professional development is to be used with primary elementary teachers, but can also be used with supporting staff. The reason for choosing elementary educators is because the evidence shows that teaching SEL to elementary students can have many positive effects on them,

and elementary educators teach elementary students. The other reason is that the school I represent as an educator bought Second Step Curriculum three years ago. Research shows that it has many positive results when continually taught, which is a personal interest of mine since it is being implemented at my school.

Setting

The intended setting of this project is a public elementary school in a northern metropolitan suburb in the American Midwest. The district serves approximately 3,200 students. The school in which the project takes place serves students in kindergarten through fourth grade. The school I will be focusing on has approximately 540 students. The school is also ethnically diverse, serving students from a variety of backgrounds, as well as English Language Learners. More than 50% of the students in this setting qualify for free and reduced lunch. Through the creation of this project, I plan to show the importance of teaching Second Step SEL curriculum, and the quick and easy-to-use resources it provides. The implementation of the project is discussed in the following section.

Implementation

The capstone project began in June of 2020. The background information in Chapter One, research done in Chapter Two, and the project description in Chapter Three were all completed in the Summer of 2020. The project implementation of the professional development on SEL and Second Step Curriculum is planned to occur in the school year of 2020-2021. The actual implementation of the project ideally takes place within the first month of school, since the lessons in Second Step will be used to help set

up routines and skills for learning within the classroom, and will be used for the rest of the school year. However, presenting the professional development workshop can be done at any time throughout the school year. The gathering of materials, creation of the handout and Google Slides, and the planning of activities will all be completed in the Fall of 2020. The final project and formal professional development will be completed by November 2020.

The professional development was designed for elementary educators. However, the professional development could be used for preschool, middle, or high school educators as well. The professional development takes place during a one hour block. It will start by posing a question to the educators to reflect more deeply on the topic of social-emotional learning. Then, the workshop will inform them on the effects of SEL using Second Step. Next, the workshop will share with them the resources Second Step has to offer, both online and within the box/binder, that will allow teachers to form quick and easy lesson plans without much planning on the educators' parts. The workshop ends with the handout of effects of the curriculum, and with the resources and time for educators to plan their own Second Step lesson in their classroom.

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

Summary

The professional development outlined in this capstone seeks to empower elementary educators to teach social-emotional learning through the use of the Second

Step Curriculum, as provided by their district. The effectiveness of this project is to be measured by the educators on the use/implementation of Second Step following the professional development. A survey done by educators at the end of the training will provide feedback on the organization, content, and relevance of the project. The long term goal of the project is to empower educators with the knowledge of SEL and its positive effects on students when it is taught 2-3 times weekly.

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

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflections

Introduction

As I come to the end of my capstone project I reflect on what started me on this journey. My first year of teaching in a public elementary school took place in a north metro suburb of the twin cities in Minnesota. The students I taught, not only had academic needs, but also social and emotional needs. My education had provided me with years of training on how to teach academic skills as well as manage in a classroom setting. Unfortunately my education had also left me limited in resources for social-emotional learning. A few years into my career as an elementary school teacher, I was provided a social-emotional learning curriculum to teach. My daily interactions with my students further emphasized the value of this resource. The biggest issue with the resource I was provided, was that many teachers still were not making it a priority in their classrooms. Due to these experiences it led me to the research question and project I chose. The research question that guided my capstone project and paper are: *What*

effect does social and emotional learning have on elementary students using the Second Step Curriculum?

In this chapter, I will reflect on this Capstone Project process as a whole. I will begin by discussing what has been impactful to me as a learner and will also review the Literature. Following that, I will discuss the implications my project has for myself as well as the field of education. There will also be some limitations of my project discussed. Furthermore, I will address any future research or recommendations related to my project, as well as describe how this project will be used for myself and could be used by others. Finally, I will end and summarize some benefits of this project to the field of education.

Major Learnings

As I reflect on my research in the process of answering my question: *What effect does social and emotional learning have on elementary students using the Second Step Curriculum?* I came across studies that supported what I had already hypothesized about social-emotional learning. During this process I was able to verify why the Second Step is a credible curriculum that teaches social-emotional learning skills. Below I will highlight my findings.

My research led to an organization called CASEL which stands for the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. CASEL has social and emotional learning standards that align with the Second Step Curriculum. CASEL has five core competencies they focus on when teaching SEL skills. These skills include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible

decision making. The core competencies from CASEL align with the four skill areas Second Step focuses on: skills for learning, empathy, emotional management and problem solving. These examples stuck out to me because just as math and reading have standards we are continually trying to meet, there are also SEL standards that should be valued the same way to help student's development. Second step is a great curriculum that will help us achieve that.

Second Step also has multiple approaches to help meet the needs of students in the school. They have a step by step instruction that is easy and simple for educators to follow. It has home links that involve the families in the learning and practicing of the SEL skill. They are culturally and linguistically sensitive by teaching age appropriate lessons. Lastly it has a common language that can be used from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. This curriculum is so simple for the learners, yet such a powerful tool for an educator to share with their students and families. If we can continue building off skills taught at the younger years, these students will be well prepared for high school, college and adulthood.

The most eye opening part of this project for me was learning how important the teaching of social-emotional skills to elementary aged students is. At that age the students are just getting into the development of so many social and emotional skills. I have seen through my research, the value of teaching SEL during elementary years as it can help with the evolution of function skills which are in the development stages in their elementary years. Function skills are important for self-regulating, the ability to focus attention, shift attention and resist distractions. These skills will be used by these

students for the rest of their lives. Reviewing my research provides many examples that support these statements.

Literature Review Revisited

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) and Committee for Children (2020) was literature I came across early in my research and some of the most valuable due to the specific experts and resources they provided to myself. I focused most of my research around the findings from these experts. CASEL identified five core competencies- self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decisions making. These core competencies supported the Committee for Children by helping them revise their Second Step curriculum to align with CASEL SEL standards. These components of CASEL and Committee for Children became a bulk of my research and project.

After identifying these components I described different approaches to teaching social-emotional learning (SEL) and how it connected to the Second Step curriculum. Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R. (2017) shared a brief on four approaches which include: 1) Having a lesson that provides a step by step instruction to teach. 2) encourage school and family partnership/involvement. 3) Culturally and linguistically sensitive curriculum. 4) School wide organization of structures. Through this research I found Second Step to be very credible in each of these approaches to teaching.

Finally, I broke down the effects that teaching social and emotional learning has on elementary students into five sections. SEL effects in the classroom, emotional intelligence, preventing bullying, academic achievement, and future success. Overall

supporting the quote by Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R. (2017, p. 2). “At the elementary school level, social and emotional learning (SEL) enhances students abilities to understand and mandate their emotions, set and achieve personal and academic goals, show respect and empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible and ethical decisions”.

All of my research greatly impacted my work around social-emotional learning and the effects Second Step has on elementary aged students. Both with my own work as an educator and the professional development I planned for our school to better understand and use Second Step curriculum as a resource to teach SEL.

Implications

This professional development is intended to be used by professionals leaders, educators, and counselors to help with the understanding of the effects of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) on elementary students and how using the Second Step curriculum will help with teaching SEL Skills. Specifically for my school this will give a detailed professional development on the resources that Second Step has to offer as a curriculum and allow for time to plan and put into action a Second Step SEL lesson. Educators at my school have had access to these resources for 3 years and only a few of the teachers teach the lessons. It is mostly used by the counselor to teach interventions. Over the last three years I have noticed tier two and tier three behaviors escalate and I believe this is due to lack of students being able to understand their own social and emotional needs. By teaching the staff the importance of teaching SEL skills for students to use when needed it will bring our tier two and tier three behavior down. I can state this

due to studies done and showing a decrease in tier two and tier three behaviors ((Frey, 2005).

Implications for policy are that instructional leaders will see the importance of teaching social-emotional skills to elementary students and not only purchase it for elementary schools but also make it a policy to teach it. Just like we have policies on teaching ninety minutes of math and ninety minutes of reading at our school, what would it look like to have a policy to teach a SEL skills once a week or thirty minutes a week be put in place. By doing this you will start to develop a common language across the school and help develop their functional skills so as they step into middle and high school they will have the skills they need to be successful learners.

Limitations

One limitation of this professional development is the requirement of the Second Step curriculum. The district that his professional development was planned for purchased this curriculum for all educators in 2017. This curriculum would cost the district, school, or individual groups of educators money to purchase.

Another limitation is this professional development was developed with a specific kindergarten through 4th grade elementary school in mind. The activities and research shared is based on an elementary aged child. If you are looking for information about Second Step in a fifth grade through eighth grade curriculum you will need to do some additional research, like the difference in tools used to teach the lessons. If you are looking for SEL for ninth grade- twelfth grade you may need to look elsewhere as there is not a Second Step curriculum that focuses on teaching to those grade levels.

Also due to the covid 19 pandemic I was unable to present my professional development. There may be limitations on the reflections that I have expressed as they are based on my own experiences and reflections on the creation of professional development.

Future Research

Based on the limitations above, the next step in research should be to research the effects of teaching social-emotional learning to middle school students and high school students. As there are many students that have not received this teaching of social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. It would be interesting to compare the benefits of teaching SEL to elementary compared to middle school. Second Step curriculum will help you be able to conduct a study on one of the instructional units on students in elementary school, grades kindergarten through fourth grade. Then, do the same study in middle school, fifth through eighth grade. When you use the same instructional units at the students grade level you will be able to compare the results of teaching it.

Using the Project

My original plan was to execute this professional development this 2020-2021 school year. Due to some unforeseen circumstances, including the COVID-19 pandemic and my school's shift to distance learning this fall, the professional development was rescheduled for the fall of the next school year. Although the date of my execution of my professional development is not yet finalized, my plan to use Second Step curriculum in my classroom and with my third grade team is going to continue to be implemented.

This project was also intended to be shared out with others educators to help with the guidance in using Second Step material online. I wanted it to be simple for educators to use and administer in their classroom. I plan to share this project with my colleagues to help inform them on the use of Second Step and the simple ways to apply it into the day.

Along with this directly impacting the educators I know, I also hope it helps guide another professional development with educators that still have questions on Second Step curriculum and how to use the resources given them. This professional development was created with all the materials for another person to utilize. The needed materials include the agenda, slide show presentation, script notes, and digital handout. I am hopeful another instructional leader will use sections or the entire professional development to inform their teachers on social-emotional learning and the use of Second Step Curriculum.

Benefit to the Profession

This project will benefit the profession of educators by teaching them how to best use Second Step curriculum to teach a social-emotional learning skills to elementary students. It will show how they can simply add this ten to fifteen minute SEL lesson into their day to proactively teach skills to your students daily. It will explain how to use all the resources provided in a Second Step curriculum box. Most of all I hope it encourages educators to be proactive in their instruction of social and emotional skills to minimize tier two behaviors and increase instructional and learning time in the classroom.

Summary

At the start of this paper, I shared my history and heart around social-emotional learning and the use of Second Step curriculum. I shared the personal connection I had with my students in my classroom over the course of the years and how their social-emotional needs affected the learning environment of the classroom. Through these experiences I felt drawn to understanding SEL and Second Step curriculum more so I could share with other educators in my school. This helped develop my question: *What effect does social and emotional learning have on elementary students using the Second Step Curriculum?*

Throughout chapter two, I highlighted key groups that had an impact on the understanding of social-emotional learning and development of Second Step Curriculum. As I continued with research I shared the benefits and effects of teaching SEL to elementary aged students. This information on the Second Step Curriculum and the effects of SEL helped transition into chapter three which addressed my professional development around SEL and Second Step curriculum.

In chapter three I addressed my project and why I choose professional development to share my findings. I described the project, its goals, the rationale, and implementation. Chapter four ended with a description of how to best use this project and how it is beneficial to the field of elementary education.

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