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Outdoor Education and the Effects on Social-Emotional Outcomes in Elementary-Aged Students: A PD Series

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Outdoor Education and the Effects on Social-Emotional Outcomes in Elementary-Aged
Students: A PD Series

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

Social Emotional Learning, referred to in this paper as SEL, is a buzz word in the current education system. There is a strong push for teachers to incorporate SEL into their instruction. In my career I have been a part of several professional development (PD) sessions surrounding SEL and have read research pertaining to SEL. Hoffman et al. (2021) conclude that teaching practices are a contributing factor in a positive relationship among ethnic / racial influence, peer socialization and academic and social readiness. Because of the persistence from education stakeholders to help students navigate mental health, peer interactions, and other social and emotional skills, I am exploring an alternative instructional practice that can contribute to better SEL outcomes.

The instructional practice that I am interested in is outdoor education. Outdoor education (OE) can be defined in many ways, such as education that takes place outdoors, education about the outdoors, and science or environmental education relating to the outdoors. OE is an instructional practice that uses the outdoors as a context for learning. There will be a more in-depth definition in Chapter Two. Using OE instructional methods and collecting student SEL data, I strove to explore my research question: *What are the effects of outdoor education on SEL outcomes in elementary-aged students?*

This chapter will outline the journey as an educator that led me to this research question. It will describe my personal and professional experiences in the education system, specifically my experiences with OE. These experiences contribute to my positionality on the subject. This chapter will preview Chapter Two and describe the

professional rationale for conducting this research, while also outlining Chapter Three and Four.

Professional Experience

There are many reasons this research interested me, most of which are inspired by my professional experiences in the elementary setting. While earning my elementary licensure, I had to complete methodology courses in literacy, math, social studies, science, health, art, physical education and music. My favorite part of these methodology courses was taking existing curricula and designing new approaches to deliver lessons. In my math methodology course, I did a lot of work around flexible thinking strategies to help students understand math conceptually rather than formulaically. In science methods we took FOSS lesson kits with pre-designed lesson plans and had to redesign the instructional strategies to increase engagement and promote inquiry. These experiences sparked a curiosity surrounding traditional instructional methods. As I transitioned into a classroom role, I began to look for ways to approach education in less conventional ways.

In my first two years as a teacher in Saint Paul, Minnesota, I worked at a year-round school. Instead of summer school, there were inter-sessions during the school's three-week breaks. During the February inter-session in both of those two years, I co-taught an outdoor class for fourth and fifth graders. This was a transformative experience for me as an elementary educator. I chose the path of elementary education because of the ability to see students develop identities and personalities at younger ages. This experience of taking students outside in the winter every day for two weeks allowed a lot of their personalities and identities to shine through. These students were city kids who showed up on the first day of the outdoor class in sneakers, jeans, and hoodies when

the temperature in Saint Paul was well below freezing. They were coming with virtually no experience of being outdoors for more than what they got each day at recess. The next two weeks we embarked on a journey of community building I have strived to recreate in the classroom. Through building shelters, playing survival and other community games, ice-fishing, building fires, and enjoying nature, I saw even the toughest and most hardened students open up and work cooperatively. This was the experience that made me want to research this topic further. This was a positive experience and it holds significance to my teaching journey, so I am choosing to do a research study to counteract some of my personal biases I hold.

As a child, I spent most of my time outside. Many of my formative experiences were in the woods or the neighborhood field exploring, building forts, playing games and playing with friends. This left me several positive memories and associations with the outdoors. Due to these positive feelings about the outdoors, it is natural for me to take my professional experiences with students and assign a positive value to it. I had to be careful when researching that this value did not interfere with the fidelity of the study. Students may not have had a positive experience outdoors in their life, or any experiences for that matter. The students may not have been as excited as I would have been to be outside, so I made sure to pay close attention to my research decisions to account for this positionality.

Since the experience with the winter outdoor class, I have also continued to see outdoor education at work. I was a part of taking students to an overnight outdoor center an hour north of Saint Paul, where they also learned about the outdoors, team-building, and the therapeutic nature of outdoors. The instructors were able to introduce content,

such as literacy and social studies as the students learned about the path of the Ojibwe tribes that brought them to Minnesota. Students went device-free for two days and stayed in rustic style cabins - another experience many of them said was their first. Furthermore, Saint Paul Public Schools has an outdoor conservancy center that all third and fifth graders in the district take a field trip to. I have also been able to take my fourth-grade class there twice over the last two years. Students hike around to learn about the geography and biology of Minnesota then inquire about these experiences to further their learning. It has become apparent in my experience that the Saint Paul School District has seen value in outdoor experiences for their elementary-aged students.

The other component of this research is SEL. This is a term I have heard every year I have been in the teaching profession. Administrators push it as part of the district plan to help students navigate emotions and identities. When looking at the Standards of Effective Teaching I am assessed on during observations, it is a term that is integrated into the standards. To be an effective teacher in the elementary setting you must also teach SEL strategies as well as content. I often find myself at a crossroads of expectations. Since the COVID pandemic and ensuing learning loss, there seems to be a lot of pressure on the academic rigor and expectations from the media, government, district, administrator and parents. In the same conversations, teachers are being told to help students stay mentally and physically healthy. It seems to be a one or the other approach, to which I wonder: How do we increase academic outcomes while also increasing social-emotional outcomes? or How can we increase academic rigor through a social-emotional instructional lens? These are not the research questions I am striving to

answer in this capstone, but they are a big part of why I am interested in alternative instructional practices to help students socially, emotionally, and academically.

Professional Rationale

As stated in the previous section, city districts are working to get students outside more. Research has shown a positive impact of being outside. The Child and Nature Network (2016) promotes research and studies that show benefits for students going outside, such as better academic performance, engagement, behavior and attention. Research also looks to answer ways to increase SEL outcomes in the classroom. Osher et al. (2016) discussed the need for schools to use a transformative SEL approach to be equitable to each student. According to Osher et al., SEL needs to be systematic and relevant to students' culture and age. Chapter Two will aim to review academic literature about OE and SEL and display a need to further this research field. There are many sources that show positive correlation between being outside and student performance and mental health, but I found few studies that directly investigate correlation between OE and SEL. I believe that teachers are looking for other options to approach SEL and I want to provide evidence whether using an outdoor education approach is one of the options.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided context to the research I am conducting. I am seeking to answer the question: *What are the effects of outdoor education on SEL outcomes in elementary-aged students?* I described why this topic has personal significance from my experiences teaching an outdoor class and witnessing my students learn outdoors over my years as an elementary teacher. I addressed some of the bias that I am carrying into this

research and will continue to address that throughout. I discussed the persistent need in the field to address SEL in the classroom, as well as the professional significance this research could have. In Chapter Two, I will review current research on outdoor education as well as social-emotional-learning to show what has already been discovered and concluded about these topics. I am aiming to take both domains of research and use this capstone to create a series of PD (PD) to help educators use OE to address SEL outcomes. In Chapter Three, I will provide an overview of the PD. Chapter Four will be a reflection of major learnings from the project, benefits and limitations, and future implications of the project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

As I aimed to produce a project that explores the question: *What are the effects of OE on SEL outcomes in elementary-aged students?* I needed to review current and historical research about those topics. This chapter includes a review of literature about OE and SEL. I used historical and contemporary definitions to create a definition of OE for my study. I then defined SEL and discussed the SEL frameworks and assessments available to use in my study. I specifically looked at SEL research in elementary and urban settings. Finally, I determined the current state of research about the OE effect on SEL.

What is Outdoor Education?

Historical and International Definitions

Lloyd B. Sharp (1948) is referred to as one of the pioneers of outdoor education. He establishes that traditional values in America since its creation have been to make people literate, specifically through learning to read, write, and do math. He wrote his article, *Why Outdoor and Camping Education?*, but when viewing the Common Core and State Standards, much of what teachers are still tasked with teaching daily is reading, writing, and math. In his writing, Sharp aims to put outdoor education into context. He argues that not all learning should be done outside, but that often there is opportunity missed to use the outdoors as a learning space. His thoughts are if something can be learned outside, it should be taken into consideration. Sharp defines the outdoors as the space that begins just outside the school building. It can be as close or as far from the

building as possible. Learning expeditions can take as long or as short as needed. Finally, he describes the common criticism of outdoor education as being simply recreation, physical education or play. He refutes this with the statement that teachers of all subjects can find material outdoors. Sharp's position is the one of the earliest published arguments for outdoor education and it will help establish the evolution of research involving outdoor education.

Building a definition of OE requires a review of several eras of research in the field. In the following subtopic I will explore how outdoor education differs from nature-based and environmental education. Ford's (1986) definition helps set a context to describe the differences. Ford defines outdoor education as learning that takes place outdoors, about the outdoors, with the purpose of developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes about the world we live in. With outdoor education, the learning focus can be mathematics, language arts, geography, geology, art, and practically any other subject. Ford ultimately builds on Sharp's ideas (1948) about OE, but is more specific by including content areas. Ford's approach can be summarized by using the outdoor setting to explore, learn and experience targeted learning goals.

With some historical context of outdoor education, it is possible to view the current research and definitions of outdoor education. Currently, outdoor education seems to be more prevalent in other countries than the United States, so I will include studies and learning models from both the United States and abroad. Gruno and Gibbons (2022) took a scan of the outdoor education experiences in British Columbia and found that many practitioners are using an outdoor education approach, but there are many approaches being utilized. They concluded that British Columbia's OE fell into one of

eight categories: physical and health education courses, Indigenous-focused programs, interdisciplinary programs, unique content programs, annual visits, community partnership programs, value-added courses, school-wide activities, and greening schoolyards. This scan shows that outdoor education does not fit into a single approach or pedagogical style and when defining outdoor education, many factors have to be considered.

In a systematic review of OE on student health dimensions across many English and German speaking schools in Europe, Becker et al. (2017) looked at different OE programs. They have similar ideas to Sharp's (1948) original definition of OE as any education that takes place outdoors. They decided a common definition they would use for their research is learning that takes place outside of the classroom or in an outdoor environment. Furthermore, in Australia, much research shows that OE is commonplace in teaching and education practices. Although OE is common in Australia, it is not defined the same as Sharp and Ford would define it. In one review of two OE programs in Australia, Thomas (2019) chose not to define OE as anything specific, and instead used it as an umbrella term for adventure education and environmental education. Thomas is much vaguer in defining OE, which suggests that it is not as clear as the other definitions used by researchers in Germany, Canada, and America. Potter and Dymont (2016) attempted to make sense of the term OE, as it is used in Australia, but much like Thomas, it added to dissent on a clear definition for OE. Potter and Dymont ascertain that many educators and researchers use OE as a term to describe methodology and pedagogy as others use it as a content area term. OE as a methodology means one is describing the teaching and learning practices in the outdoors, much like Ford would choose to define

OE. Speaking of OE as a content area would describe it as content, curriculum and subject matter as one would with reading, writing, math and science. Potter and Dymont, for the sake of their research, choose to view OE as a content area based on the fact that many jurisdictions in Australia teach OE as a subject area. Dymont et. al (2018) continued to utilize OE as a subject area when researching pedagogical content knowledge and applying it to OE. They even cited other Australian studies, including Potter and Dymont, that define OE as a content area rather than methodology, suggesting that Australian utilizes OE more as a subject area than education systems in other countries.

Nicol (2002) wrote a three part journal article on OE, its historical development in the United Kingdom (UK), and how it relates to environmental education (EE). Nicol references the formation of the National Association of Outdoor Education (NAOE) in order to describe the beginning of OE in the UK. The NAOE was founded on the principle that OE is an approach or method to achieve content objectives, much like the definitions used by Ford (1986) and Sharp (1946). This fits in the historical context, as NAOE was founded in 1970, in between Sharp and Ford's research. Nicol did make a summary statement that helps understand the connection between many of these historical and international definitions of OE: "outdoor education defies definition" (p. 32).

As stated by Nicol, it is nearly impossible to define OE as one thing. There are many views and perspectives on what OE is and how it should be utilized. OE is a part of many countries' educational systems in varying ways. OE is also often referenced with the terms nature-based education (NBE), environmental education (EE), and place-based

learning (PBL), which further disrupts the ability to create a common definition amongst researchers.

Nature-based, Place-based, and Environmental Education Versus Outdoor Education

Many articles mentioned OE along with NBE, EE and PBL. Some used them as synonymous terms or interchangeably, as others chose to use one versus the other. Nicol (2003) continued her research series to conclude the relationship between OE and EE, noting that OE is usually viewed to have social- and personal-based outcomes and EE is seen to have sustainability-based goals. Utilizing a philosophical framework and four ways of knowing; experiential knowing, presentational knowing, practical knowing, and propositional knowing, OE can find a place within a sustainability-based model of EE, but she does not assert they are in the same.

Wals et al. (2014) describe EE as having the goal of changing students' environmental behaviors. It is a teaching practice that aims to raise awareness and enable students to think critically about issues regarding the environment, which relates to Nicol's assertion of sustainability-based education. Taylor et al. (2022) would agree with Nicol and Wals et al. that EE needs to firmly include issues of sustainability, as they argue that EE is an education practice that teaches about the environment, environmental issues and prepares students for environmental stewardship.

Much like OE, some view NBE as an overarching term for a content area, a discipline, or a pedagogy. Taylor et al. continued to discuss the intersectionality of NBE and EE. They viewed NBE as an education practice that connects learning to nature, the natural world or a natural place where the learning is happening versus their definition of EE as having environmental issues at the core of instruction. The definition of NBE more

aligns with the definitions for OE used by Ford and Becker et al. due to the emphasis on using the natural world to learn, rather than the definitions for EE laid forth by Nicol, Wals et al. and Taylor, Butts-Wilmsmeyer, and Jordan.

Warkentin (2011) described a study she did with college students in a teacher prep program in New York City. The point of the study was to cultivate naturalists in an urban environment by returning to the same location in Central Park weekly and recording observations. Many of the students did not expect to learn much from this, as they did not view a highly manicured city park such as Central as nature. Warkentin described this method as PBL or NBE instead of OE, but I believe Sharp, Ford, and Becker et al. would describe it as OE as it is learning taking place outdoors. It is labeled as PBL because of the experience of remaining in one place with a goal of observing the natural world. The research does mention OE in their study, but more often described the learning activity as a way to show preservice teachers benefits of PBL and NBE, even in an urban environment. Wals et al. also views PBL as a solution that allows students to feel a connection with the natural planet.

When looking at NBE and PBL, some discrepancies arose. Many PBL and NBE models include mentions of indigeneity. Johnson (2010) views PBL as a method in creating a critical consciousness about the atrocities committed by Westerners towards indigenous groups. He argues that western researchers have disconnected place from narratives, while place holds a strong significance to the stories being told about history, culture, science and civilizations. The discrepancy is that often educators will push PBL as a successful learning practice, much like Warkentin did in her study, but leave out the importance of place to the native and indigenous narrative or can white-wash the

significance of the place with western ideals. Friedel (2011) agrees that there is an overarching feeling of whiteness when delivering education. PBL could assume that native youth have a special connection to place and the land because of historical narratives. It also could be troubling as it can create a racialized learning environment that utilizes western practices and does not include or assumes student cultural practices.

Using the historical, international, and contemporary research about OE and comparing it to research about EE, NBE, and PBL, I came up with the definition I would use for my research: *OE is a pedagogy that takes place in the outdoors (outside the physical classroom and school building). Teachers can deliver lessons in any content area if they use the outdoor space as context for instruction.*

What is Social Emotional Learning?

When exploring the effect of OE on SEL, it is imperative to determine current practices and ideas surrounding SEL in an elementary school. SEL has many dimensions and applications across all education settings. Many researchers ascertained that it is critical to current educational research. There are many areas to explore in SEL including definitions, instructional practices, how those practices affect students and how educators assess SEL.

SEL Definitions

Much like OE, SEL is a term that may be used in different ways in education. In a teacher's guidebook, Elias et al. (1997) defined SEL as situations where adults and children learn how to recognize, express and manage abilities that allow someone to be successful in tasks such as learning, relationship-building, problem-solving, self-control, self-care and cooperation. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional

Learning (CASEL, 2021), which is one of the most widely adapted frameworks for SEL, defined it as a method of teaching children skills to be effective in life. These skills include emotional regulation, cooperation, empathy, handling challenges effectively, and building positive relationships. CASEL chooses to focus on children's SEL development in their definition, whereas Elias et al. includes adults as well. When breaking down CASEL's definition, Humphrey (2013), also chose to include adults. He made sure it was clear that SEL is a process or method that schools can utilize for teachers and students. Finally, Humphrey raised the point that it encompasses interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. So to summarize the findings for this research, SEL was defined as *a learning process that trains and engages students in identifying emotions, regulation strategies, relationship and community building, problem-solving, personal responsibility, and working as part of a team.*

SEL Implementation Practices and Effects on Students

Osher et al. (2016) summarized years of research done around SEL. They provided criteria for effective SEL implementation. The criteria included the SEL instruction to be age and developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, and systematic. Durlak (2016) provided a list of components that need to be considered for any successful program implementation. This list included: fidelity, dosage, delivery quality, adaptation, participant engagement, differentiation, checking control variables, and reach of the program. Considering both Osher et al. and Durlak's criterias for successful program implementation allows for a deeper look at program effectiveness. Osher et al focused on implementation over the course of a research study within a school

setting, whereas Durlak was providing an implementation guide and considerations for school systems when they begin to implement SEL.

CASEL (2021) provided a guide to implement schoolwide SEL. In this guide they included five steps: build foundational support, create a plan, strengthen adult SEL, promote SEL for students, and practice continual improvement. Building foundational support means creating an implementation team and a shared vision for schoolwide SEL. Creating a plan includes using the school vision to develop goals and a long-term roadmap for implementation. The stakeholders who may be involved in creating goals and implementation in CASEL's guide would be a school-based team, teachers, students, families, and community partners. Durlak would add the important stakeholders in implementation are also policy makers, school funders, program developers, and consultants. Strengthening SEL amongst adults allows for a cohesive school environment that aligns with the SEL model and goals. It also allows teachers to better model SEL competencies to their students. Promoting SEL for students includes establishing school-wide norms, utilizing an evidence based program, and establishing community and family partnerships. CASEL suggested that implementation in the classroom should include explicit instruction of SEL skills. Like Osher et al, CASEL described the need for SEL instruction to be developmentally appropriate for the students. Some other integration criteria for student SEL are creating a supportive environment, goal-setting, designing learning activities that use teamwork and include problem-solving, active listening in discussions, and affirming identities, cultures and perspectives in the classroom space, to list a few. Finally, CASEL suggested utilizing improvement cycles to evaluate and adjust schoolwide SEL instruction.

After Osher et al. utilized their implementation guide in their research, they concluded that SEL can be helpful in promoting citizenship and emotional regulation, solving some common education problems such as school dropout and delinquency, and preparing students to solve problems and think critically. This implementation guide was very similar to CASEL's, and stressed the importance of schoolwide implementation. They were able to see a negative effect if the school does not implement SEL with fidelity, intention and high quality.

Durlak et. al (2011) also added to the research of positive effects of SEL implementation. Like Osher et al, they found that SEL implementation can have positive student outcomes such as increased SEL skills and attitudes, lower emotional distress, less behavior issues in the classroom, and improved academic performance. Furthermore, they found that effective implementation could and did happen with school staff rather than outside agencies and community groups. This gave an important piece of data that shows SEL needs to be implemented throughout the school by teachers and staff who are with students daily.

Although CASEL, Osher et al, Durlak and Durlak et al. looked to provide research on positive implementation, there is some dissent on implementing SEL programs in schools. Zhao (2020) summarized many of the reasons opponents of SEL raise issues with the implementation. One of the key opposing opinions to SEL implementation is the over politicizing of a non-academic standard. This comes from many states adapting SEL skills as part of their standards. Another opposing idea is that SEL is being oversold as a fix-all, and SEL organizations may be biased in their ideologies. There are a lot of opinions that SEL research is too ideological, not scientific

enough and often oversold. Finally, many dissenters pointed to SEL as a way to strip academic, ideological and personal freedoms from students. The thought is that implementing SEL is a way for progressive educators to create progressive-thinking students, a nod to the criticism of social control and indoctrination. Although Zhao cited many published articles in her review of SEL dissent, many of those were from opinion pieces and testimonies and not many peer-reviewed journals. While I researched SEL implementation and effects, an overwhelming majority of peer-reviewed journals pointed to positive effects, which could align with the dissenter's opinion that the research is oversold and overhyped.

Throughout my personal experience as an educator and throughout my review of literature SEL is often framed with a deficit mindset. An example of this mindset is that students need to be saved by SEL to not end up with negative outcomes that could be expected of them based on their race, identity, culture, or environmental circumstances. Jagers et al. (2019) wrote about a transformative SEL. This approach attempts to mitigate systemic inequities by confronting the roots and causes of those inequities. The research stated that SEL cannot be viewed as a one-size-fits-all approach, and the outcomes should be skills and competencies that help students address roots and causes of inequity. The study used the CASEL framework and suggests that transformative SEL results in engaged citizenship, which in turn allows students to address inequities. The CASEL foci of SEL are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills. Finally, these researchers suggested some evidence-based approaches for transformative SEL. These approaches were summarized as: explicit instruction of social competencies and integrating those competencies

throughout instructional and disciplinary practices; a supportive learning environment throughout the entire school community which encourages and incorporates a sense of safety and belonging; culturally-relevant instruction and developmentally-appropriate tasks; and scaffolded and differentiated instruction that allows for inquiry, transferable skills, constructive learning and supports students.

One study from Edtrust (2020) had a full section on shifting the focus of SEL from "fixing kids" to a more equitable approach to SEL development. The study provided some mindset shifts adults in a school can practice in order to deliver more meaningful SEL instruction. These shifts include: using a growth and strength-based mindset when thinking of students versus a deficit-based view, dismantling a one-size fits all approach to recognizing cultural and societal differences and influences, and working to recognize and reduce biases. Ultimately, research showed that students of color are targeted for social competency instruction more often than white students as a result of adult bias that students from diverse backgrounds need these missing skills to succeed. Looking back at Durlak et al. (2011), researchers did acknowledge some of the demographics in their positive implementation studies, but it was not a key component of the research. Only about 35% of the study participants were from ethnically or socioeconomically diverse school settings and 47% were from urban schools. Results were not segregated by these demographic factors, pointing to the issue of SEL research and implementation as being one-size-fits-all.

In the studies of SEL implementation by Osher et al. and Durlak et al., implementation seemed to rely on a schoolwide mission or goal to increase social and emotional skills or competencies amongst the school community. Buy-in from

participants seemed to be a key component of positive SEL implementation and effects. Positive outcomes came from schools that utilized SEL practices within the whole school community, ensuring adults were modeling positive SEL behaviors. Research from Edtrust and Jagers et al. also showed that there needs to be a clear and intentful focus on racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic perspectives while implementing SEL programs. Although dissenters attempted to write SEL off as an ideological social control instrument, research showed that SEL can be successfully implemented and provide positive outcomes for students.

Social Emotional Learning Instruction in an Elementary Setting

Although SEL can be implemented for all learners, my research question is specifically about elementary-aged students. Jones et al. (2010) looked at utilizing an embedded SEL instruction practice, 4Rs, during literacy instruction for one full year in the elementary setting. This study was done in ethnically diverse schools, which is important to note, as looking at SEL in a diverse setting was intentional in this study. Hunter et al. (2021) looked at sustained SEL instruction to students in first and second grade. Hunter did not focus on ethnically diverse schools. The Hunter et al. study had two groups, one that received SEL instruction in just first grade and the other received it in second grade as well. The Hunter et al. study differed from the Jones et al. study as they delivered SEL alone. They did not embed SEL into other subjects, as Jones et al. did with literacy. Although Hunter et al. acknowledged there were many variables that could have affected the results, the conclusion was that universal SEL programs that are sustained through elementary school could have some positive causal effects on behavior and academic outcomes. The Jones et al. study was over just one year of instruction and they

also found that the positive effects of the SEL program were few and not sustained. They continued their research and added that with continual embedded instruction, students did increase SEL skills over time. Both studies concluded that more time and research is needed to make definitive statements about using SEL in elementary schools and the long-term effects.

Similar to Jones et al. (2010), Daunic et al. (2021) utilized literacy-embedded SEL instruction to test its effect on kindergarten and first grade students. Also similarly to Jones et al., Daunic et al. researched in Title I eligible elementary schools, meaning the population was diverse culturally and socioeconomically. Some of the SEL practices implemented in this study included utilizing story books and vocabulary to allow students to practice SEL skills. The Daunic et al. study was targeting students with precursor behaviors that may lead to being labeled EBD (a special education label: emotional behavioral disorder). Although Daunic et al. specifically targeted a population of students, Dresser (2013) would suggest that using literacy instruction as a basis for SEL could be effective elsewhere. Dresser urged teacher candidates to be cognizant of the specific needs of students and how to address SEL needs during literacy and language instruction, which continues to be a theme amongst SEL implementation research.

When researching equity-based instruction, race was not the only factor I discovered to be prominent. Cho et al. (2019) examined teacher's perspectives on refugee English learners (ELs). The article concluded that many teachers took a deficit view when giving their perspective on the refugee students' SEL skills, as their cultural and ethical differences were clear in teachers' responses. This aligned with Dresser (2013),

Jagers et al. (2019) and Edtrust (2020) who concluded there should be a shift towards strength-based perspectives when thinking of SEL development in students.

Dresser, Cho et al. Jagers et al. and Edtrust also align with Heineke and Vera (2022) as they discussed preparing to instruct SEL to emergent ELs in an elementary setting. Heineke and Vera spoke to the caution educators should use when implementing universal one-size-fits-all style SEL programs when teaching emergent ELs. The main points that Heineke and Vera made were that emergent ELs may have some of the same needs and experiences as mainstream English speakers, their language acquisition experience (as well as the stress of learning a new language), immigrant identity, along with any trauma from migration, family separation or school interruption was different than those of mainstream English speakers. Both Cho et al. and Heineke and Vera found that teachers were underprepared to teach SEL to students from other countries. Both studies also highlighted that teachers often are unable to utilize positive relationships with parents and families of the ELs due to perceived cultural and language barriers, which could lead to negative outcomes. These studies continued to prove the need for teachers to utilize culturally relevant pedagogy during SEL instruction and that SEL educators should be aware of their own assumptions and biases when working with students from diverse backgrounds.

In summary, when instructing elementary school students, researchers found more success with multi-year studies. It was clear that research suggested embedding SEL into other subjects, such as language arts. It also was apparent that there is a need for elementary teachers to address the cultural needs of their students when delivering SEL instruction and avoid using a one-size-fits-all approach.

Social Emotional Learning Assessments

When addressing SEL, research also points to methods of assessing SEL. The CASEL (2019) implementation guide provides an assessment for teachers to use to see if they are delivering SEL effectively in the classroom. That assessment can be found in Appendix A. Although that assessment is a strong resource for educators to use for self-reflection, I was interested in student assessments that show SEL learning outcomes. It has become clear that due to the abundant amount of SEL programs and implementation practices, there is not one single assessment for SEL outcomes. Jonson's (2022) study really stuck out to me as it aimed to help educators choose a proper SEL assessment to use when looking to gather data. Some considerations mentioned by Jonson when choosing an assessment are: aligning the assessment with the purpose of the data, targeting specific competencies to focus on, and understanding the cultural appropriateness of the assessment based on the study participants. The study then provides some considerations for measuring quality of the assessment: effectiveness in measuring the competency, will it provide clear and interpretable evidence, appropriateness for the students, study participants, or setting, and any shortcomings that can arise from scoring and interpreting the data from the assessment.

As evidenced by much of the research, it was also important to consider the equity of assessment in this field. El Mallah (2022) offers a perspective that aligns with the transformative SEL approach laid out by Jagers et. al. El Mallah, like Jonson, poses the challenge of ensuring the assessment is what is needed to fit the parameters of the use. When working with students from different ethnic backgrounds, El Mallah argued that SEL assessment should fully validate all competencies that belong to that culture.

This requires the researcher or educator to understand the cultural perspective of that student before assessing SEL. El Mallah suggests that SEL competencies are displayed differently among different ethnic, racial and cultural groups, so assessment should reflect that. Some considerations El Mallah suggested were to allow participants choice to list competencies, then rank them rather than providing a list of competencies.

Ultimately El Mallah saw many deficit-based competencies used in SEL assessments, and urged to shift to more diverse, strength-based terms that help students identify their own competencies more clearly and accurately.

Research shows the need for many considerations to choose the appropriate assessment for SEL outcomes. Understanding the purpose of the assessment and the participants that are being evaluated is an important takeaway. Being cognizant of the cultural backgrounds of participants and reflecting those differences within assessment is pivotal learning that has guided this research.

Outdoor Education Effects on Social Emotional Learning

My research question aimed to examine the effect of OE on SEL outcomes amongst elementary-aged students. Research mainly leans towards a positive correlation between OE and SEL. Children and Nature Network (2016) provided a summary of how nature can improve academic outcomes in a graphic provided in Appendix B. The graphic showed that spending time in nature boosts students' performance in academic subjects, enhances their creativity, critical thinking and problem solving, increases their attention and focus, and students are more enthusiastic, engaged and less disruptive. The domains shown in the graphic such as critical thinking, problem solving, behavior, and engagement are social competencies that closely align with the definition of SEL by Elias

et al. (1997), CASEL (2021), and Humphrey (2013). Children and Nature Network utilized several studies in the graphic that all point to positive effects of OE (sources cited in the graphic). These conclusions are similar to those that were found in a summation of 147 studies reviewed by Mann et al. (2022). Mann et al. concluded that after reviewing these studies, outdoor learning experiences had measurable outcomes of socio-emotional competencies and academic outcomes. They concluded that OE could be an effective learning method for educators to employ. Mann et al. did acknowledge that not every one of the 147 studies had a positive outcome and that OE is a field that should continue to be researched and that because OE is an ambiguous field and term, it may be holding back research.

Even in the 147 studies that Mann et al. (2022) , few had shown a negative correlation between OE and SEL. However, some research provided barriers that need to be considered to OE. Chavez et al. (2019) wrote about families' views about public greenspaces in highly diverse and low-income areas. Families valued greenspace, but had concerns as well. These concerns include safety, managing children's behavior in outdoor spaces, lack of accessibility, and fear of accidents. Accessibility is one concept that was extremely important to consider. It is clear there is a strong need for further research on access to the outdoors for people with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities. Horton (2017) also wrote about the accessibility issues. Their research shows that many parents of children with disabilities described anxiety surrounding the outdoors due to barriers for their children. Some of the most common barriers reported by those parents are logistical issues, tripping hazards or hard-to-navigate paths and surfaces, and attitudes of others. Although these families understood the common health and mental benefits

attributed to the outdoors like the ones shown in Child and Nature Network (2016) graphic and Mann et al. (2022) review, they were not as likely to enjoy their time if they took their children there.

In summary, there are highly positional views in the research about OE. Many researchers clearly had values that aligned with the outdoors and nature. This is clear by how many positive statements were made about the outdoors and utilizing natural spaces within research. Although there are many studies published showing a positive correlation between the outdoors and mental and emotional well-being, there still seems to be a lot of research needed. Along with this there were some negative views on the outdoors and some barriers for access. These accessibility considerations are important when planning OE experiences and lessons.

Conclusion

In conclusion, OE could be considered many things amongst researchers. The definition has transformed over time and the methods used in the United States, Australia, Canada, and Europe vary greatly. The terms NBE, EE, and PBL also occur in similar research, which led me to define OE as *a pedagogy that takes place in the outdoors (outside the physical classroom and school building). Teachers can deliver lessons in any content area if they use the outdoor space as context for instruction.*

SEL is considered a process that engages people in utilizing skills to identify and regulate emotions, cooperate and collaborate, practicing self-responsibility and problem-solving. Research showed that SEL is prevalent in many schools and are more likely to be successful when they are implemented properly. Research also showed the need to consider cultural relevance when implementing and instructing SEL. There was

some dissent that believes SEL is too ideological and progressive, but studies showed there are beneficial effects when implemented correctly. When choosing assessments, researchers encouraged a deep-dive into many factors prior to choosing an assessment. Finally, when linking OE and SEL, many researchers believed there is a positive correlation between the two.

In Chapter Three, I utilize the research from this literature review to create a PD series that teaches elementary educators how to incorporate OE into their instructional practices with the purpose of exploring the effect of OE on their students' SEL outcomes. Chapter Three provides a description of the project, including the framework used, the setting and audience, and an overview of activities and objectives.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

When considering my research question *How does OE affect SEL outcomes of elementary-aged students?*, I believed the best approach would be to witness it in action. Research has shown there is a positive correlation between OE and positive SEL outcomes (Children and Nature Network 2016). In Chapter Two, I displayed the differences between EE, NBE and OE. The fact that there is not a common definition for OE suggests that it is not as easily understood and defined as other content and instructional areas are in education. Due to the need for a clearer path for OE practices to be understood, educators to help increase SEL outcomes in their students, as well as a desire to see research applied to practice, this chapter describes the PD (PD) I created to help teachers consider my research question.

This project is a multi-day PD. This chapter describes the framework of the project, the demographic of educators and the setting of schools this PD is designed for. It also describes the timeline of the PD, each day's format, activities, guiding questions, and response types. This chapter also provides the assessment created for checking PD effectiveness for student outcome as well as instructor feedback. At Chapter Three's conclusion, the reader would understand the entire project's implementation.

Framework

In order for this PD to be successful, it includes the elements of effective PD. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) assert these elements as: content focus, active learning, collaboration, modeling, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection, and

having a sustained duration. This PD series includes aspects of all of these components in order for it to best serve its audience.

The content focus of this PD is OE and SEL student outcomes. Each session of the PD has a content objective that provides context to the learning to come. This PD is not designed to be done alone. It is designed to be done within a professional learning community (PLC) or grade-level teams, promoting collaboration. It also is designed for educators to introduce their new learning in the classroom, meaning teachers will be actively learning with their students as well. With the use of peer-reviewed research texts, model lessons, and expert teachers, the participants are supported throughout the PD to reflect on best practices. Participants are provided with an assessment to use to examine student outcomes in order to reflect on their experience and provide feedback on the PD. Finally, this PD occurs over several sessions that will span several months, allowing participants to grapple with the content, utilize it, observe student outcomes, and reflect on their own practice throughout the process.

Setting and Audience

This PD is designed for educators in a school setting that does not have any existing OE curriculum or programming. The school setting is an urban school that has an acre grassy field for teachers to use as their outdoor area for learning activities. The PLC that will be participating in this study will be the educators who teach third, fourth, and fifth grades, with the intention to expand the PD over time to modify the materials to be used in pre-k, kindergarten, first and second grade classrooms. The PD is targeting third through fifth grade because the learning activities and assessments included in the PD are more developmentally appropriate for those aged students.

The school this PD is designed for is in an urban setting where students have some outdoor space in the community, but it is not as accessible as outdoor spaces for students attending school in a rural or suburban setting. A large number of students in the community are students from immigrant backgrounds. The demographics are: 50% Asian Pacific Islander, 20% African American, 10% Hispanic/LatinX, 10% White, 3% Native American and 7% of more than one race. Over half the population of students in this school are ELs, meaning the English as Second Language (ESL) teachers that service third, fourth and fifth graders will also participate in this PD. Finally, about 15% of students receive special education services in the general education classroom, so special education teachers who service the students in grades 3-5 will be participating in the PD as part of the cohort. With the adult PD participants and the learners they will be practicing the PD with identified, I will describe the project in greater detail.

Overview

The overview of the PD will describe the timeline of the project, the goals and objectives of each session, and provide an overview of the activities in each PD session. The PD is broken into six sessions spanning three months of instruction. Each session will be incorporated into Job Embedded PD (JEPD), meaning participating educators will have a 50-minute PD session during the work day. This PD will be delivered bi-weekly in order to provide educators time to plan, implement, deliver and reflect on OE learning activities. After three months of PD revolving around OE, educators will then decide whether incorporating OE into their instruction is beneficial to students' SEL outcomes.

Session One

Session One focuses on the needs of the educators in order to understand and utilize OE instruction. The objectives for session one are: Participants will be able to identify their experience with OE and any barriers to implementation; participants will understand the potential benefits of OE for their students; and participants will understand the scope and sequence of the PD. Session One encourages participants to share about their experiences with OE and any factors that need to be considered with delivering OE with their classes. Session One promotes collaboration and reflection about their current practices, while introducing OE as the content focus.

Session Two

The goal of Session Two is to connect the learning from session one to the goal of the whole PD, which is the effect of OE on SEL outcomes. Session Two revolves around SEL outcomes. The objectives for session two are: participants will be able to assess their own SEL practice; and participants will be able to describe the ways OE can support student SEL outcomes. Session Two includes activities that encourage reflection on current instructional practices and positionalities and collaboration through discussion with colleagues.

Session Three

Session Three provides active learning opportunities and modeling of an effective outdoor lesson. The objective of the session is: participants will be able to experience an outdoor education lesson in action. The objective of the outdoor lesson is an ELA objective: students will be able to use metaphors, similes, and personification to describe the natural environment. Session Three provides active learning with the content focus.

The facilitator brings participants outside and teaches an OE lesson that is connected to a literacy standard. After the OE activity, participants have the opportunity to collaborate with their grade-level teams and SPED and EL staff to plan an OE lesson with a grade-level standard. The facilitator provides blank lesson plan templates and coaching throughout this process.

Session Four

In Session Four, all participants engage in active learning in an OE setting. Each grade level team teaches an activity and provides feedback to each other. The objective of session four is: participants will practice delivering an OE lesson. Each grade-level team will deliver a shortened version of the OE lesson they planned to the rest of the participants. The participants participate in the learning activities and then provide constructive feedback to the grade-level team that led the lesson, addressing engagement, differentiation, modifications, and accessibility.

Session Five

Session Five refocuses the PD to the overall objective: using OE to affect SEL outcomes for elementary-aged students. Session Five allows educators to revisit positive SEL outcomes and introduces the PD-provided SEL assessment. The objective for Session Five is: participants will understand SEL assessment implementation; and participants will plan to implement OE lessons with their students. In Session Five, participants watch and read evidence-based SEL resources and reflect on their practices using the SEL framework. The facilitator distributes and explains an SEL assessment the participants use with their students. The participants have time to plan to distribute the

assessment to their students and plan a content-focused OE lesson to deliver to their class while the facilitator provides support and coaching.

Session Six

Session Six gives participants the opportunity to reflect on the lessons they taught to their class and review the assessment data. The objective for session six is: participants will reflect on their practice and assessment data. In Session Six, participants reflect on their OE lessons they delivered to their classes. They then use the SEL assessments to examine student data, which allows them to ponder the PD guiding question: *how does OE affect SEL outcomes of elementary-aged students?*

Summary

This PD will allow educators to gain content knowledge, actively learn, collaborate, observe modeling and research, and most importantly reflect on current practices. Through a progression of six sessions over three months, participants will learn about OE and SEL, experience OE in action and experiment with OE instructional strategies. The PD is urging educators to think outside of the norms of education and try non-traditional strategies and learning settings. Using self-assessed student data, teachers can evaluate the effectiveness of OE in their own classrooms and make an informed decision on incorporating OE into regular instruction.

Chapter Four will be a reflection of creating this PD. I will highlight some of my findings about adult learning. I will discuss any challenges and successes of conceptualizing a PD series. I will continue to reflect on how this process has affected my positionalities and practices in education as an educator and a learner.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

This research project aims to explore the question: *what is the effect of OE on SEL outcomes of elementary aged students?* Section Four is a reflection of my learning throughout the process of researching this question and designing and creating this project. Section Four examines any major learnings I had as a writer and researcher. I also revisit Chapter Two and discuss the prominence of the research I utilized in creating my PD. Chapter Four also considers the implications of this project, as well as any limitations it may have. Finally, Chapter Four offers some perspective on future research, uses, and benefits related to my capstone project.

Major Learnings

I reflected on the process of researching, learning, writing, and creating materials for my capstone project. I learned a lot about myself and academic research throughout writing this capstone. I learned that being thorough is important when researching. I learned that reading all the time is pivotal. I also learned that picking a topic I was passionate about was helpful. I chose a topic that I had experience with, which made researching and writing easier. As an educator, going through this process put a lot into perspective.

The perspective that I had when beginning this capstone project was that I have read, researched and written a lot throughout my education, so it would just be another project like those. It required a lot more patience, diligence, and academic language and writing use than I expected. I noted that as an educator, this process gave me a new

perspective about my students. I can take this process and apply my learning to how I teach students the reading and writing process. I will continue to examine my biases and assumptions about my students' abilities. Although a student may have the skills to read and write fluently, they may not succeed with academic writing or research. I could not help but continue to think about how I support students, especially ELs, with academic language use. It has given me a perspective to be flexible about expectations and honest with my students about my own experiences with writing. I will continue to reflect on the projects and topics I give my students. I know that giving them opportunities to be passionate about the topic will have a positive impact on the finished product.

Finally, I learned about the process of research and my own interests in education academia. I started this project expecting to do a thesis because I knew I wanted to see my research question answered in action. I discovered that doing data collection with students requires a lot of due diligence. There were several proposals needed to use my students' data in my research thesis. Not only was there a need for an IRB (institutional review board) review to begin collecting data; there needed to be a proposal submitted to the school district, consent forms distributed, and valid assurance that data will be private. There was some oversight on these requirements, prompting me to transition from a thesis to a project. Although I was expecting to do a thesis, the project taught me a lot about my relationship with education. I discovered that I enjoy creating PD. I enjoyed creating learning opportunities for other educators, especially in a field I am interested in. I learned that I have participated in enough PD during my career that I know what is successful in engaging educators. I learned that if I were to move on from classroom teaching, coaching or PD creation would be something I would be interested in.

Ultimately having to pivot from a thesis to a project opened a door to future career endeavors for me.

Revisiting the Literature

As I described, I learned a lot about myself as a learner during this project. I also learned more about OE and SEL throughout researching these topics. Some of the literature I reviewed was pivotal to the project. Some of the literature also resonated with me as an educator and affected my practices in the classroom.

The first integral part was defining OE for use in this project. As I researched, I found several definitions and ideas of what OE truly is. There seems to be a spectrum of how to define OE from extremely specific ideas such as Wals et. al (2014) idea that OE is EE with the goal of creating a strong environmental conscience amongst learners to a less specific definition such as those by Sharp (1948) and Ford (1986), who describe OE as education that takes place outdoors, but does not need to be directly about outdoors, nature, or the environment. In my research, I leaned towards Sharp and Ford, as I viewed OE as a way of changing the setting of education in order to give elementary students different opportunities to practice SEL skills. I will continue to use this research to advocate for my students to use the outdoors as a learning space.

Although I know a lot about SEL through my experiences as an educator in public education, many ideas from my research reinforced my knowledge on the topic. In order to research the question: *what is the effect of OE on SEL outcomes for elementary students?*, I needed to have a clear understanding of positive SEL outcomes. Osher et al. (2016) and Durlak et al. (2011) grounded my research with a summary of positive SEL outcomes. My positionality going into the research was that OE would have positive

effects on SEL, but it was clear that I needed to define what a positive SEL outcome would even look like. These outcomes look like citizenship, community, emotional regulation, utilizing skills, and stronger attitudes about learning. Creating PD that challenges educators to get students outside the classroom would need a possible positive outcome for educators to buy in, so it was important to be able to have an idea of what those positive outcomes could look like.

Lastly, creating PD that has an SEL focus needs to be backed up by SEL research. CASEL (2021) was an important resource to assess whether my project followed implementation principles. When designing PD sessions and materials, the CASEL framework was evident in each session. The key ideas of the framework present in the PD series are foundational support, planning for SEL practice, building adult SEL, promoting student SEL and continual improvement. The PD itself is a method of foundational support and planning SEL practice. The PD encourages the adult learners to practice SEL skills. The objectives of the PD encourage educators to have their students' practice SEL and the results of student assessments can be utilized for further improvement. Finally, in designing SEL assessment to determine effectiveness and improvement, not only for this project but in my own practice, El Mallah (2022) was an important resource. El Mallah argues that SEL assessment should be given in a manner that allows for student voice and background to be accounted for and not rely on deficit-based competencies. Although I opted to have PD educators deliver SEL assessments to students through a pre-written survey, I made sure each skill was framed in strength-based language. I also have considered how to regularly monitor and talk

about SEL in my classroom in a positive manner, allowing students to describe their own skills and values, rather than assigning them skills I see as valuable.

Implications

Positive SEL outcomes is a goal for many elementary schools. This project was designed to examine an alternative education strategy to help affect SEL outcomes. In an era where elementary-aged students are spending more time indoors and on technology in and outside of school, this project offers a path to get students outside. This project can be utilized by districts that want to try getting students to learn in different settings and give opportunities to get students outside in nature. The mental and physical health benefits of being outside are clear in research and I believe many educators would agree they want to see their students healthier. Some policy implications could include increasing outdoor time in schools, including OE into curriculum, or schools utilizing funding to increase outdoor learning areas.

Limitations

When considering limitations of this project, the scale of the work is the main limitation I see. This project focuses on grades three through five in one building in a very specific school setting. In order for this project to be used in any district PD or policy discussion, it would need to include PD opportunities for kindergarten through second grade as well. It would also need to be able to fit within PD cycles, as many schools and districts are focusing on core instruction PD, meaning that alternative education styles may not be in the forefront of stakeholders' plans for bettering their schools. Finally, OE is still a novel idea for many schools and teachers. Teachers are unlikely to try new approaches when they are comfortable with their norms. The

perspective that OE can lead to unexpected behaviors, is hard to control and unsafe, schools' lack of outdoor spaces and is not as accessible for students with special needs will be a major limitation. Ultimately, it would take a major perspective shift to get OE implemented in many schools.

Future Research and Benefits to the Profession

This project can be a starting point for future research. My original idea for my research was to deliver OE to a group of fourth grade students over a period of twelve weeks and observe the SEL outcomes. If a researcher went through the proper review protocols, they could start there to have usable data to show a conclusion for the research question: *what is the effect of OE on SEL outcomes for elementary students?* As noted in limitations, this PD series was designed for third through fifth grade educators. More research and PD development for kindergarten through second grade educators would be another path to further this research. I do believe that this research should be tested with students to see if OE does or does not affect SEL outcomes in order to show a correlation between being outside and SEL outcomes. As I stated, there needs to be a perspective shift amongst educators, data can be a strong tool to shift those perceptions.

The benefits of this research include providing teachers and students with opportunities to try something new and different. So much of education takes place sedentary in a classroom. Getting students outside can provide new experiences for them and opportunities to practice SEL skills. In my experience, teachers often ponder ways to get students more engaged in their lessons, cooperating with their classmates, and utilizing SEL skills. Using the outdoors as a setting for lessons can provide teachers with

an opportunity to change things up to see if a different approach can help achieve those goals.

Summary

Chapter four includes a reflection on my process, the literature I used, any implications and limitations of the research, and lastly how this project could be used to inform future research. I learned that educational research requires a lot of academic language and writing skills. I also learned that being passionate about the subject matter helps one be successful in research. I learned that as an educator, I can use my own experiences in this project to relate to my students' experiences with work I assign them. The literature I used provided important information to create definitions of OE and SEL, a framework for SEL implementation and assessment, and an outlook on some possible outcomes of the project. The implications of this project could include utilizing the PD in a school interested in getting their students outside more or trying a different way of teaching. The limitations include the need for an educational perspective shift and more stakeholders pushing to try new approaches. In the future, researchers can deliver OE lessons and collect student data in order to provide stakeholders with evidence based results. The benefits would include students having more time outdoors and a chance to increase SEL and academic outcomes.

This project contains a personal narrative of how I chose this topic and why it is important to me. It includes a literature review that consists of current research on the topics of OE and SEL which helped me develop the project. The PD is a six session series that allows educators to collaborate, receive expert modeling, discover new learning, try new approaches with each other and their students, and assess data to reflect

on their practices. It encourages educators to think about education in a different way and utilize new strategies. Finally, I reflect on how this project has influenced my own practices as an educator and the potential for future work in this field.

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APPENDIX A

CASEL SEL In the Classroom Self-Assessment

SEL in the Classroom Self-Assessment

TEACHER/CLASSROOM: _____ DATE: _____

Use this self-assessment three to four times over the course of the year to assess your strengths and areas to develop as you promote SEL through explicit instruction, integration into academic instruction, and a supportive classroom climate. Place a check in the column that indicates the frequency of each indicator. For indicators that you rate as “sometimes” or “infrequently,” consider what strategies, resources, or support you may want to use to deepen your SEL practice. For indicators you rate as “unsure,” consider what additional information or feedback you want to gather.

Markers of SEL in the Classroom		Often	Sometimes	Infrequently	Unsure
Explicit Instruction	I use an evidence-based approach to teach social and emotional skills in a sequenced, active, focused, and explicit way and on a regular schedule.				
	I teach SEL in a way that is developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive for my students.				
	My students lead routines, share their perspectives, and reflect on their experiences during SEL instruction.				
Integration of SEL into Academic Instruction	SEL standards/goals are embedded into my academic lessons (see sample lesson plans).				
	Students make connections between SEL and what we're learning and initiate reflection and discussion.				
	I foster academic mindsets by helping students set goals, commending academic risk-taking and incremental progress, showing students how to correct mistakes, and framing struggle as a key part of the process of learning.				
	I select content and plan instruction that links to students' lived experiences and frames of reference and by anticipating support that individuals may need to access content and participate fully.				
	I design learning activities that allow students to explore issues that are important to them and co-create solutions to improve the classroom, school, or community.				
	Class time is balanced with periods of teacher-led instruction, student talk and interaction, and time to work/reflect alone.				
	I prepare students to engage in classroom discussions by actively listening to their peers, affirming and respectfully challenging each other's ideas, and formulating questions.				
	I ask open-ended questions to surface student thinking and probe students to elaborate on their response.				
	I use collaborative structures that require students to communicate, cooperate, share responsibility, monitor that all ideas are heard, and problem-solve.				
Students reflect on what made their collective work successful and/or challenging and plan for improvement.					

50

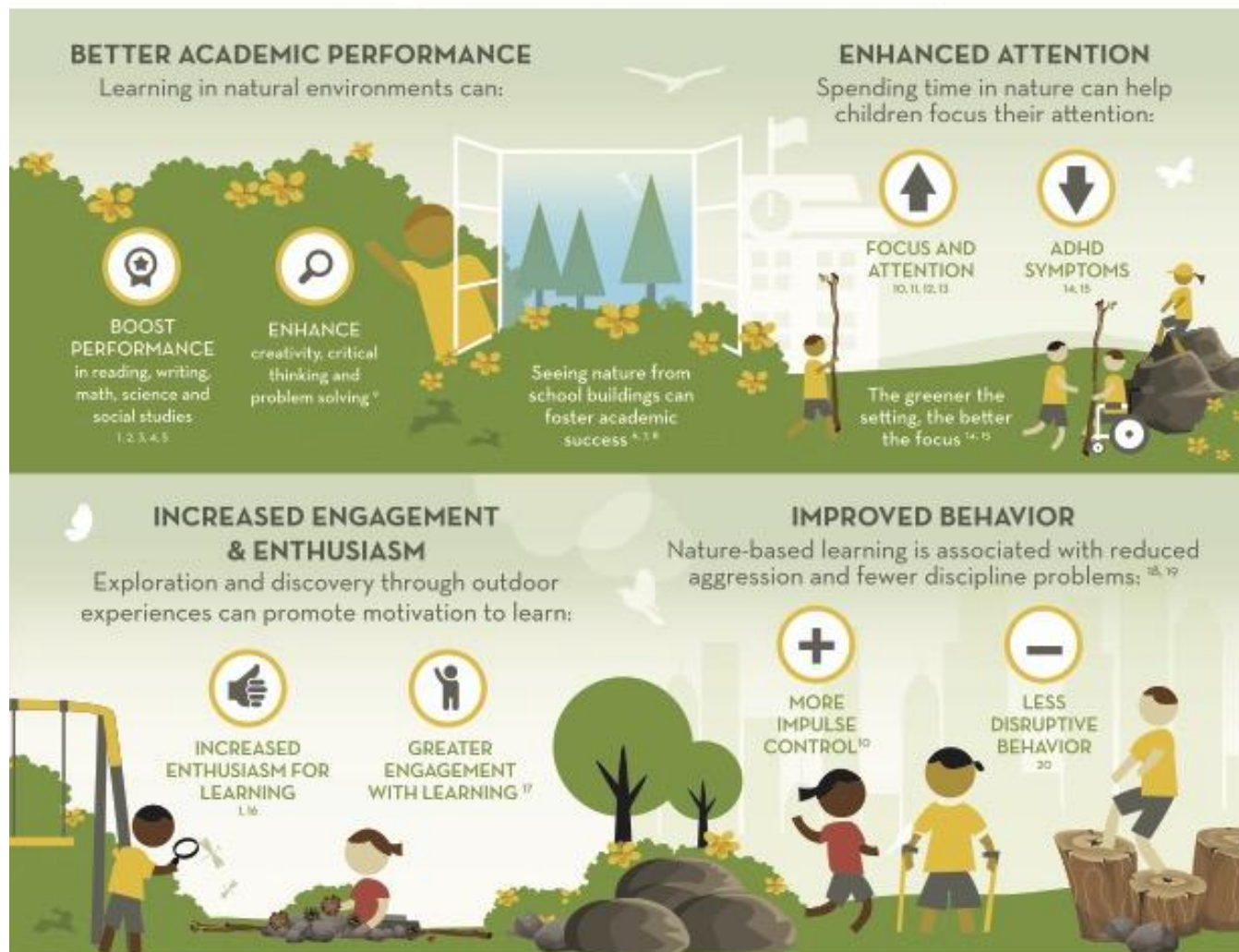
Supportive Classroom Climate	My class has co-developed shared agreements for how we will treat one another, and we check in regularly about how we are living by our shared agreements.				
	Students know, follow, initiate, and provide input and feedback on our regular classroom routines and procedures.				
	I communicate that I appreciate each student as an individual and am interested in knowing them.				
	I check in and follow up with students about their perspectives and concerns.				
	I facilitate class meetings, circles, or other intentional community-building activities to cultivate a culture of personal connection, mutual support, and belonging.				
	I vary student grouping so that each student gets to know and work with everyone else.				
	My classroom environment, activities, and interactions affirm students' diverse identities and cultures. We share and learn about each other's lives and backgrounds.				
	I teach, model, and reinforce language and strategies that help students to express empathy, resolve conflicts, repair harm, self-reflect, and self-regulate.				
	When classroom agreements are breached, I respond in a way that is discreet, developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and restorative (such as using empathetic listening, "I" statements, and open-ended questions).				

APPENDIX B

Children and Nature Network Infographic

NATURE CAN IMPROVE ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Spending time in nature enhances educational outcomes by improving children's academic performance, focus, behavior and love of learning.



children & nature
network

NLC NATIONAL
LEAGUE
OF CITIES

THE **JIB** FOUNDATION

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH ON THE BENEFITS OF NATURE AVAILABLE AT childrenandnature.org/research

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

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C&NN recognizes that not all studies support causal statements.

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