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## Increasing Teacher Buy-in for the Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning in the Elementary Classroom

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# Increasing Teacher Buy-in for the Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning in the Elementary Classroom

By

Rebekka Schrank

*A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Teaching*

**Hamline University**

**Saint Paul, Minnesota**

**August 2021**

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## ABSTRACT

Schrank, R. (2021). *Increasing Teacher Buy-in for the implementation of Social-Emotional Learning in the Elementary Classroom.*

This capstone project aims to answer the question: *How can we increase teacher buy-in for programs like Conscious Discipline, Second Step, and MoveMindfully so that social-emotional learning (SEL) focused programs can be used separately or in concert with one another in the elementary classroom?* This project includes a presentation for a professional development (PD) workshop and supporting materials created to stretch across two workshop days. These workshops will be held within Independent School District 196 (ISD 196), a school district located in the southeast metro of the Twin Cities in Minnesota. This presentation will inform teachers of the previously mentioned SEL programs and engage them in strategies that can later be used in the elementary classroom. Before the first workshop, participants will fill out a pre-survey. They will respond to 16 closed and open-ended questions regarding their opinions of SEL and their preferences in teacher training. Following the last workshop, participants will fill out a post-survey similar to the one given prior. The researcher will also use informal observations and exit slips as forms of data collection throughout these workshops. The researcher intends to use the data collected through this project to provide insight into teacher buy-in of current SEL programs in place within ISD 196. This information will be provided for decision-makers within the district to make informed decisions on how to proceed with the various SEL programs. This paper summarizes the initial reasoning for creating this project, a literature review, an outline of the project, and a reflection piece wherein the researcher addresses benefits to public scholarship and potential research for the future.

**Keywords:** social-emotional learning, elementary, Conscious Discipline, MoveMindfully, Second Step, professional development workshop

## **DEDICATION**

To my family, friends, and loved ones who supported me throughout this experience. Your patience and encouragement helped me to complete this project. Special thanks to Christine Kroeze for your constant enthusiasm for this project and how it will contribute to fellow educators' understanding of social-emotional learning. Thank you to my Capstone Committee for reviewing my work.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### **Why Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)?**

When I was growing up, my schooling was solely devoted to academic content such as literacy, math, social studies, and science. The idea that we would have a curriculum focused on fundamental social and emotional skills did not register as a possibility. Teachers never explicitly taught students how to handle bullies or manage their time appropriately for assignments. These teachers expected these abilities from their students, not considering that many were not taught these basic skills at home or through extracurricular activities. I was fortunate enough to be raised in a household with chores and taught social awareness and responsible decision-making principles. Unlike others, I also had the opportunity to interact with others outside of the home by participating in organized sports or childcare. These situations taught me the skills necessary to form healthy relationships with others. Few children are privileged to have these experiences in their early years of life. They can be crucial moments in one's life because these developed skills are carried with children when they enter school. Some of my classmates were not as fortunate to have the same opportunities as I did growing up. Therefore, they did not learn the skills necessary to succeed in a classroom setting. Not having been taught the social and emotional skills that would allow them to sit still for extended lengths of time or attend to activities and persist when things were challenging was a factor in keeping them from succeeding in school. The education system focused on teaching the student, not the whole child; that has since changed.

As a college student, I majored in Communications & Journalism and minored in Psychology, thinking that social work or therapy would be where I ended up. When I finally graduated, there was uncertainty about the path I wanted to take with my knowledge as an

undergraduate student. I decided to take a year to explore the options that were out in the world by working as a full-time paraprofessional in an Autism Day Treatment program. It was through this experience at this job that I realized I liked working with young people. I always wanted to help people, whether by helping them as they strived to address their mental, emotional, and physical needs. So this role felt right. This position required me to work with children between the ages of two to seven who were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and attended the program to address their social skills, communication (*as some were non-verbal*), sensory processing, and self-regulation. These skills helped those children learn ways to succeed both in an academic setting and in life. The paraprofessional's role is to provide emotional and behavioral support to the young children in that small group setting. I had never seen or experienced anything like this programming, where social and emotional skill building was at the forefront of the work done with children. It seemed that this program was uniquely exceptional, and in some respects, it was. However, I later discovered that teaching to the whole child had become a staple in special educational settings of the present day.

It was awe-inspiring to observe the gradual growth of every child that entered the program. It always warmed my heart whenever we could see a child successfully exit the program, gaining the skills necessary to help them going forward. A child's last day in the program often led us to consciously look back on the growth and development they made with us. The skills they worked so hard to learn had always been considered inherent. Their successes motivated me to explore a career path that supports children's growth in academics and life. I eventually decided to go back to school to become a teacher. In addition to changing career paths, I also changed to work in special education at a school.

I started in a setting IV special education program. The program I worked in was part of a larger intermediate school district, taking in students from all across the south metro of the Twin Cities. The students who attended the program ranged from first grade to twelfth grade and were all on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Any student that attended the program would have disabilities such as educational disorders, emotional behavior disorders, autism spectrum disorder, or health-related disabilities. These disabilities and their behaviors at their schools were what led them to the program.

Through my experience working in this program, I found that things were not always what you expect. The students in this program attended their academics in a small-group setting while attending social skills groups and 1:1 therapy sessions. Although these students were physically capable, they had experienced some of the most adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that I could have ever imagined. These mentally and emotionally scarring experiences were destructive for many of these children. Ultimately their experiences were triggering for them and often resulted in them acting out in the classroom. Therefore, the program that I worked in provided students with a more hands-on approach throughout the school day.

When shadowing these students from the classroom, to specialists, to groups, to lunch, I would get to witness first-hand how they would react when faced with stressful situations. Frequently when confronted with an obstacle, these students would get agitated, shout, get physically violent towards peers or staff, they would elope or even damage property. These students were the type of children who were not taught the social or emotional skills to prepare them for life outside of school. If anything, the abuse and neglect they were up against at home or in their previous schools taught them maladaptive ways to get by in life. In our program, however, the students were explicitly taught social and emotional skills daily in their small



groups and would have opportunities to sort through trauma in their therapy sessions. Emotional and mental health was at the forefront of our school, and academics came second. After working as a paraprofessional in an Autism Day Treatment program and working in a special education setting, I became intimately familiar with social-emotional learning and its benefits for children. When it was time for my transition into a mainstream school when student teaching started, I felt excited and hopeful by the prospect of seeing how social-emotional learning was in typical schools.

I was disappointed by the lack of SEL that was taking place in mainstream classrooms. When student teaching started, I was initially intrigued by MoveMindfully in professional development (PD) workshops before the school year. A trainer had attended our workshop and walked all the staff through breathing and moving exercises that lasted the entire workshop. Before everyone left the workshop, the principal commented that staff needed to prioritize self-care this school year. This comment was appropriate given the condition of our world at the time. In the months that preceded that workshop, the entire country was frantic due to the widespread and fast-sweeping COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, there had been a civil upheaval in Minnesota due to the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer.

Furthermore, staff and students would be moving into uncharted territory during the school year, abiding by the CDC's safety and health regulations to ensure that everyone stayed safe. The need for self-care was more relevant than it had ever been before. I anticipated the same emphasis on self-care and well-being with students during the school year as it had been with staff, but that was not the case. Nevertheless, it was never more evident to me how important SEL was for students this school year.

### **The Importance of Social-Emotional Learning**

There has been much research conducted in recent decades exploring the benefits that can come from providing SEL. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) reported that SEL had been known to improve students' social and emotional skills, prosocial behavior, academic success, attitudes, and a positive shift in school and the classroom (CASEL, n.d.). Academic success is achieved through learning skills such as self-management and responsible decision-making. Such skills allow students to set goals and stay determined to accomplish these goals eventually. For example, this skill could apply to learning a new concept or finishing up a project that seems unattainable, all situations that arise when students are in school.

Another example would be if students were working together in finishing a group project, without social skills or adopting prosocial behavior, the students would not be able to collaborate effectively to accomplish a task as a group. Skills, such as those previously mentioned, are practical and can be carried into adulthood and used across social and professional contexts. Studies have shown that skills learned through SEL can be carried up to 18 years past the initial intervention (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg, 2017). While research has consistently shown the benefits of SEL, it is not always explicitly taught in schools.

### **Research Question**

The research question I am hoping to answer through my work is: *How can we increase teacher buy-in for programs like Conscious Discipline, Second Step, and MoveMindfully so that these programs can be used separately or in concert with one another in the elementary classroom?* While I know SEL is a vital resource to young people, I wondered why it was not explicitly taught in mainstream classrooms. There could be several reasons for this: not enough support from administrators, lack of time, funding, or even training, as discussed later in this

paper. Conversations with colleagues and personal experience suggest that teachers feel overwhelmed and ill-prepared to tackle such important topics as these in a classroom. Throw in standards and annual standardized tests, and it is evident why teachers feel pressured to push academics rather than social and emotional skills. Therefore, the focus of this paper is not so much on teachers buying in on the significance of SEL. Studies reveal that 79% of teachers understand the importance of it (Schwartz, 2019). Instead, this paper focuses on increasing teacher buy-in for the implementation of SEL in the classroom. The intention behind this project is to help inform teachers within my school district about the framework behind Conscious Discipline, Second Step, and MoveMindfully and give them the support and tools they need to feel confident in teaching these programs in their classrooms.

### **A Professional Development Workshop**

A way to support teachers in implementing the three various SEL programs is to provide a professional development (PD) workshop for them to attend. This workshop aims to inform my colleagues about these programs by discussing their origins, goals, framework, and typically used strategies. I plan to hold the workshop throughout two hour-length sessions that are spaced out a week apart. In this workshop, small groups of teachers will attend and be prepared to have their questions answered. Data collected through a pre-survey in advance of the workshop will alert me to teachers' questions and concerns: that way, the presentation will be tailored with the audience in mind. While there will be a straightforward presentation on the facts and figures, teachers will also have opportunities to work in pairs and small groups and collaborate to tweak a lesson centered around Second Step. The intention behind this workshop is to present information and allow for exploration of the three different SEL programs. The teachers will participate in activities within each program, allowing for first-hand experience with each. In the

end, teachers will feel familiar and comfortable in teaching any of the three programs to their students.

### **The Benefits of Social-Emotional Learning to Public Scholarship**

This paper and the workshop that goes along with it are essential in the betterment of future generations. At this time, much of our education system recognizes the importance of SEL. However, the individuals expected to teach children are neither trained nor intimately familiar with the SEL programs. As a result, the curriculums are not being taught regularly or in-depth. This workshop aims to help teachers feel better able to tackle these crucial skills and mindsets in the classroom. Not only will doing this help students learn the essential skills necessary to be successful in life, but it will also help teachers learn these skills to implement them in their own lives.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

In conclusion, this work aims to answer the research question: *How can we increase teacher buy-in for programs like Conscious Discipline, Second Step, and MoveMindfully so that SEL focused programs can be used separately or in concert with one another in the elementary classroom?* In answering that question, I will look through past research and outline a workshop used to address and increase teacher buy-in. In the next chapter, there will be an overview of background and research that looks at elementary students' cognitive and psychosocial aspects and the origins of SEL. Additionally, there will be an all-encompassing synopsis of Conscious Discipline, Second Step, and MoveMindfully and the research studies that cement its validity. The following chapter will go through a detailed description of the PD workshop implemented within my school district. I will explain the teaching strategies used to explain why I believe this approach will most effectively increase teacher interest and buy-in for these programs. The last

and final chapter will include the materials, outline, and presentation used throughout the presentation in my workshop. I am confident that the research gathered and information presented in this work will ultimately increase teacher buy-in of the SEL programs. Additionally, I believe it will increase teacher confidence in effectively teaching their students social and emotional skills.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Elementary Students

Children between the ages of 4 and 12 are typically the ones that are attending elementary school. These are formative years for many children as they enter into an environment outside of the environment that raised them. They are exposed to peers and adults alike who will likely present incongruity from what they have always known. Students not only learn about academics when they enter the classroom, but they also learn about themselves and develop their own identities. In elementary school, we begin to see drastic changes in cognitive, physical, and mental development. As educators, we will most likely interact with children at various stages of development, and thus the skills and habits we teach them will last a lifetime.

Therefore, schools must provide students with opportunities to develop healthy habits and ways of thinking. This section will take a closer look at the characteristics of different stages per Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Additionally, there will be an overview of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development for ages that fall within the elementary age group. This section will lay the groundwork for our understanding of elementary-aged children and their cognitive and psychosocial development stages. Thus, it will give us greater insight into the social-emotional learning curriculum that will be most constructive in teaching elementary students.

Jean Piaget was one of the leading psychologists of the twentieth century with his research on children's cognitive development. Through his work, he developed Piaget's theory of cognitive development. He concluded that children went through a series of four stages where their mental processes matured due to biological maturation and lived experiences (Babakr,

2019). These stages include: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. Students in elementary school will most likely not be in either sensorimotor or formal operational stages throughout their attendance. Despite this, it may still be relevant to provide a brief synopsis of both stages to help provide greater depth in understanding preoperational and concrete operations.

The sensorimotor stage typically occurs in a child, starting at birth and ending approximately around age two. At this stage, young children are typically learning to imitate others and remember events. They eventually begin to develop object permanence and discover that objects and people continue to exist even when out of sight. This stage in development is also known for intentionality, which is when children begin to learn and act with intention instead of moving based on reflexive actions (Woolfolk, 2017). This stage in life may not seem relevant for educators of elementary students because, at this point, students will have matured and entered into the preoperational stage. However, the sensorimotor stage sets the building blocks of cognitive development. This stage helps to support children's understanding of the world as they move into the preoperational stage.

The preoperational stage in Piaget's theory begins when a child learns to speak and lasts approximately until the age of seven. In this stage, young children will begin to use symbols to represent objects; this ability is known as semiotic function. Early stages of this ability are apparent in children even before they learn to speak and are apparent when children are pretending or acting out something to communicate their understanding of an object. (Woolfolk, 2017). This ability to understand and communicate symbols fortifies as the language continues to develop. It is also at this stage, where children process operations logically and in one direction. For them, it isn't easy to engage in reversible thinking and thus think of things through multiple

lenses. For example, when a child is in the preoperational stage, they may not understand some equations. For example, they would not comprehend that an equation such as  $4 + 1 = 5$  could be reversed into something such as  $5 - 1 = 4$ . Children will continue to struggle with this thinking throughout their time in the primary grades. Lastly, and most pertinent to social-emotional development, it is at this stage that children have difficulty understanding the point of view of another person. It is not typically until adolescence that children begin to take on the perspectives of others; however, there are always exceptions to this norm.

The concrete operational stage approximately begins around first grade and can last as late as early adolescence. At this time, children can logically tackle hands-on problems. Additionally, children will have an understanding of conservation. This ability allows them to recognize that an amount of something can remain the same even when its appearance changes, so long as nothing is added or taken away from that amount. A classic example of this situation could be demonstrated with a glass of water. Imagine that the glass that the water is in is narrow in diameter and tall, especially compared to a shorter and stockier glass. If the water in the tall glass were to be perfectly poured into the shorter and stockier glass, that could affect how a preoperational child would perceive it. That child may believe that the shorter and stockier glass has less water since the fill line does not reach as high as in the other glass. That child does not understand that the amount of water hasn't changed but believes that what they see is what they should believe. However, that is not the case for a child in the concrete operational stage. A child in this stage would understand that the width and height of the glass influence how we perceive the water; they are capable of understanding conservation. In addition to conservation, a child in the concrete operational stage can reverse their thinking and mentally undo actions. They are essentially having a basic understanding of reversibility, which would not have been present



before. Not only that, but a child in this stage also recognizes that there is a past, present, and future. For children to understand these concepts helps make it possible for them to eventually shift their thinking in more abstract ways, which is an indicator of the formal operational stage.

Like the sensorimotor stage, the formal operational stage is not typically seen in elementary school. Instead, this stage is typically present in children in adolescence and proceeds into adulthood. In this stage, individuals can also think hypothetically and be able to solve problems through the process of deductive reasoning. Not only that, but individuals at this stage can also solve abstract problems logically. Perhaps most applicable to this study and how we relate to one another is that individuals at this stage can consider multiple perspectives other than their own. This allows them to develop concern over social issues, personal identity, and justice (Woolfolk, 2017, p.47). Based on what we know of cognitive development, it is clear that many skills involved with social-emotional learning need to be practiced. Such skills as building relationships, making responsible decisions, being self-aware, socially aware, and managing oneself are all things that need to be introduced and practiced amongst elementary school children. However, if these skills are not being taught at home, it falls on educators to step in and reinforce these types of skills as a means to build up students to be competent and self-sufficient adults. It is imperative to review Erik Erikson's theory of Psychosocial Development to understand elementary students' thinking and behaviors.

Like Piaget, Erik Erikson was a psychologist. However, his research was focused on an individual's psychosocial development. Unlike Piaget, however, Erikson established a theory in which individuals go through eight stages of development. As a result, I will only briefly go over the two most aligned stages with elementary students; initiative versus guilt and industry versus inferiority. The Initiative vs. Guilt stage takes place approximately at the ages of three to six. In

this stage, children begin to take greater initiative in what they do and gain more independence from their families. This behavior is appropriate in terms of age since many children attend kindergarten at school by the age of five. An unfortunate outcome of the initiative that emerges in this stage is that it can be perceived as assertiveness. This unintentional assertiveness often leads to forcefulness, resulting in adverse outcomes with others. When children become aware of their misstep, they can feel a sense of guilt for overstepping or being too forceful. However, if young children can effectively take the initiative in what they do, they will garner independence. It is believed that if a child can complete a stage, they will likely grow into an individual with a healthy personality. If a child fails to complete a stage, they will develop an unhealthy personality and poor sense of self. This notion is true for every stage and can be applied similarly to the other stage typically seen in elementary school; the stage of industry versus inferiority.

The other psychosocial stage during the elementary school years is industry versus inferiority. This stage emerges approximately around the ages of six to 12. Typically, at this stage, children encounter obstacles and challenges that they have never faced before. They are tasked with learning new concepts and strategies and subsequently entrusted with solving unique problems that they may have never encountered before. When students can complete a task before them, such as homework, having the opportunity to complete it effectively causes a growing sense of competence (Woolfolk, 2017). A child will have successfully progressed through this stage if they have garnered independence. If they are not successful, then they will feel inferior in the tasks they take on. This outcome is not fixed, for Erikson believes that children can ultimately master this stage even when they have moved into another stage. As children get older, they may face increased competition amongst peers in realms such as athletics, academics, and social status. This can put a more significant strain on students' feelings

of accomplishment. Eventually, this may lead an individual to look inward to who they are and see themselves in the world. This shifts focus to the next stage of Erikson's theory: identity versus role confusion. However, this stage of development is not relevant for elementary school-age children. Therefore, the focus of this literature review will now shift to the kind of social-emotional learning curriculum

### **Social-Emotional Learning**

Social-emotional learning (SEL) has been a widely discussed and debated topic in education over the last few decades. The concept of SEL was borne out of deliberations in a nationally-held meeting hosted by the Fetzer Institute in 1994. Amongst the professionals who curated the idea of SEL were educators, researchers, and child advocates. These individuals believed that there should be efforts made within the schools to help promote healthy development amongst school-aged children. At the time of their meeting, there were already programs in the schools that addressed such issues as drug prevention, sexual education, moral education, and civic education. However, nothing was in place for addressing the emotional, physical, and mental needs of children. Therefore, it was in this meeting that the foundation for SEL was laid, and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was established (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], n.d.). This section will define and further describe SEL and the competencies that CASEL outlined. The section will also discuss past research related to the benefits of SEL for both students and teachers when incorporated into the classroom curriculum.

Elias et al. defined SEL as a means of obtaining core competencies that allow individuals to set goals, recognize and manage emotions, empathize with the perspectives of others, make

responsible decisions, and form relationships with others (Elias, Zins, Weissberg, Frey, Greenberg, and Haynes, 1997). This follows along with the framework designed by CASEL wherein there are five various SEL competencies. These competencies include self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. As described by CASEL, self-awareness is the ability to understand our emotions, thoughts, and values. It is also the ability to recognize how these perceptions can influence our outward behavior across different contexts. Building off this competency is self-management, which is being able to understand our emotions and manage them. Furthermore, it is the ability to know when and how to express one's emotions depending on the situation. This can involve such skills as delayed gratification and internal motivation, leading to someone eventually achieving their goals and aspirations in both the long and short term.

Self-awareness and self-management are paralleled by social awareness, which is the ability to understand the emotions of others. Social awareness also is when an individual can empathize with others, even if their lives are vastly different from our own. Oftentimes, an individual's first exposure to people from different cultures and communities is when they attend school for the first time. In this setting, a large group of young people come together to form a class. As a class, these students learn, work, and interact with one another close to each other over several months. Another competency within the CASEL framework is relationship skills. This is where an individual can establish healthy and supportive relationships with others. Moreover, an individual who has excellent relationship skills can navigate a variety of settings and effectively form bonds with a diverse group of people (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], n.d.).

The fifth and final competency established by CASEL is responsible decision-making. While the previously mentioned competencies focus on skills that can be applied exclusively inwardly or externally, this last competency combines skills that require an individual to be thinking about both contexts simultaneously. In responsible decision-making, an individual needs to consider their choices and how that choice will impact themselves and others (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL] n.d.). Individuals need to consider the benefits and the consequences of their choices and how they will influence their well-being. Furthermore, when we act on our choices, those actions will likely impact those around us. Therefore, when making responsible decisions, individuals should also consider the collective well-being of people within their communities. As a whole, these competencies come together to cover a wide range of skills that can be developed across multiple settings and over an entire lifespan. The key settings where individuals are challenged to build on these skills would be in the classroom, within the family, in school communities, and throughout the greater community. Despite these multiple settings, the focus of this study is tailored towards the classroom community.

It has been argued in recent years that schools should not only be teaching academic content, but that schools should also incorporate SEL into the classroom to teach social, emotional, and ethical behaviors to students (Learning First Alliance, 2001). There is a vast amount of research that has supported this school of thought. Research studies have shown that SEL consistently leads to beneficial outcomes for students. The short-term effects of SEL are that it can bring about positive attitudes towards self and others, an increase in positive social behaviors and relationships, improved academic performance, and a decrease in conduct behavior and emotional distress. The long-term effects are a greater likelihood of graduating

from high school and college readiness. Also, effects include reduced criminal behavior, mental health, and more engaged citizenship (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, and Durlak, 2017). A 2011 study that conducted a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of 213 school-based, universal SEL programs had similar findings. However, this study concluded that was found only to be the case in schools where the teaching staff successfully conducted the SEL programs in the classroom (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger, 2011). Additional research has shown that when implemented correctly and when teachers support SEL, there is an increase in adoption, sustainability, and impact of SEL in the schools (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson and Salovey, 2012). Since classroom teachers are the ones who are primarily in the classroom with students, they are the ones responsible for teaching the curriculum put forth by their schools. This puts the liability on teachers to educate their students on SEL; however, the following questions arise, ‘Are all teachers willing to teach SEL?’ and if so, “Are all teachers trained to teach it?”

In a survey conducted by Education Week Research Center, 78% of teachers reported that they felt that it was part of their role to help students develop strong social and emotional skills. Nevertheless, only 29% reported having received any mental health training at all. Many of the teachers in this survey reported that several challenges got in the way of them effectively teaching SEL to their students. These challenges included: having little time left to teach SEL after teaching academic content, lack of support from families, inadequate professional development, inadequate SEL programs provided by their schools, inadequate support from administrators and trained mental health professionals (MHPs), among other reasons (Schwartz, 2019). While the responsibility falls on teachers to educate students on SEL, little support is provided to give them the tools to do it. While there are legitimate reasons for teachers’

hesitations on teaching SEL, teachers have many more advantages that come from incorporating it into their teaching practice.

Research has shown that SEL not only benefits students but also benefits the teachers in the classroom. While many teachers in the Education Week Research Center survey reported that there was not enough time to teach SEL because of the demands placed on them teaching academic content, the research could present a rebuttal. One study found that teaching SEL practices are negatively associated with teacher burnout (Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small and Jacobson, 2009), which means that more teachers felt inclined to stay in the profession due to teaching SEL. Despite feeling like there is no time to incorporate it into their teaching, teachers have made time for it and have found success. SEL strengthens teachers' commitment to the profession and increases their overall satisfaction to keep working in education (Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes, and Salovey, 2010). Studies discussed that this could be explained by noting how teachers feel like their lives and the lives of all school community members feel more valued when social-emotional learning is promoted throughout the school building (Collie, Shapka, and Perry, 2011). When considering all these benefits that come from teaching SEL, the question arises, 'Why are teachers not adopting SEL teaching and practices in their classroom then?' Perhaps the issue lies with the types of programs offered or that teachers don't feel well-equipped to tackle these crucial topics in the classroom.

This professional development (PD) workshop aims to address these possible setbacks and inform teachers about the three different SEL programs in their school community. The three SEL programs that will be discussed are Conscious Discipline, MoveMindfully, and Second Step. Each program is distinctively different but can complement each other in the classroom if used appropriately. The following sections will hone in on the different elements of each

program and discuss the research that supports the efficacy of each in an elementary setting. that will be most effective for this age group.

### **Conscious Discipline**

Reports have shown that 61% of adults have reported that in their lifetime, they had at one point or another experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). This includes such experiences as verbal, sexual, or physical abuse, substance abuse, incarceration, family dysfunction, or mental illness (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021). Further research has shown that these types of stressors can lead to mortality, disability, and morbidity (Edwards, Shipman, and Brown, 2005). Conscious Discipline attempts to address these issues by being a trauma-informed SEL program that informs teachers how to make both mental and practical shifts in their relationships with students so that children are being brought up in environments that are internally transformative (Bailey, 2014). This section will elaborate on how Conscious Discipline outlines ways that educators can establish safety, connection, and problem-solving within the classroom. Furthermore, this section will review past studies that look at the benefits and efficacy of Conscious Discipline in the classroom.

Conscious Discipline is a program that addresses behavior in the classroom while also providing a nurturing environment for students to learn. It integrates social-emotional learning, school culture, and discipline to develop resilience in the classroom. It is built around three different values. First, controlling and changing ourselves, as teachers, is possible and can positively impact others. Second, that connectedness governs behavior. Essentially, meaning that when we have relationships with our students, we are likely to establish a community built on mutual respect where there is an understanding of how we treat one another so that everyone



feels safe and welcome. Third, conflict is an opportunity to teach. Instead of resorting to punitive punishments, when there is conflict, a teacher can take that discord and use it to present multiple perspectives and implement conflict resolution in the classroom. Ultimately, Conscious Discipline is rooted in the philosophy of acceptance over rejection, which has been routinely used in the traditional discipline compliance model (Bailey, 2014). Conscious Discipline is based on its uniquely designed Brain State Model and organized around the Seven Powers for Conscious Adults, the School Family, and the Seven Skills of Discipline.

The Conscious Discipline Brain State Model identifies three basic states in which people think and process their surroundings; these brain states are survival, emotional, and executive (Bailey, 2014). In the survival state, individuals resort to their primal state of being. In this state, people become reactive and self-defensive; their senses are heightened, and their sole focus is on seeking safety and simply surviving their current situation. Unfortunately, many students who have experienced multiple ACEs in their lives will enter a classroom and be in a survival state. They are not in a place to learn but instead in a place of distress where they will likely not participate or excel in a traditional classroom environment. In the emotional state, individuals' emotions are heightened by stressors going on in their surroundings. Like the survival state, students in the emotional state will also be unable to learn effectively. They may be concerned about whether things in their life are going according to plan, using past experiences to indicate how things should or should not be. If a child struggles with a new concept or is experiencing conflict with a peer, they may begin to experience feelings of frustration that encapsulate their lives. These feelings of inadequacy leave students with little capacity to be present and willing to open themselves up to new information presented in the classroom. Lastly, in the executive state, individuals are in a relaxed state. People can better recognize their thoughts and feelings and how

they interact with those around them. When a child is in the executive state, they will be more likely to have control over their emotions and direct their thoughts to the content being presented before them (Bailey, 2014). The Conscious Discipline Brain State Model is meant to be a reference for teachers trying to understand their students' mindset. Ultimately, this model should assist teachers in supporting their students to enter a state where optimal learning will occur.

Conscious Discipline is organized around the Seven Powers for Conscious Adults, the School Family, and the Seven Skills of Discipline. The Seven Powers for Conscious Adults is centered around safety and how teachers should strive to manage their internal thoughts and feelings to create a space that feels safe for students. Conscious Discipline asserts that teachers should adopt the skills that they want their students to learn, and that is: perception, unity, attention, free will, acceptance, love, and intention. It is believed that a classroom without a teacher who possesses these skills will not be able to manage a classroom or effectively discipline students. The Seven Skills of Discipline focuses on how teachers should handle problem-solving in a classroom by asserting that there are seven skills to utilize. These skills include choices, empathy, composure, encouragement, positive intent, assertiveness, and consequences. The notion behind these skills is that teachers can use these skills to teach their students lessons about life instead of using traditional discipline that can be seen as punitive. Lastly, Conscious Discipline promotes the idea of a School Family. The idea of a school family is that it is organized like a healthy family model, where development can take place for all the members that are a part of it. This can be done through strategies currently established in the education system, such as routines, structures, and rituals. Creating a healthy and supportive atmosphere is a simple way that teachers can help support students when they enter the classroom. Conscious Discipline is a program focused on strategies and mindsets that a teacher

can adopt in their practice. While there are strategies that can be taught to students, this program, unlike other programs, attempts to target both teachers and students. Conscious Discipline is a program that encourages teachers to make a conscious choice to strengthen the social and emotional development of their students.

Studies have shown that Conscious Discipline has proven benefits for its students. In one small-scale study in Florida, a study looked at the impact Conscious Discipline would have on student behaviors. The researchers enlisted 12 teacher-student pairs to take part in the study. Out of these pairs, there were two control pairs, and the rest were a part of the experimental group, who received training in Conscious Discipline. The study took place over six months, in which teachers attended training and workshops and would use the skills learned in these formats to apply to their classroom. To assess the effectiveness of the intervention, the researchers used the Behavior Assessment System for Children (Reynolds and Kamphaus, 1992) before and after the intervention. They saw significant improvement amongst all pairings that were a part of the experimental group—leading the researchers to determine that Conscious Discipline positively affected student behavior in the classroom (Hoffman, Hutchinson and Reese, 2005). Although this study was small, it hints at the successful outcome resulting when using Conscious Discipline in the classroom.

A larger-scale 2013 study looked at the effectiveness of Conscious Discipline on social-emotional development, school readiness, and school climate. The researchers of this study recruited 66 pre-kindergarten teachers across three states and had them participate in t/he study over eight months. Of the participants, there were 38 in the experimental group and 28 in the control group. Those in the experimental group received 35 hours worth of training on Conscious Discipline, whereas the teachers in the control group received less than one hour of

training. Over the eight-month study, the researchers collected data through teacher reports, parent surveys, implementation logs, and observations. In the end, researchers found that there were significant positive changes in all three dependent variables that were being examined (Rain, 2014). Although this study was focused on children younger than elementary school age, it is relevant to this study because it demonstrates how simple training on the Conscious Discipline curriculum can significantly impact the social and emotional development of a child.

Conscious Discipline is a vital SEL program to utilize in schools because of its positive impact on students and teachers. Its practices that it proposes are easy to understand and implement and can be done in any classroom setting. As research has evidenced, Conscious Discipline consistently brings about positive change to the school community. As this program mainly focused on thinking and mindsets, it will be relevant to also look at SEL programs that prioritize different values. Therefore, this next section will focus on MoveMindfully, an SEL program that asserts movement and mindfulness as essential factors in promoting social and emotional learning.

### **MoveMindfully**

The typical assumption that many people make about social-emotional learning is that it is limited to learning skills that help individuals have healthy relationships with others. However, social-emotional learning is more than just focusing on what is happening around us; it also focuses on what is happening within us. When it comes to caring for our own emotional, mental, and physical well-being, classroom-based yoga interventions can help to teach us effective strategies. In one past study, it was found that yoga interventions improved such things as emotional balance, attentional control, anxiety, negative thought patterns, emotional and physical

arousal, and reactivity, among other things (Serwacki & Cook & Cottone, 2012). A Minnesota-based organization known as MoveMindfully combines mindfulness and movement to teach young people how to improve overall well-being. This section will look closer at the skills and practices that MoveMindfully teaches. Additionally, this section will examine MoveMindfully's role in schools and how educators can take what they learn from this organization and apply it to their classroom's daily routine. Lastly, this section will review past studies and the results that come from yoga-based interventions in schools, thus providing evidence for why it is a program that should be regularly used.

MoveMindfully was founded by a Minneapolis-based social worker, Kathy Flaminio. Flaminio had been working in the Minneapolis school district for twelve years when in 2005, a spontaneous act with her students led her to realize that yoga could be used as a tool for regulation and stress in students. Following her discovery, Flaminio continued her research on mindfulness, movement, and mental health by training in the well-established Yoga Calm program for over one year. Using the movements and strategies she learned through this experience, she introduced Yoga Calm practices to her school district. In introducing these practices to her district, she collected data on the positive impacts that these skills could have on both students and staff. The data she collected proved to increase on-task behavior from students and decrease behavior referrals and voice volume within the classroom (Flaminio, 2021). She eventually started the 1000 Petals, LLC program, which eventually was rebranded as MoveMindfully. Since then, Flaminio's program has had a presence in many school districts throughout Minnesota, where movement and mindfulness techniques are being taught to students and teachers alike.

The mission behind MoveMindfully is to train and support individuals to develop emotional, mental, and physical well-being through the practices they teach in their program. MoveMindfully focuses on three specific practices: move, breath, and rest (MoveMindfully, 2021). These practices are intended to help self-regulation and build community connection. Six types of movements are used to address different periods throughout the day, and they are used in: centering, transitioning, focusing, calming, engaging, and releasing (MoveMindfully, 2021). Typically in their program, a trained MoveMindfully instructor travels around to schools in their area and conducts workshops on different mindfulness techniques and movement exercises. However, when an instructor is not available to provide workshops, some strategies can be utilized independently by teachers.

There are many tools, both movement, and breathing, that teachers can use to support MoveMindfully practices in the classroom for their students. For example, breathing tools include the Hoberman sphere, pinwheels, and bubbles, among other items. These items can help focus on breathing and emphasize different types of breathing, such as inhale or exhale. These tools are easily accessible and can be multi-purpose in the classroom. MoveMindfully supplies a card deck to any schools that are participating in their program in terms of movement tools. For each card, there is a photo reference to show an individual how to do the movements. Then, there are descriptions highlighting each pose's emotional, physical, and mental qualities (MoveMindfully, 2021). These are all tools that MoveMindfully instructors incorporate into their workshops, but they can also be utilized by teachers with even limited exposure to the program. Aside from the research that the founder of MoveMindfully conducted, many research studies have explored the benefits of mindfulness in education and, more specifically, the benefits of MoveMindfully.

One 2015 research study looked at the effectiveness of yoga-based practices on 36 second and third-graders in Maine. The study took place over ten weeks, in which a trained yoga instructor would come once a week and lead a half-hour-long session for the classes. The session involved yoga exercises, a centering activity, breathing exercises, a themed discussion, and a relaxation/closing exercise; practices similarly used by MoveMindfully. The researchers used observations and teacher feedback to collect their data. In addition, they collected saliva samples to assess cortisol levels before and after the interventions. In the end, the researchers found that both groups of participants experienced a drop in cortisol level following the cognitive tasks, but not after the yoga practices. The teachers also reported that they saw improvements in their students' behavior following the intervention (Butzer et al., 2015). Unfortunately, this study has a small pool of participants, so even a slight margin of error could skew the results.

In a similar study conducted in the United Kingdom, researchers looked at how mindfulness benefitted young people between the ages of 12 and 16. There were 522 participants in all, and they were split up into control and experimental groups. The study took place over several months, and within that time, the participants were provided with mindfulness interventions from the Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) program. In this study, data were collected from participant reports before, during, and after the mindfulness interventions. When the data was pulled together, the researchers discovered an increase in acceptability of mindfulness amongst both the students and teachers. Additionally, these participants reported a decrease in stress and depression (Kuyken et al., 2013). This study was significant because it reinforced similar findings found in previous studies on the effectiveness of mindfulness-type interventions in the classroom.

While the study was promising in providing more insight into the benefits of social-emotional learning, there are still some considerations. First, this study was looking only primarily at mindfulness interventions rather than mindfulness and yoga. Second, this study took place in a different setting from the United States, where the value placed on social-emotional learning may be perceived differently. Lastly, this study had participants in an older age range than what is being looked at for this specific work. All of these considerations point towards that while social-emotional learning research is becoming increasingly prevalent in recent decades, there is still much more work to be done, especially when looking more closely at mindfulness and yoga in the classroom.

## **Second Step**

Research has shown that universal interventions in schools, such as the Second Step, develop socially and emotionally competent individuals who have more positive attitudes towards themselves and others, more positive behaviors in school, and fewer behavior problems (Durlak et al., 2011). Second Step is not only a universal program, but it also provides educators with hands-on lessons and activities for students that explicitly address skills that can last a lifetime. Second Step includes units on empathy, emotion management, problem-solving, and friendship skills, among others. This section will address a more detailed summary of the Second Step program, including its origins and development over the years. Additionally, this section will give a more substantial overview of its curriculum and its use in the classroom. Lastly, this section will review past research studies that look at the benefits that emerge from using Second Step and how it compares to other SEL curriculum.



The Second Step program identifies with the mantra, “Not Just Better Students. Better People.” Second Step is a social-emotional learning program that the Committee for Children created. The Committee for Children is a nonprofit organization founded in 1979 and was created to uphold the safety and well-being of all children through social-emotional learning (Committee for Children, 2021). Initially, when the organization started, it had provided a curriculum titled ‘Talking About Touching’ and was meant to inform and support children to recognize physical abuse and sexual abuse. Ultimately, the program was designed to give children the tools to put an end to abuse or prevent any abuse from happening in the first place. Once this program had been in place for several years, the Committee for Children created the Second Step program in an attempt to teach skills like empathy, self-awareness, and social awareness, amongst others, to prevent young people from growing up to become abusers themselves (Sanderlin and Kandel, 2021). Since its creation in 1985, Second Step has been used across various age groups and settings to teach social-emotional skills to students.

Second Step is designed to be a program that classroom teachers can implement. However, social workers and other professionals in a school setting can access and utilize the content. Since Second Step is a universal program, its content applies to all students, no matter their background. The curriculum is designed to promote social-emotional competence while also teaching skills for regulation. In addition, the program is meant to decrease problem behaviors and ultimately increase students’ academic success (Sanderlin and Kandel, 2021). Specifically, in elementary school, the curriculum is tailored to learning, empathy, emotion management, and problem-solving skills. Additional units can be utilized, such as bully prevention and child protection (Second Step, 2021). These skills are taught through classroom kits that are provided to teachers through their district.

The classroom kits include physical lesson plans that are fully scripted and explicitly give step-by-step instructions for teaching the content to students. This is supposed to give teachers a tool to utilize, even without extensive training or workshops, to teach the curriculum to students (Second Step, 2021). There are approximately 25 lessons that can be taught weekly and are about 30 minutes in length. All the activities are meant to be engaging and get students interacting with one another during that time. To reinforce what is taught in these lessons, Second Step even provides homework, reflective writing activities, and an academic integration component (Sanderlin and Kandel, 2021). These elements that all go into the curriculum are meant to increase fidelity and ensure that the skills being taught to students will be long-lasting. There are countless ways that Second Step attempts to be accessible and effective for both students and teachers; there is even research that supports its efficacy.

In a 2015 study, researchers studied the effectiveness of the Second Step program by primarily looking at its fourth edition. The researchers wanted to look closer at the progression students experienced in their skills after learning over one year. They conducted a large-scale study looking across 61 schools in six different school districts. The participants were made up of both teachers and their students, ranging from kindergarten to second grade. Altogether, there were 7621 participants, 321 teachers, and 7300 students. A variety of measures were used to assess change, including teacher assessments of student behavior, behavioral assessments, and statistical analysis. Throughout the study, and after collecting data throughout, the researchers found that Second Step positively influenced student behavior and school readiness. However, they found that the data was more pronounced for students with more significant problem behaviors at the beginning of the study (Low, Cook, Smolkowski and Buntain-Ricklefs, 2015,

Low, Smolkowski and Cook, 2016). Similar conclusions were made in another study, looking at Second Step in a setting with at-risk children.

A 2017 study conducted in preschool classrooms looked at the Second Step Early Learning (SSEL) program compared to traditional Head Start programs and community preschools. The study looked at how programs compared when implemented in a setting with low-income students—examining students’ executive functioning and social-emotional skills over time. The study concluded that SSEL brought about significantly better outcomes than the traditional programs (Upshur, Heyman, Wenz-Gross, 2017). There is a great deal of evidence from studies, which suggest the efficiency of Second Step across all ages and in a school setting.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

Social-emotional learning has gained much traction in school and research over recent decades, as more schools are beginning to adopt the whole child approach in education. As it is becoming increasingly popular, it is also becoming increasingly important to be teaching children skills that will allow them to thrive in an ever-changing world plagued by pandemics, civil uproar, and technologically driven societies. The responsibility has fallen on educators to provide the support and knowledge that will allow students to adopt the social, emotional, and mental skills that will allow them to be successful. While there are a decent amount of SEL programs established, some schools and teachers are unable to access and effectively implement them in the classroom. Teachers struggle to integrate SEL learning into the school day for reasons ranging from lack of training to an overburdened workload. My objective is to create a PD workshop that can help inform and guide teachers in using Conscious Discipline, MoveMindfully, and Second Step in their classrooms effectively. In the following chapter, I will

provide an overview of the PD workshop that is aimed at being presented before Independent School District 196, where these programs are in place but are not being explicitly used by teachers.

## **CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT OVERVIEW**

### **Present Project**

This chapter will overview all of the elements that go into the professional development (PD) workshop. First, there will be an overview of the participants and the setting of the study. Second, this chapter will discuss the desired outcomes from these workshops. Furthermore, this chapter will provide a breakdown of the different elements considered when structuring this presentation and how I hope to capture my audience's attention so that the information presented will be memorable. Lastly, this chapter will discuss why this PD workshop is invaluable in the movement towards social-emotional learning (SEL) and how teachers will more widely and effectively use it in the classroom.

### **Participants**

There will be approximately 20 participants who will attend this PD workshop. All the participants involved will need to have met the following criteria to be in attendance: The participants need to be licensed classroom teachers whose license was in elementary education and actively teach students between kindergarten through fifth grade. The participants need to be teaching within Independent School District 196, referred to as ISD 196. The school district is located in the south-metro of the Twin Cities, the largest metropolitan area of the midwest state of Minnesota. The participants who will participate must be classroom teachers instead of teachers instructing students in a specialty or small-group capacity. These parameters will be imposed to find the appropriate candidates to participate in the PD workshop. This standard is set to ensure that the focal point of this project is what occurs in a typical classroom throughout the school week. The success of this PD workshop will determine if future workshops will be held for the other staff in the building.

### **The Setting of the PD Workshop**

The setting for where this PD workshop will take place is ISD 196, located in the southeastern region of the metropolitan area known as the Twin Cities in Minnesota. It is the fourth largest district in the state serving approximately 29,000 students across 19 elementary schools, six middle schools, and four high schools. Out of these schools, there are six magnet schools and one middle school. Two learning centers in the district offer both adults basic education classes and early childhood care. Not only is the district robust, but it is also highly praised for being a thriving district wherein 92% of its students successfully graduate from one of their high schools, according to the most recently reported data. While all of these statistics are significant, there was little to find on the district's website regarding social-emotional learning.

Having worked within the district, I know that two different SEL-related programs are already in place at the various elementary schools. There is Conscious Discipline, a program that strives to shift teachers' thinking and how they perceive the behavior of their students. Then there is MoveMindfully, a program that aspires to incorporate movement and mindfulness breaks throughout the school day to help regulate students and decrease stress. While both of these programs are well-established within the district, their daily use within the classroom is inconsistent. In addition to these two programs, the district plans to pilot a new SEL curriculum, known as the Second Step program, this upcoming school year. While those within this district are familiar with the programs, a professional development workshop that delves deeper into the three programs will suit the participants within this setting.

### **Desired Outcomes**

There are both short-term and long-term goals that I intend to accomplish from this PD workshop. Concerning short-term goals, I would like teachers to see the value in each program and the different perspectives each can provide. Moreover, teachers' attention will be drawn to how all three programs could be used in concert with one another. When looking ahead in the years to come, I want the teachers who attended this workshop to feel confident in their ability to teach SEL and see it as worthwhile to teach in the classroom. Ultimately, teachers will understand that they can pull practices and beliefs from the various SEL-related curriculums and make them their own in the classroom.

### **PD Workshop Framework**

This PD workshop will be completed at Glacier Hills Elementary School. It is structured as an in-person meeting where teachers can interact more freely in the same space. In recruiting participants, I will send out a mass email a month before starting the PD workshop. The email will be sent out to all staff in ISD 196, even staff who are not classroom teachers. This way, I can gauge any future interest in broadening this PD to individuals who take on different roles within a school building. I will summarize the PD workshop and the benefits they could hope to gain by participating in it. The email will have an attached Google form where I ask that the individuals interested in the workshops fill out the form. The form will include questions asking for individuals' first and last name, the school they work at, how long they have been with the district, their familiarity with SEL, and contact information used to get in touch with them. I want the teachers who participate in the workshop to voluntarily be a part of it to assure that they are fully committed to the process (Brookfield, 1986).

Initially, there was going to have just been one session for the workshop. However, to make the workshop experience more worthwhile, I believe it would be prudent to have two

sessions to split up the workshop into more manageable segments. The sessions will be separated by a week apart. Participants will have an opportunity to practice using the skills they learned from the workshop in their classroom practice and report their experiences. There will be 20 people participating in this workshop, and this same group will be together for both workshop sessions. This set-up will keep the audience numbers small and allow more opportunities to engage more deeply with the content throughout the workshop. Each session will be approximately one hour in length and will be broken up into an introductory presentation, small group discussions, and active learning to keep the participants engaged throughout the entire time. The outline of the presentation was created in part by principles established through research-driven sources on successfully teaching adult learners.

### **The PD Workshop Pre- and Post-Assessments**

Before any of the participants attend their first session of these workshops, they will first take an online survey that I will send to them a week in advance of their very first session. The survey will include open and closed-form questions about the teachers' familiarity with the three different SEL-related programs. Ultimately, the takeaway from this survey will be to learn about their acceptance or rejection of the programs. The acceptance or rejection of the programs will be determined based on their application of programs, consistency, attitudes toward SEL, and whether or not that responsibility should fall into the role of the teacher. By sending out the survey virtually and a week before their first session, I hope to make the workshop more accessible to the participants and bring their values and concerns to the forefront of the workshops. This data collection will benefit me because it helps outline the focus throughout the presentation (Knowles, 1984). The responses received on the survey will initially entice the participants at the beginning of the workshop. The survey is also essential in measuring



increased teacher buy-in. Collecting data is why there will also be a post-survey, similar to the initial pre-survey, which will be sent to participants immediately after their last workshop session. This post-survey will be a way to measure any changes in teacher buy-in due to the PD. The pre-and post-surveys are just one way I plan to assess the effectiveness of the PD workshop. Another way is through one-on-one interviews, conducted with just a few participants, to get more open-ended responses on teacher opinions of the different SEL programs.

Like the surveys, I will seek out individuals who may be willing to participate in pre-and post- interviews, which will take place in person. These individuals will be enlisted to participate in the interviews using the initial forms attached to the original email. I will include a question stating, *"In this PD workshop, there will be opportunities before and after it takes place to sit down with the presenter for an interview. This will allow you to provide more in-depth insight or concerns you may have about Conscious Discipline, Second Step, and MoveMindfully. This interview should last approximately 15 minutes and is an opportunity to transform how social-emotional learning can be taught at your school. Would you be willing to take part in this interview process?"* The teachers will have the ability to circle 'yes' or 'no' simultaneously as when they agree to take part in the PD workshop. In addition to the pre-surveys, these interviews will set the stage for the teachers' initial thoughts about the different programs. No later than a week following the last session of the workshops, I intend to meet again with the same participants I interviewed before starting the workshops. The purpose of the post-survey is to assess whether the information presentation effectively educated the participants and prompted increased teacher buy-in for any of the three different SEL programs.

### **The PD Workshop - Session 1**

As previously mentioned, there will be two sessions for the workshop experience and one group of 20 participants that complete the workshop sessions together. Each session will be an hour-long and include an introductory presentation, active learning, and small group discussions. The first session will focus primarily on Conscious Discipline and MoveMindfully, the two already well-established ISD 196. Since many of the teachers within the district should be familiar with these two SEL programs, I will not spend as much time reviewing them but instead getting the participants to interact more as a whole and with each other. A PowerPoint presentation will help act as a visual aid when introducing data, program summaries, and videos, among other points in the workshop. Although the presentation starts with limited interaction from participants, by having a PowerPoint, I will create "interaction on the platform" by giving something for participants to look at and make meaning out of (Knowles, 1992).

The first few slides will have data presented on the screen to display the consensus or dissension between the participants. I want to use this opening to validate their opinions and create dialogue amongst the participants and groups. I will employ a Think-Pair-Share opportunity, so the participants will turn towards someone they are sitting next to and discuss any data that surprised them and any data they had already presumed. The participants will be broken off into their pairs for a few minutes before they will be asked to return to the whole group and share what they discussed. Based on data collected and participants' reactions, I want this activity to get them to consciously think about how they feel about the two programs and why.

Following the initial kickoff of the presentation, I will provide a brief overview of Conscious Discipline. In summary, I will talk about creating the program and its four central tenets: the Brain State Model, the Seven Powers for Conscious Adults, Creating the School Family, and the Seven Skills of Discipline. The notion of creating a school family involves

creating environments rooted in structure, routines, and rituals. Following this overview of the tenets, I will check in with the participants and prompt a small group discussion centered around ways they create safe environments for their students rooted in the ideas of a school family. The small groups of 2-4 participants will discuss different strategies to help their students feel safe (Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017). I also want them to discuss areas where they fall short and brainstorm ways to improve their learning spaces. The small groups will come back together as a whole group, and a representative from each group will describe what was discussed. Depending on the feedback given from each group, there can be a lengthier whole group discussion where troubleshooting occurs to help resolve a couple of recurring issues. Following the discussions surrounding Conscious Discipline, the presentation will shift into talking about MoveMindfully.

As with Conscious Discipline, when the presentation shifts to MoveMindfully, I will provide an overview of MoveMindfully and mindfulness as a skill to be taught in the classroom. Together, we will review the data supporting teaching mindfulness in the school setting and go into the breathe-move-rest practices that the program employs in its skill-building. The participants' will do breathing exercises and stretches similar to what will be used in their classroom. We will first take several minutes to quietly and calmly attempt different movements. After practicing the movements, we will review the different types of movements, such as "cognitive regulation" and "physical regulation," amongst others. The presentation will then open up the whole group to a discussion, thinking about how different movements could be used throughout the school day.

Following this discussion, I plan to close the first session of the workshops by engaging in a mindfulness-based breathing exercise. Participants will be encouraged to get in the most

comfortable position for themselves to relax more easily. We will all be taking part in the breathing exercise for a minute or so. The expectation is that all participants participate in these exercises to gain greater familiarity and feel comfortable teaching the same exercises with their students. The hope is that the participants can experience the benefits themselves and understand the importance of these SEL programs in their classrooms. Once we have finished the breathing exercises, a piece of paper will be passed out to each participant where they are asked to write out a goal that they have for themselves regarding SEL in the following week. I want them to think about what they plan to take away from the first session and incorporate it into their daily routine. The participants will need to write their names on the paper even though whatever they choose to write will be confidential from any other participants. However, I want to pass back their written goal when we meet again for the second session for the following week.

### **The PD Workshop - Session 2**

The week following the first session of these PD workshops, I want the participants to practice what they learned in the first workshop and then use it in their classroom. When the participants return to the second session, they will receive the paper where they wrote their goal from the previous session. The session will start with the question, "Did you accomplish the goal you set for yourself last week? Explain to someone sitting next to you why you were able to accomplish the goal or why you were not." The participants will take a few minutes to share their experiences with someone sitting near them. After time has passed, I will bring the whole group together again. Participants will be prompted to volunteer moments of success and where they perhaps struggled. As a large group, we can brainstorm ideas for working around the obstacles that prevent those from reaching their goals. Following this initial kickoff activity, we will shift the group's attention to our main topic for the second session, Second Step.

Like the first session, I will provide a brief overview of the Second Step program by discussing how it originated, its skill-based curriculum, and details about the skills explicitly taught by grade level. I will emphasize in this presentation how Second Step's curriculum is focused on explicitly teaching skills to students and going over role-play scenarios. Although I will already know what each person believes is the most crucial skill to teach, there needs to be some discussion amongst the whole group. Everyone will be asked to stand up and be ready to move around. I will then list the five competencies established by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and outlined by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). These five competencies include relationship skills, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, social awareness, and self-management. Participants will be pointed to an area of the room and state, *"Those of you who believe \_\_\_\_\_ to be the most important skill to teach students, move over here."* This line will be repeatedly listed off until all five competencies have been named. Everyone should have moved into their chosen skills designated spot of the room. I will then ask the people of each chosen competency to discuss amongst themselves for a few minutes why that is the most crucial skill to teach. Once they have finished discussing amongst themselves, they will be asked to pick a representative of their group and have them speak on their behalf to explain why they believe their chosen competency is the most important to teach. After those competency groups have shared their ideas and solidified, I will let the participants know that they will stay in that group to work together and review the Second Step classroom toolkits together.

In ISD 196, every school has its Classroom Toolkits, consisting of teacher manuals of SEL lessons to teach students. Each manual contains scripted lessons, activities, and overviews for teachers to refer to when teaching to students in the classroom. Each group will be assigned a

different grade-level toolkit and be asked to explore the toolkit together. I will suggest that the groups look through the manual and observe any noticeable lessons that would align with their chosen competency. The groups will have around ten minutes to flip through the manuals or access the resources online and explore them through there.

After some time has passed, I will tell groups to finalize a favorite activity in the manual. Once everyone has done that, I will tell the groups to work together and outline an SEL lesson using the activity in the manual as a guide. The participants will be challenged to develop things they like about the lesson, things they do not like, and how they would tweak the lessons. They will be encouraged to find ways to make the lesson their own and incorporate skills or ideas they learned from the previous session on Conscious Discipline and MoveMindfully into their Second Step lesson. Depending on the time remaining in this workshop, groups will be given ten to fifteen minutes to brainstorm effective ways to teach the skills and lesson while simultaneously making it their own. As the groups work with each other, I will walk around the room and observe active learning. This informal observation will also be an informal assessment where I listen to participants use what they have learned from these workshops to create their own SEL lesson. Depending on time, groups will come back together to share what they have come up with in their small groups. Perhaps all groups will have a chance to share, but most likely, there will only be enough time for sharing from groups that have volunteered. As we begin to wrap up the sharing portion of the session, the participants will be thanked for taking part in both workshop sessions. They will also be informed that they will receive a follow-up survey that they will need to fill out to reflect on their experience from the workshop. I will also let the participants know that those who have done a pre-interview will need to do a post-interview. They will be contacted in a follow-up email with allotted times when we can meet again for

post-interviews. I will end the last workshop by opening it up to an optional Q&A from participants; anyone that wishes to leave will be allowed at that time.

### **The Importance of Educating Educators on SEL**

This project is essential for public scholarship because the participants' background and skills they gain from this PD workshop can directly apply to their work in the classroom. The short-term and long-term outcomes I hope to achieve from these workshops have a lot to do with educating teachers on the importance of teaching SEL and ultimately swaying their opinions of the three programs in place at their building. Ultimately, I want the participants who participate in my workshop to walk out with a more positive outlook on SEL regarding its significance and benefits. Research has shown that teacher buy-in for SEL will influence the efficacy of how it is taught in the classroom (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, and Salovey, 2012). Since teachers are the primary deliverers of SEL, they must be implementing the concepts and skills effectively to ensure that they impact their students.

Furthermore, by providing professional development, I will help to increase the likelihood that a program will be initiated and that it will be lasting (McCormick, Steckler, and McLeroy, 1995). Therefore, the hope of providing a PD workshop to educators within ISD 196 is to have teachers buy into the benefits of Conscious Discipline, MoveMindfully, and Second Step and be taught with consistency and high regard. Educating the teachers on ISD 196 on the three different programs will help ensure that the future of our students' mental, emotional, and physical well-being is guaranteed.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter provides an overview of the PD workshop that will eventually be conducted in ISD 196. This chapter discussed the setting of the workshop and the participants

who would take part in it. Additionally, this chapter gave an overview of the workshop structure and how it would be laid out, keeping in mind the strategies and principles that have been proven through research to be effective in teaching adult learners. Lastly, this chapter described the desired outcomes that would result from this workshop and how these outcomes would ultimately contribute to public scholarship in education. The next chapter will reflect the PD workshop as a whole, examining any possible implications that may result and how future research on teacher buy-in for SEL can move forward. Additionally, the next chapter will reflect on the growth I experienced from this project and how the knowledge gained from this process will enhance my teaching practice for the future.



## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

### **Purpose of this Capstone**

The focus of this project is to answer the question: *How can we increase teacher buy-in for programs like Conscious Discipline, Second Step, and MoveMindfully so that these SEL programs can be used separately or in concert with one another in the elementary classroom?*

This capstone project aims to create materials to present to educators in professional development (PD) workshops. Ultimately, this content will inform educators of these three SEL programs and convince them of the importance of implementing these programs in the classroom. Using assessment tools, such as pre-and post-surveys, I will collect data informing me of teacher buy-in changes throughout the PD workshops. A long-term goal of this capstone project is that the participants of the PD workshops will have increased acceptance of SEL and have the confidence to teach any of the three SEL programs to their students in the classroom daily. This chapter will reflect on the significant learnings I had as a researcher, writer, and learner while completing this project. Additionally, I will discuss how I created this project and how this capstone project will impact public education and later SEL research.

### **Major Learnings**

Throughout creating this PD workshop, I have learned how to be an efficient researcher by cultivating a literature review. While researching the content that would later be incorporated into the presentation, I first found research that would provide a well-rounded perspective on SEL and the three programs this project is centered around. In order to narrow in on the research process, the approach had to be skillful. Three significant learnings emerged from this

experience. First, one needs to start by doing broad research before narrowing in on the specifics. For example, I sought out the expertise of a content expert in the field of social-emotional learning, a school social worker in ISD 196. In this meeting, I was given a brief overview of the SEL programs at local schools in the southeast metro. This interaction oriented me to the different SEL programs and how they are used in the schools. Ultimately, this in-person research was how the three SEL programs were chosen for this project. After solidifying the SEL programs to be examined in this capstone project, I narrowed in on the research. Conclusively, the research for this project was centered around social-emotional learning, elementary-aged children, Conscious Discipline, Second Step, and MoveMindfully. Once the focus areas were established, I could delve even deeper into research that presented information on each topic.

The second significant learning was how to recognize a quality resource. When researching past studies, I kept the research within the confines of Hamline's online databases and articles. When a study presented informative data, I used critical thinking to discern whether this source was reliable. Was the author of the article an expert in their field? Was the article peer-reviewed by someone who could correct misconceptions if necessary? Is there perhaps a conflict of interest that exists between the author and the research they are doing? Is the data out-of-date, or is it an article that is current with the times? All of these questions and more were considered when breaking down the research for this project.

The third thing I learned from this experience as a researcher is to verify whether or not the data in the source aligns with the data presented in another source. Essentially, the information in that source is supported by other research done in different studies. By narrowing in on this research and confirming its validity, I was able to pull together data that would bolster

the presentation in this PD workshop. The steps taken while researching this capstone project are necessary for any disciplined researcher to formulate a thoroughly researched project.

### **The Literature Review**

All parts of the literature review were critical in providing substance to this capstone project. However, the research on CASEL's framework for social-emotional learning (SEL) was the most important in establishing a foundation for my research. In the literature review, I define SEL and describe the competencies within the framework that makes up SEL. I also summarized research studies that found the benefits of social-emotional learning and how it may be lacking. For example, background information provided by Elias et al. outlined goal setting, recognizing and managing emotions, responsible decision-making, developing and maintaining relationships, and empathy as crucial competencies that SEL aims to teach its learners (Elias, Zins, Weissberg, Frey, Greenberg, and Haynes, 1997). It is vital to research and cite this framework early on in this capstone because these competencies are what all SEL programs are trying to achieve with their curriculum. Therefore, it provides background information and creates commonality between the three SEL programs so that participants can make connections throughout the entire PD workshop.

The data collected from research studies on SEL also proved to be helpful when creating this PD workshop presentation. One research study, in particular, had to do with teachers' attitudes towards SEL in the classroom. In this study, completed by Education Week Research Center, the researchers wanted to collect data from teachers on their opinions of SEL. Surveys were used to collect data, and in their findings, the researchers learned that 78% of teachers felt that it was part of their role to help students develop their social and emotional skills. Nevertheless, only 29% of teachers reported having any mental health training (Schwartz, 2019).

Despite believing that it is their responsibility to teach social and emotional skills that contribute to students' overall mental health, not even half of the teachers surveyed had any training that would prepare them for such a thing. This research proved to be an essential finding because it focused on issues directly related to this project; educators desire to do the best for their students but do not have the means or knowledge to teach them about SEL.

In the Education Week Research Center study, teachers reported several reasons they could not teach their students SEL. These obstacles included lack of time, lack of support from families, administration, inadequate SEL programs, and lack of training (Schwartz, 2019). Many of these obstacles will be similar to the ones faced by the participants in this PD workshop. Therefore, this research is essential for two reasons: the first reason for making connections with the participants and their struggles. The second reason is to address the lack of training by providing well-rounded and engaging training on SEL that will equip teachers with the knowledge necessary to teach social and emotional skills in the classroom.

### **Policy Implications**

In recent years, federal and state policy has helped integrate SEL into districts and schools, resulting in SEL being a part of many more students' lives. According to a framework brief put out by CASEL in March of 2020, all 50 states have preschool SEL competencies or standards established. Furthermore, 18 of the 50 states have K-12 SEL competencies or standards in place. The following states that have K-12 SEL competencies include Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin (CASEL, 2020). So while SEL is becoming increasingly prevalent in schools within

specific states, there is still room for improvement when looking at SEL's role on a national level.

The latest development in funding for education has arisen over the last year with President Biden's signing of the American Rescue Plan (ARP). This stimulus bill resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic that spread throughout the world in the spring of 2020 and affects people today. Within this economic stimulus bill, funding was allotted to elementary and secondary schools through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER); approximately \$122 billion in funding is to be dispersed amongst all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. This money will address the repercussions that COVID-19 has had on students, their families, and those working in education. According to the U.S. Department of Education, schools can use this funding by putting it towards implementation strategies that meet the emotional, mental, social, and academic needs of students that were hit hardest by the pandemic (Press Office, 2021). During the 2020-2021 school year, many students learned remotely to limit the spread of COVID-19 amongst young people. Remote learning occurred because young people were unable to be vaccinated at the time. This change took a toll on many students' social and emotional well-being as they had limited face-to-face contact with peers and were prevented from engaging in group gatherings, such as team sports or school events.

This capstone project and other SEL-related research will likely have implications on policy having to do with SEL. This research could influence state and federal decision-makers who decide how to allocate ESSER funding to put more of it towards the SEL curriculum in the schools. More money spent on SEL could result in more training for teachers, improved training for teachers, and higher-quality SEL programs used in the schools. All these changes and more will likely lead to SEL acceptance by educators and families throughout the United States.

Increased acceptance and a broadening of implementation will ultimately help students of all ages whom the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacts.

### **Limitations**

When designing this capstone project, I had intended to use multiple means of collecting data from the participants in the PD workshop. Initially, I planned to do pre-and post-surveys, pre-and post- interviews, exit slips, and observations to accurately represent the participants' thoughts on SEL throughout the workshop experience. While creating this presentation and the supplemental materials used in conjunction with it, I decided to take out the pre-and post-interviews. This change was due to constraints in time for participants and concerns of redundancy. When creating this PD workshop, the idea to do pre-and post- interviews emerged to have more qualitative data to understand why the participants think the way they do about SEL. However, the pre-and post-survey questions are too similar to the interview questions. So when it came time for me to decide which method I most wanted to use to collect data, I leaned more towards surveys for a few different reasons.

Surveys would be more effective than conducting interviews for a few reasons. First, when trying to schedule interviews with participants, it seemed that it would be challenging to find a convenient time for both the participants and myself. Additionally, I wanted to interview participants before the workshop and following the workshop. This formatting would require us to schedule two different times to meet that would work for both of us. Planning would be even more difficult if I conducted both types of interviews with multiple people. Second, the timeline for when to launch the PD workshop was between late August to early September. This time of year would be ideal for preparing teachers for what they needed to know about the SEL programs before beginning the school year. However, teachers are typically overwhelmed by the

start of the school year since they try to be ready for their students on the first day. Giving them another task to work around during workshops would deter participants from being a part of the workshop altogether. Lastly, surveys are more likely to remain anonymous, whereas interviews are not. Therefore, surveys would result in more authentic responses to questions than if interviews were conducted. That is because participants may be less likely to share more controversial opinions towards SEL. All of the reasons mentioned above are why I decided to exclude the pre-and post- interviews from this final project.

### **Future Research**

The focus of this capstone project centers around learning teachers' attitudes towards SEL and their application of it in the classroom. The PD workshop within this project is designed to inform teachers on the three different SEL programs and the positive effects of implementing them. Since this PD workshop is set to take place within ISD 196, the focus of this project is on Conscious Discipline, MoveMindfully, and Second Step, which are all programs currently in place in ISD 196 or are to be used this upcoming school year. This capstone project aims to discover whether or not this training will influence teacher attitudes toward SEL and lead to increased implementation of any or all of these SEL programs in the classroom. This capstone project further cements prior research on SEL and will provide opportunities for similar research projects to be conducted in the future.

A longitudinal study could be conducted on either Second Step, MoveMindfully, or Conscious Discipline to understand better the efficacy of these programs on students' social and emotional skills over time. This study could focus on a class of students in kindergarten who learn one of the SEL programs consistently. This study could last up to one year or take place over several years as the researchers examine these participants' entire elementary school

experience. Through surveys, observations, or even interviews, the researchers could collect data to assess if students' behavior changes. In the end, researchers of a longitudinal study could find out how either of these programs can adapt or evolve to best serve students across the lifespan.

From the findings in this capstone project, I know that Second Step and MoveMindfully are programs that publicize curriculum for elementary, middle, and high school students.

However, how effective are these programs for older students? A comparative study on the effectiveness of these programs amongst different age groups could be a research topic.

Conscious Discipline is unlike Second Step or MoveMindfully because it is a program that centers around how teachers can shift their practice in order to provide a nurturing environment for students. A research question would then be whether or not this program's framework would be applicable across different age groups. If not, how would teachers need to adjust their understanding of Conscious Discipline to impact their older or younger students? There have been prior studies conducted on these programs. However, there is more research that should be done.

### **Communicating the Results**

This project will be shared with others through an oral presentation where I present to colleagues through a PD workshop. Within this project, there is a presentation, a goal sheet used as an exit slip, a pre-and post-survey, and materials provided by the three different SEL programs that will go along with this written portion. Throughout the workshop, these materials will be used to present information and collect data that will be later used to present findings for a later date to colleagues. Ultimately, I want the data I uncover to be presented to administrators at schools. This step will help inform administrators of teacher opinions on the SEL programs in place and help them make informed decisions to improve the future.



Additionally, the information I have collected in the literature review will be communicated to the participants in the PD workshop. The workshop will take place over two different days and will take place in person so that participants will be able to interact with one another easily. I intend to use student-centered teaching practices when presenting the SEL data to the audience and research-driven strategies to lead professional development. This approach involves using visuals, audio, and hands-on activities that will capture the attention of various learners in the audience. By sharing interactive learning opportunities throughout the PD workshop, I hope that the participants will take away some of the strategies they learned and feel confident communicating similar strategies to their students.

### **Benefits to the Profession**

This capstone project benefits the field of education for several reasons; however, more importantly, it benefits the needs of teachers. There is a short-term and long-term benefit that has motivated me to move forward with this project. This project will benefit teachers in the short term because it will educate them about the three SEL programs they will encounter in ISD 196. The presentation will also prepare them for the immediate need of teaching the content to their students. Being trained to teach SEL will benefit teachers' mental health and dedication to the profession in the long term. As mentioned in the literature review, one study found that teaching SEL in the classroom has decreased teacher burnout (Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small and Jacobson, 2009). Additionally, it increases teacher commitment to the field as it causes teachers to feel more valued within their classroom and school community (Collie, Shapka, and Perry, 2011). Lastly, being trained to teach students social and emotional skills simultaneously teaches educators how to use these skills and apply them in their own lives out of the classroom.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I reflected on the components that went into creating this capstone project and how it will someday contribute to the betterment of the education system. At the beginning of the chapter, I reflected on significant learnings while putting together this capstone project. I discussed how my research process was adjusted, which ultimately influenced how I processed the information as a learner. This change influenced how I wrote, because it became easier for me to write out the information more effectively in my own words. Following this section, I examined the components of earlier research and sifted through the data that was the most helpful in making connections through the project; this happened to be the data on CASEL's SEL framework. In the next section, the circumstances in place with the ARP economic stimulus bill were discussed. This bill has granted the education system some flexibility in allocating spending. Schools can now put the funding towards SEL training for teachers and resources that would further support teaching SEL in the classroom. I then recounted why the pre-and post-interviews were excluded from the final project, explaining how this decision would make the PD workshop more manageable for both participants and myself. From there, I make predictions about what future SEL research could do to build onto the findings made in this capstone project. Afterward, the data was broken down. I explained how the information I collect from the workshop would contribute to what is presented to colleagues in the future. Then, I explain how I will communicate these findings in the literature review to participants. Lastly, I describe how the work in this capstone project will ultimately benefit the teaching profession. I focus on the benefits that will arise specifically for teachers in a field of work where there is high burnout and stress. This chapter has allowed me to reflect on the process, interpret this work for others, and make predictions for positive change in the future.

## **Conclusion**

This capstone project strived to answer the question, *How can we increase teacher buy-in for programs like Conscious Discipline, Second Step, and MoveMindfully so that these programs can be used separately or in concert with one another in the elementary classroom?* I attempt to answer this question by creating a PD workshop that aims to increase teacher buy-in through educating, practicing, and reflecting alongside fellow teachers around three different SEL programs. Once this PD workshop has concluded, the assessments used to collect data will give ISD 196 an accurate picture of what was effective in increasing teacher buy-in for SEL. Ultimately, I want teachers who were a part of this PD workshop to walk away feeling confident in themselves and their practice. Furthermore, I aspire for these teachers to have adopted some of the SEL skills they learned into their everyday lives.

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