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Social and Emotional Learning Resource to Reinforce Skills for 1st Grade Families and Caregivers

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Social and Emotional Learning Resource to Reinforce Skills for 1st Grade Families and
Caregivers

by

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

Social and Emotional Learning continues to grow and take part at all times in schools. This capstone project extends social and emotional learning (SEL) to time outside of school. The project discusses the relationship between schools and families/caregivers with the common goal of extending learning outside of school. This project creates a website as a resource to aid families/caregivers in reinforcing social and emotional skills outside of school. The following question is proposed: *How can we make Social and Emotional Learning more accessible for 1st grade families and caregivers in order to reinforce social and emotional skills outside of school?* The research explores social and emotional skills, relationships between schools and families/caregivers, equity, and mental health. The website created consists of information on SEL and activities for families/caregivers to work on with their students throughout the school year. The goal of this project is to reinforce social and emotional skills in students through collaboration between educators and families/caregivers.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

Education begins before school through different influences in a child's life. One of the first pillars of a child's education is their families and caregivers and is a stronghold throughout the child's development and education. While students progress through their education, social and emotional learning is a key part of their education. Social and Emotional Learning helps students understand their emotions and have empathy toward others. These skills eventually help students develop positive relationships and work with their emotions. All in all, these skills help children achieve their goals and continue learning to be part of the world. The purpose of this capstone is to answer the question, *How can we make Social and Emotional Learning more accessible for 1st grade families and caregivers in order to reinforce social and emotional skills outside of school?* In Chapter 1, I provide my personal and professional background with social and emotional learning, as well as social and emotional learning in school, and why this topic is important to myself and a school setting. Along with implementing social and emotional learning, creating opportunities to practice these skills outside of school help children use them outside of school settings.

Rationale

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has been in demand since the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Mak (2022), "Schools need to establish policies and responsive practices around discipline to promote equity, reduce bias, and provide opportunities for social emotional learning (p.59)". They relate this need to the global pandemic and the

“resurgence of Black Lives Matter” (Mak, 2022, p.59). Both of these events have called for racial justice, and the dynamic in schools has shifted greatly as we discover that children need to address emotions that come with the previous events discussed and were not able to do so during distance learning. According to National University (2019), students who participate in social and emotional learning saw an academic increase of 11% (2022). Resilient Educator also informs us that students with social and emotional learning exposure have reduced life risks. I wish to make this resource available so kids can practice their social and emotional skills at home. It is important to create time for social and emotional learning during the school day and giving resources to families and caregivers for social and emotional learning can help reinforce these skills and provide children with more practice on the subject. In the following sections, I discuss my personal and professional experiences with social and emotional learning. My personal experience talks about social and emotional learning while I was in school. Regarding my professional experience, I explain my recent involvement with social and emotional learning as a paraprofessional.

Personal Experience

Most of my experiences in a school setting have been in the Twin Cities. I grew up in St. Paul and moved around in the areas nearby. I stayed in South St. Paul School District for K-12 and experienced many things outside of school that affected my schooling. One of the defining factors that influenced my schooling was familial support. I have only had my mother during my educational career and being the sole breadwinner she had to work many hours during the week. Although my mother worked overtime, she would take time to do our school work together and help us maintain Spanish skills as

well. Another support in my education was my grandparents. During the first few years of elementary school, we would get dropped off at their house so that we could get to school. They would also help us with schoolwork while we waited for my mother to pick us up. My mother and grandparents helped me feel a passion for school; and now a passion for teaching. Looking back on my experience with school and my family, I worked on social and emotional learning skills in many ways. One of the things that my mom did with me concerning SEL was acts of kindness. I learned to take time to be kind to others by writing a kind note or holding the door for others. These acts helped me with empathy, a skill that I use today as an educator. A child's home life is diverse and their family may look different from others. So in the same manner as this project, I think about what intersections of identity affect a student's life and create a resource where families and caregivers can complete an activity together each week. Equity is important to this subject because children have different experiences, different families and caregivers, and different learning styles.

Professional Experience

For the past year, I have been working in schools as a paraprofessional. One of the things to note is that throughout my professional experience, the schools did not have an SEL curriculum to follow. More specifically, the 1st grade team I work with as an instructional assistant pulls resources on their own to teach SEL. The focus on SEL has been greater in my current positions than in previous ones. During the day, teachers have a designated 20-minute block of SEL. They read books and have discussions or complete activities on emotions or self-awareness, etc. SEL is also present during morning meetings; students sing a "wish well" song for their classmates that are not present and

they have a chant for self-motivation throughout the day: “I am kind, I am brave, I am smart, I am awesome!” Social and Emotional Learning is integrated into all parts of the school day and being part of the support staff it is also part of my job to help with social and emotional learning. These skills are important to the classroom community and help create an effective learning environment.

Context

Social and Emotional Learning helps children learn about their emotions and use that knowledge to build social skills that benefit them in school as well as in other settings outside of school. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2023), families and caregivers of children help them use social and emotional skills to create “authentic partnerships” while schools use SEL skills for “practices and policies”. Both of these are part of CASEL’s framework wheel in which all components of SEL work together to apply evidence-based strategies to develop skills. In this learning, 5 social and emotional competencies are developed: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2023). These can be taught at various grade levels and help children use these skills and apply them to practice. Equity and implementation have become concerns in Social and Emotional Learning (Mak, 2022). Social and Emotional Learning has the potential to create an inclusive school, but like many other subjects, there is pushback on social and emotional learning. This pushback must be discussed alongside advocating for social and emotional learning in schools. This subject is direct instruction of understanding themselves and others as well as creating a solution to problems is an issue because of beliefs of who can teach it. One of the suggestions is to

use language that can be understood by others to ensure that social and emotional learning can be part of the day for students. While social and emotional learning is going on, educators also have to look at their teaching from different perspectives to understand how others may have different opinions on what SEL is in the classroom. Just like we begin to incorporate social and emotional learning at school with an equity lens, we can discuss the role of families and caregivers in social and emotional learning.

Families and Caregivers

The focus of my capstone is providing families and caregivers a resource so that social and emotional learning can continue being part of the day as a learning experience. Families and caregivers can bring insight into the cultural experience and perspective of a child in social and emotional learning. Albright (2010) stated that “all parents have strengths and skills, and have valuable perspectives and information regarding their children that contribute to educators’ knowledge base and ability to effectively teach”. That being said, Albright (2010) argues that parents are capable of assisting educators in teaching subjects such as social and emotional learning if these parents are given the tools and opportunities to do so. The relationship between schools and families and caregivers has to be strong to work together on the competencies that are part of social and emotional learning. Families and caregivers know about a child’s development and learning needs which are key to reinforcing the learning they do at school on the subject. This being said CASEL stated that families and caregivers need to be part of decision-making processes on planning social and emotional content, particularly historically marginalized groups (2023). Communication is a key component to creating a school-family relationship to plan and implement SEL. While communicating with

parents, educators must learn about backgrounds and cultures to provide them with ways to participate in learning and other activities in school. For this capstone, I will be creating a website with activities for families and caregivers to work on social and emotional skills. The goal of this website is to curate activities that help families and caregivers work on social and emotional skills. These activities help students learn and talk about their emotions with their families and caregivers; they help students with self-control and decision-making along with many other components of social and emotional learning. The activities on my website align with the work done in 1st grade but provide teachers with an opportunity to reach out to families after each activity to continue improving on the activities and incorporate what the families would live to see as part of social and emotional learning.

Equity and SEL

For many, the goal of social and emotional learning is to help students learn about their emotions and what role that has in the world around them. CASEL makes it part of the framework to have equitable access to learning and resources (2023). There is also a critique of social and emotional curriculum as it can ignore “multiply-marginalized people” as discussed by Clark (2022). This term refers to groups of people marginalized by more than one of the following: their race, gender, socioeconomic status, and others. While social and emotional learning becomes part of the school day, one thing to keep in mind is that teachers need to receive or find the right resources to help children meet their social and emotional needs. This teaching must also include a framework that names “inequities, collective agency, and acknowledges and enables access to emotions” (Clark, 2022). Equitable teaching about social and emotional learning has to keep in mind the

diversity of children's backgrounds and learning abilities. This means that the content that teachers choose to implement must reflect and be relevant to their students.

Equity is important to the work done with social and emotional learning in schools. While this capstone is being completed there will be a reflection on how I am creating an equitable website for the families and caregivers of the children. This equitable access must reflect the experiences of the families and caregivers in order to complete the activities given by the teachers. This includes being aware of my own biases and being aware of the children and their families/caregivers' backgrounds and experiences. The connection created through the website on social and emotional learning helps families and caregivers along with teachers work towards the common goal of helping students become life-long learners and have the competencies to create relationships and make decisions.

Summary

In order to answer my research questions, *How can we make Social and Emotional Learning more accessible for families and caregivers in order to reinforce social and emotional skills outside of school?* I am hoping to create a family resource to allow families and caregivers to work at home on social and emotional skills to reinforce their importance in all settings. This website will be used in conjunction with 1st grade SEL lessons in schools and give a series of lessons and resources to help 1st grade families and caregivers complete SEL work at home during the week. In Chapter 1, I laid out my personal and professional background. I explained the importance that SEL has in the classroom and schools. In Chapter 2, literature is reviewed on social and emotional learning regarding the following topics; the benefits and pushback on SEL, mental health

and SEL, school-family relationships, and equity. Chapter 3 describes the capstone project, including the website and the content created to create the families and caregivers tool. Finally, Chapter 4 is a reflection on the project and the work leading up to the creation of the website.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The following chapter is a literature review aiming toward social and emotional learning (SEL) in relation to families and caregivers as well as equity. To answer the question, *How can we make Social and Emotional Learning more accessible for 1st grade families and caregivers in order to reinforce social and emotional skills outside of school?* The themes of social and emotional skills, family/caregiver and school relationships, and equity are discussed to support the creation of a website for families/caregivers to have resources for social and emotional learning at home. During this literature review, social and emotional competence is examined. The review consists of articles with qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research. In this context, competence refers to “the ability to do something successfully or efficiently” (Merriam-Webster, 2023). Competence is discussed in relation to the ability to successfully use social and emotional skills as well as competence by adults to provide direct instruction of these skills to children.

The first theme is what social and emotional skills look like in a school. This theme observes and discusses the use of curriculum and implementation. This section looks at the success of curriculums and the outcome of their use of them. This section discusses where more support is needed in the implementation of SEL.

The next section of this literature review discusses the characteristics of a relationship between schools and family/caregivers. The role of families/caregivers in social and emotional learning is emphasized in this section. This set the foundation for

the discussion on how families/caregivers reinforce social and emotional skills at home intentionally and directly.

The third section of this literature review examines social and emotional learning through an equity lens. This section collects the information from both of the previous sections and examines how curriculum can result in the inclusivity of all students concerning their race, socioeconomic status, and more. This section critiques the implementation of social and emotional learning in schools and what is needed where there is a lack of equity in social and emotional learning.

Finally, the fourth section of this literature review discusses mental health and the use of social and emotional learning to support children and adults. This section examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of children, adolescents, and adults. This section aims to explain how social and emotional instruction can support all age groups through mental health challenges such as the pandemic.

Social and Emotional Skills

This section examines what is being taught under the social and emotional learning umbrella in schools. First, it looks at the fundamentals of social and emotional learning. In this case, fundamentals refer to the skills and groundwork behind SEL; this means the skills needed for students to create positive relationships with others and themselves. The next part of this section looks at different activities curated and aimed toward SEL. The activities lead to the discussion of curriculum and what they encompass once they are integrated into schools. This section concludes by examining what is missing before, during, and after the implementation of SEL.

Curriculum and Implementation

Social and emotional learning helps children learn about their emotions and use that knowledge to build social skills that benefit them in school as well as in other settings outside of school. To choose activities to target social and emotional skills at home, there is a need for what social and emotional learning looks like in a school context and what is important for the successful implementation and execution of the subject. A widely used SEL resource and curriculum is CASEL as they advocate for universal implementation (CASEL, 2023). CASEL is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning; a non-profit with “commitment to evidence-based SEL to support all students’ learning and development” (Our Mission and Work section). CASEL’s Framework (2023) is a wheel that sets the foundation to apply SEL strategies in a learning community. This wheel includes five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The competencies aim to do the following:

SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities. (CASEL, 2023, What is the CASEL Framework? section)

Elliot (2023) examined the CASEL framework during a universal screening of an SEL focused program. In this study, Elliot finds that the CASEL framework positively

influences the advancement of SEL focused programs (2023). The screening was indicative of CASEL's core competencies while focusing on goals and areas of improvement to continue this work in the focused program (2023). Moreover, the implementation of an SEL framework like CASEL's in schools may result in positive outcomes such as in the universal implementation of an SEL curriculum *Open Circle* in McDaniel (2022). Universal implementation of SEL in a school in the southeastern United States produced "differentiated effectiveness" by grade level (McDaniel, 2022, p. 57). McDaniel argued that to implement a new SEL program, schools must use research-based interventions that fit the needs of their school and are cost-effective. *Open Circle* is created for a full year of implementation. Another part of implementation is the environment in which the curriculum is established. Kabacki (2022) stated that environmental factors affect social and emotional learning. There are many decisions that schools must make in the implementation of social and emotional learning; one of these is thinking about what results in the most positive outcomes for the students.

Why is SEL important?

Social and emotional learning results in positive outcomes for students. In the same way, Wu (2020) stated that students demonstrated improvement in teacher-related empathy, prosocial behaviors, coping styles, inhibitory controls, and problem behaviors. Wu (2020) mentioned that for students to have competence in social and emotional skills, "teachers need to be provided with adequate time and opportunity to become confident in program implementation" (p. 795). The mixed-method study by Voith (2020) looked at the implementation of a school-based SEL program, *The Peace Program*. In this study, there were clear short-term or long-term results of the program:

The strongest conclusion that can be made from the outcome analysis, instead, indicates that context—or the environment such as classroom dynamics, teacher disposition, and school climate—may matter when developing, delivering, and evaluating social–emotional learning programs” (Voith, 2020 p. 337).

Likewise, Fairless (2021) stated that a school environment can positively impact a student’s achievement. Fairless measured student achievement through social and emotional skills, self-efficacy, socio-economic status, parental environment, peer support, and teacher support. Although children may not respond uniformly, Low (2019) stated that in two years of the SEL curriculum, there were reduced behavior problems. There was an improvement in SEL competence over the school year but it declined over the summer. Low suggested that schools could add boosters or extensions in the summer to continue the competence gained in the school year; which could also result in more parent involvement over the school year overall. The findings in these studies allow us to see the benefits of social and emotional learning, but SEL is also learned at home with families and caregivers. The outcomes of SEL for the children are key to the implementation of this project. My project is a website for students and families/caregivers to work on SEL skills. This website will include activities and resources that will help families/caregivers to work on different SEL skills over 12 weeks. The website aims to continue SEL outside of a school setting and reinforce skills learned. This website aims to continue to improve student academics as well as social and emotional competence through the curated activities and support of families/caregivers. The website benefits from relationships between schools and families/caregivers, as well as an equitable approach to SEL.

The following section examined the elements of a healthy relationship between schools and families/caregivers. These elements lay out the foundation for decision-making and collaboration.

School-Family/Caregiver Relationships

Relationships between parents and schools are important in a school community. This section discussed communication methods and their effectiveness in a school-family/caregiver relationship. These relationships are crucial to the school community because it allows families and caregivers to know what is going on in schools. These relationships also create a foundation for the resources provided through this capstone. Finally, this section looks at what factors go into decision-making between schools and families to include them in social and emotional learning. Clarke (2010) defined, “family-school relationships as a child-centered connection between individuals in the home and school settings who share responsibility for supporting the growth and development of children”(p. 61). This relationship is important to this capstone because the collaboration between schools and families/caregivers aids in the implementation of my SEL website.

Decision-making and Collaboration

Families/caregivers are part of the school community and play a role in the decision-making of content taught in schools. The characteristics of a good relationship between families/caregivers and schools are essential to decision making and collaboration between both parties. According to Clarke (2010), school and family/caregiver relationships are “child-centered connections between individuals in the home and school settings who share responsibility for supporting the growth and

development of children" (p. 61). Clarke argued that a "healthy" relationship between schools and families/caregivers consists of the following elements: trust, sensitivity, and equality. In addition, these relationships also require actions such as: communicating effectively, building trust, showing respect, sharing learning experiences, and resolving conflicts. With experience in education, the relationship may be challenged and not be established between schools and families (Clarke, 2010). The challenges that these relationships face are grouped into 3 categories according to Clarke: interpersonal, logistical, and systems-level challenges. The challenges may impact the decision-making and collaboration between families/caregivers and schools. Clarke argued that for families there is resentment over the way their child is viewed at school as well as the alienation of diverse cultures resulting in suspicion that schools are treating their children equally. These interpersonal challenges are as follows for educators:

For teachers, challenges often include: (a) a lack of understanding of the ways in which families support children, (b) failure to see differences as strengths, (c) fear of criticism concerning their teaching skills and ability to work with families, (d) lack of commitment to family involvement, (e) low expectations for families from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., low-income), (f) stereotypes about families and their ability to address concerns for their child, and (g) fear of conflict with families. (Clarke, 2010, p. 74)

Altogether these characteristics are essential to the relationships between families/caregivers and schools. These relationships are important to keep in mind when creating social and emotional learning opportunities. As noted by Kabacki, environmental factors are contributors to competence in social and emotional skills (2022). This

includes parental involvement in their child's learning. This can be linked to schools and families/caregivers' collaboration on social and emotional learning and other subjects in school as noted by Clarke (2022). In the same way, Low (2019) discussed the implementation of social and emotional learning curriculum over two years. In this study, Low reflected on how increased families/caregivers during the school year can help with the loss of social and emotional skills over the summer. Decision-making and collaboration between schools and families/caregivers aid in the implementation of social and emotional learning at school.

The following section discussed the role of families/caregivers in social and emotional learning. It examined how families/caregivers contribute to their child's social and emotional skills.

Families/Caregivers and SEL

Social and emotional learning begins at home with families and caregivers. SEL at home influenced how students learn SEL at school. The role of families and caregivers is crucial for the foundation of social and emotional skills. Albright (2010) discussed the partnerships needed between families/caregivers and schools to promote SEL and the extension of opportunity for learning across all contexts through SEL. Albright discussed that the opportunity for learning across contexts through SEL should respect diversity and it can be done so by giving families/caregivers a range of opportunities to get involved (p. 250) For example, families and caregivers' collaboration with schools can model communication behavior and relationship skills which are intrapersonal skills that help in SEL and other contexts (Albright, 2010, p. 246). Likewise, in the study by Miller (2018), parenting and social and emotional skills are observed in SEL professionals and their

families. Miller argued that using the school-based SEL framework can help and parallel the SEL parenting done at home. Miller used the CASEL framework as a reference to how parenting and SEL work and argued that "All five of CASEL's social and emotional competencies are relevant for adults (e.g., teachers, parents) as well as children" (p. 14). The first competency discussed by Miller is self-awareness and parents can help with this skill by making behavioral changes themselves. Next, social awareness is discussed and this skill is reinforced through trusting relationships between families/caregivers and their children. Third, Miller analyzed self-management and this skill is reinforced by families/caregivers and is a major focus on controlling behaviors and actions towards others. The next competency discussed is relationship skills, reflected in the relationships between adults; these skills aid children to assert themselves and listen to others. Finally, responsible decision making is a skill families/caregivers model for their children. This skill is reinforced by allowing children to make authentic choices for themselves (pp.14-15). Miller concluded their study with the suggestion of improving the support offered to educators and families/caregivers by building upon research and practice. The framework for SEL strategies by CASEL is parallel to what students are learning at home with their families/caregivers. Families/caregivers are essential to SEL for children and begin the work towards competence in these skills. Subsequently, the relationship between families/caregivers and schools is a model for these skills and works towards the common goal of equitable education for children. In the same way, these relationships create collaborations between my website and the families in order for the reinforcement of social and emotional learning outside of school. While these relationships are built, it should be noted that SEL begins at home. Families/caregivers bring insight into the SEL

done outside of schools. While considering the implementation of SEL in schools and the relationships needed for collaboration, another part of the process is examining what an equitable approach may look like in the creation of the website. In the following section, equity is discussed in order to support the creation of the website through an equitable lens. The discussion must be included in order to review the concerns in the implementation of social and emotional learning, as well as the collaboration to reinforce these skills outside of school.

Equity and SEL

Equity is a concern regarding social and emotional learning. In terms of equity, a concern is that social and emotional learning is not equitable regarding race and the intersecting identities of students of color. CASEL (2023) stated that “*equity and excellence* refer to every student—across race, ethnicity, family income levels, learning abilities...other factors—engaging in high-quality educational opportunities and environments that best promote their healthy social, emotional, and academic development” (How Does SEL Support Educational Equity and Excellence? section). This section provides an overview of equity in social and emotional learning. It looks at how social and emotional learning creates opportunities for equitable learning along with a lack of equitable learning. This section explores the following themes: promoting agency and civic engagement, and using SEL for system improvement.

CASEL integrates equity as part of its framework and strives for equity and excellence in SEL (2023). CASEL (2023) argued that SEL advances equity and it is important to allow for:

...young people need to be surrounded by trusting relationships and environments where they feel motivated and engaged, emotionally and physically safe, and a sense of belonging among adults and peers. This requires making sure that educational policies treat students fairly and that all students have caring teachers who believe they can succeed. To fully support all students' SEL, adults need to understand their own biases and expectations, develop awareness of students' cultures and backgrounds, and acknowledge and challenge any inequitable practices and/or policies that can limit or harm the development of children. (How Does SEL Support Educational Equity and Excellence? section)

The CASEL framework has been used to implement standards for social and emotional learning, such as in Ohio, as analyzed by Clark (2022). This study is an ethical critique of the K-12 SEL standards. The results of this study “illustrated serious concerns regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion” (Clark, 2022, p. 145). This study found that these standards may affect the SEL experience negatively due to the undermining and erasure of emotions and the role they play in social justice movements. This is concerning because racism and ableism are ignored and Clark argued that the use of these standards puts privilege over productive conflict, in other words, there is an emphasis on behaviors over emotions. Clark (2022) advocated for:

...a framework that explicitly names inequities, allows for collective agency, and acknowledges and enables access to emotions. Making space for these emotions, although considered by some to be outside the “norm” of acceptable classroom behaviors, would allow all students to be seen for who they are, to truly express

how they feel, and to create and take up opportunities, themselves, for social change and justice. (p.132)

There are areas of improvement when implementing a curriculum that will be inclusive, diverse, and equitable. The following studies discuss the use of SEL curricula with the need for improvement toward an equitable learning experience. In the collection of studies reviewed by Rogers (2022), there is evidence that in urban schools, SEL does not consider anti-Black racism. Like mentioned by Clark (2022), when a framework is used, it is important to name inequities and make spaces for different emotions that come from different perspectives which results in the elimination of the anti-Black rhetoric mentioned by Rogers. On the other hand, Rosenberg (2022) presented the case of Afghan refugees in an evidence-based curriculum that used SEL as preventative mental health care. In this study, Rosenberg (2022) evaluated the curricula to ensure that it was culturally specific, multilingual, trauma-informed, and included physical education. In this pilot program, the challenge faced was finding a common language to discuss emotions but the adaptation of the program was well received; for Rosenberg, this meant that continued partnership with community members can further improve the program. Another adaptation of the use of SEL in a classroom would be in the study by Song (2022). Song stated that by using SEL as a goal, translanguaging English Language Learners were able to use their entire language repertoire for the content. This example of creating opportunities that would allow students to be seen and express themselves and the emotions that they may feel. These studies show that allowing children to be seen and express themselves leads to agency and civic engagement in which they use their SEL skills for a common goal.

Agency and Civic Engagement

Agency and Civic Engagement refers to having control over our actions and the consequences in order to work to make a difference in a community that promotes equity. In SEL, agency and civic engagement is a direct result of having competency with social and emotional skills. Particularly with the knowledge of CASEL's core competencies, the following competencies are the foundation of having agency and civic engagement: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (2023). For the purpose of promoting agency and civic engagement, it can be observed that Mak (2022) emphasized that SEL along with diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential to understand racism. This emphasis comes after the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement which brought forth the discussion of high emotions. This resulted in advocating for system-level change in all institutions. Likewise, Kervick (2020) advocated for increased attention to restorative practices which results in advancing SEL, youth agency, and curricular integration. Agency and Civic Engagement is a direct result of competencies in social and emotional skills like the ones presented by CASEL (2023).

An equitable approach to the creation of my website helps with the creation of relationships between schools and families/caregivers, as well as the implementation of social and emotional learning during the day. This approach allows for the use of the cultural knowledge of families/caregivers and their parenting to reinforce the skills learned at school.

Mental Health and SEL

Over recent years mental health has been a concern throughout all parts of society. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, mental health is the emotional, physiological, and social well-being of a person. (2023). According to Nirmita et al. (2023), symptoms of anxiety and depression have elevated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These were caused by numerous factors and remain a concern afterward. In the same way that there was an increase in substance abuse and deaths. In the same way that there is concern over the lasting effects on mental health for adults, Theberath et al. (2022) examined the effects of the pandemic on children and adolescents and found that:

“The outbreak of COVID-19 has had a multifaceted and substantial impact on child and adolescent mental health, with the most frequently reported psychological reactions being anxiety (28%), depression (23%), loneliness (5%), stress (5%), fear (5%), tension (3%), anger (3%), fatigue (3%), confusion (3%), and worry (3%)” (Impact of COVID-19 on child and adolescent mental health section).

Theberath et al. (2022) argued that social support is needed so that children and adolescents can face mental health challenges such as the pandemic. These social supports can be social and emotional learning activities that are part of the school day. These activities allow kids to have and maintain social networks as well as develop the skills needed to navigate said networks. Prosocial behavior, as defined by Oberle et al (2023), “ entails voluntary acts that benefit others” (p.633). These skills that children learn during social and emotional learning result in higher levels of optimism, lower

levels of depressive symptoms, and higher academic achievement (Oberle et al. 2023). Social and emotional programs can help create positive outcomes with children's mental health such as in the program reviewed by LaBelle (2023). LaBelle reviewed an SEL program Positive Action (PA) and how they are used to "increase resiliency and address the mental health needs of students in school settings (p. 1). The program emphasizes mental health and skills like self-management and goal-setting. This program is used at an individual, family, and community level and their relationships with the school. LaBelle concluded that the program's effectiveness could be seen through the relationship between the program and "decreasing and preventing substance use, violent behaviors, and sexual activity in fifth-grade students" (2023, p.5). The issues surrounding mental health disproportionately affect students of color and other intersecting identities that marginalize different populations. Nirmita (2023) stated, "Further, negative mental health impacts have been more pronounced among several populations, including communities of color, young adults and children – populations which have historically experienced increased barriers to care" (Looking Ahead section). An equitable approach to social and emotional learning can help students with access to resources that may not be readily available in their community. The social and emotional skills students learn from programs and schools set them up for creating relationships with themselves and others. These skills help decrease mental health concerns and help students with academic achievement as the previous studies have discussed.

Summary

This chapter contained a literature review discussing the social and emotional learning done by families and caregivers and how we can create equitable social and

emotional learning in both school and outside contexts. This equitable approach also allows these skills to reach students whose mental health is not addressed due to inequitable access to resources. The literature reviewed in this chapter aimed to answer the question: *How can we make Social and Emotional Learning more accessible for 1st grade families and caregivers in order to reinforce social and emotional skills outside of school?* This chapter examined the implementation of social and emotional learning in schools and the role of families/caregivers in social and emotional learning. The relationship between schools and families/caregivers is discussed through the characteristics of a healthy relationship but also the challenges that it may face. These relationships are important to the decision-making and collaboration between the two; more specifically how the decision-making and collaboration contribute to creating my SEL website. While creating this website, I must take time to understand my own biases and be culturally responsive to the families/caregivers that will be using my website as a source of social and emotional learning. Taking an equitable approach to this project provides access to communities of color and other identities with resources.

Chapter 3 describes the website created for social and emotional engagement with families and caregivers. This chapter explains the activities curated for 1st grade families to reinforce SEL skills at home and be culturally responsive to the diverse families in the district. The activities curated for the website aim to create collaboration between families/caregivers and schools to create opportunities for social and emotional learning. These activities take into account the trusting relationships that children need in a learning environment. The activities also engage students in an emotionally and physically safe environment. As an educator creating the website, I keep in mind my own

biases and expectations for the children and families/caregivers. I also keep in mind the student's cultures and backgrounds to challenge myself to find the best ways to support the development of the children.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

This project aims to create a family resource to allow families and caregivers to work at home on social and emotional skills to reinforce their importance in all settings. This chapter describes the project developed for this capstone. The project is developed through literature as well as personal and professional experience. The following question was proposed: *How can we make Social and Emotional Learning more accessible for 1st grade families and caregivers in order to reinforce social and emotional skills outside of school?* Families/caregivers are important to SEL because these skills are important to relationships and navigating society. In order for children to develop these skills and navigate society, it is important to take an equitable approach to SEL and provide opportunities to use cultural knowledge to reinforce the skills learned at school.

Project Overview

A website was created in order for families/caregivers to reinforce social and emotional learning at home with resources and activities to carry out weekly. This will be a means of collaboration and communication between families/caregivers and schools. The website was designed to parallel the social and emotional learning done within the school day in 1st grade with weekly activities to be completed by families/caregivers and their children.

The name of the website is *Social and Emotional Learning at Home*. This website was created through google sites and was created as a blog with modules that include information on the skill for the week along with the activities and resources to try at

home. The website had a homepage where you can navigate with a bar with the following topics: SEL, Modules, About, and Survey. Table 1 includes the breakdown of the content on the website.

Table 1.

(Content of SEL Website)

Topic	Content	Additional Info
Homepage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Toolbar for other topics ● Pictures of school work (tentative) ● Fact about SEL 	<p>The theme of the week will be on display on the homepage. Families and caregivers will still have access to previous modules if needed. The school work will be displayed on the website once the year begins and students complete activities in SEL with their teacher.</p>
SEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is Social and Emotional Learning? (SEL) ● SEL at school ● SEL at home ● Why is SEL needed? 	<p>This will be an in-depth explanation of what SEL is and looks like in the settings. This will be the information hub of the website and will explain to parents why SEL is important.</p>

Modules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Week 1: respect ● Week 2: responsibility ● Week 3: honesty ● Week 4: kindness ● Week 5: empathy ● Week 6: compassion ● Week 7: gratitude ● Week 8: cooperation ● Week 9: perseverance ● Week 10: self-confidence ● Week 11: manners ● Week 12: self-control ● Extra Activities/resources 	<p>In each module:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Summary/explanation of themes ● Work done in school ● Activity or game for the home ● resources/more info ● Book/read-aloud <p>More in-depth topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Problem-solving and Teamwork (Week 8) ● Cause and Effect (Week 2) ● Bullying/Cyberbullying (Week 4) ● Tattling (Week 3)
About	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bio ● Experience ● Contact info 	<p>This topic will introduce the parents to myself and learn about my experience in schools.</p>
More	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Google Form (assessment) ● FAQ 	<p>The FAQ provides information on the activities and resources.</p>

The SEL bar included information on what SEL is and why it is important to schools and other settings. The Modules tab included the weekly module with resources and activities. The About tab included information about myself and my personal and professional experience with SEL. Finally, the Survey tab included an assessment of what works well with the website and a way to get feedback. The Survey tab also had a section for community interaction such as questions and comments that families can create to inform others about how the website works for them and their families. The Modules tab is for weekly assignments including a summary of the lessons done in class and how the activity or resource chosen for the week connects to what is done at school.

The website included 10 modules to be completed over the course of 12 weeks. These activities included the following themes: respect, responsibility, honesty, kindness, empathy, compassion, gratitude, cooperation, perseverance, self-confidence, manners, and self-control. The focus of each module (week) is one of those themes and the activities are curated to reinforce the skills that they learned at school. The summary and activities of the website were both in English and Spanish. The activities ranged from read-aloud to mindful breathing all of which can be done at home and the resources provided through the modules on the website. The website is accessible and easy to navigate for parents and can be modified to parallel the SEL being taught in 1st Grade.

While creating a website, I had to remember the best practices and supports for a website. I wanted the website to be accessible and easy to navigate for parents. According to Bushnaq (n.d.), this includes using a clean and simple design; this includes clear fonts and smooth navigation from page to page. Anastasia (2022) agreed that the website should be clean and simple in order for the website to be flexible and change with the

trends and also as content to be added. All in all, the key to a successful website that provides families/caregivers with the resources they need is simplicity and accessibility. This helped in the creation of my website and the goal of making it an equitable resource. An equitable resource also means that it is accessible to all in the way that fits them best; this means that my website can be accessed in a different language. For now, my website will be available in English and Spanish.

This project took place in a suburb school district south of a metropolitan area in the Midwest. The district is composed of 5,000 students in PK-12th grade. The school for which the website was created in parallel to SEL taught in 1st grade consists of: 42.5% Hispanic/Latino students, 31.3% White students, 10.9% Black or African American, 5.2% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander students, 1.9% American Indian or Alaska Native students, and 8.2% students of two or more races. The school also has a student population of 58% of low socioeconomic status. With 38 full-time teachers and 1 school counselor, the school has implemented SEL as part of their day. The teachers and counselor find the resources as there is no school-wide curriculum. The school has implemented Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and uses them to create a positive learning environment through proactive strategies. The school counselor has weekly lesson plans with the students to support positive learning environments and SEL. In talking with the school counselor, they mentioned “When choosing activities for SEL it is important that they reflect students and not just one perspective. There is a lot of great literature that does a good job of doing so.” (S. Casmer, personal communication, April 7, 2023). This personal communication and the school's demographics where the project took place support an equitable approach to the website and its content. Albright

(2010) discussed the need for collaborations between families and schools in SEL. A website is a tool meant to support collaboration between families and schools in order for students to have competence in SEL. Clark (2022) emphasized the creation of a framework that is equitable and emphasizes the emotions of different perspectives. One of the goals of my project is to allow for equitable SEL that includes the diversity of families and brings forth the emotions they may feel that are different from other perspectives.

Rationale

Social and Emotional Learning was selected as the topic of this project to reinforce skills in all contexts. This resource aims to support both teachers and families/caregivers with SEL. While collaborating with 1st grade teachers, I learned that the SEL happening in the classrooms was from resources they found. By creating the website, students can continue SEL outside of school and apply it in different settings. This is important because families and caregivers can be models for students in SEL. One thing that should be mentioned is that there will be families that will not access the website. The reasons for this may be due to a lack of time or resources. Many families do not have access to a laptop or a computer so they access school material on their phone. There may also be families who do not have time to complete the activities due to multiple jobs or other reasons as the school has many low socioeconomic status families. As a solution, I created a website that can be accessed through different devices.

My website can be accessed through a phone or a tablet as a response to those families that do not have a laptop or computer. I acknowledge that families/caregivers may be unable to access my website at all but I hope to bring SEL to the home of as

many students as possible. SEL is mentioned in newsletters sent home with students and the work done at school is sent home with them as well. The importance of SEL will be communicated with families to the best of my ability and I was open to parents reaching out if they had questions about the topic. As stated by Miller (2018), the CASEL framework can be applied by adults and in turn be a model to students on what social and emotional skills look like and how to apply them in their day to day. Due to the diversity in the school district and the school, equity was also important to the creation of the website. This meant that my website would include the different perspectives of the families and caregivers, as well as give space for the families/caregivers to use SEL to understand the emotions that come with marginalized identities such as race and socioeconomic status. This project will continue to change with the SEL taught in 1st grade at this school. I plan to modify the website throughout the school year but later modify it to include more SEL content for families/caregivers of other grade levels. To encourage parents to participate, the website was promoted through parent-teacher messaging and newsletters from the teachers. I also gave families a worksheet where they can keep track of their week and color in the completed activities with their child. This can be turned in quarterly for the students to receive credit and choose a prize of their liking from the classroom. These initiatives aim to encourage families/caregivers to participate and help students continue working on their skills.

Project Assessment

To assess the helpfulness of this website for families, a Google form is included on the website for feedback on the activities and resources. This form allowed families to rate the activities done each week and submit comments on what is working and what can

be changed. This is included on the main page of the website to ensure feedback is reviewed in a timely manner to improve upon activities. Along with the form, there are opportunities for the teachers and myself to collaborate on defining what is working well with the website and what may need improvement. This allows for the creation of a resource that matches the students it aims to help with SEL skills, making it an equitable resource for families/caregivers and students.

Project Timeline

The research question was created in February of 2023 and thus began the development of the chapters in this project. Chapters one through three were written from February 2023 to April 2023; Chapters one through four were all revised in August 2023. The literature used to create this project was gathered from a database provided by Hamline University. The SEL website and its activities were created starting June 2023 through the end of August. This project was put to the test during the school year 2023-2024 with three 1st grade classes.

Summary

Chapter 3 describes the project created in this Capstone. The website created in this capstone is a resource for families/caregivers to reinforce SEL at home and parallel the skills learned at school in a different setting through weekly activities. Considering the importance of the collaboration as mentioned by Albright and allowing this collaboration to provide a different perspective and the motion that comes with it, the website created allows SEL to be connected through two different settings. The capstone was created over two months and once in completion serves as a tool for 1st grade families in a diverse school district. Finally, Chapter 4 wraps up the capstone by

reflecting on the project and showing how the research question is answered through the literature and the creation of the website.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

The website aims to create a family resource that can be used to work on social and emotional skills at home. The practice of social and emotional skills helps reinforce them in all settings. This chapter is a reflection of the capstone project. The following question was proposed: *How can we make Social and Emotional Learning more accessible for 1st grade families and caregivers in order to reinforce social and emotional skills outside of school?* In Chapter 4, I discuss the major learnings and revisit the literature from Chapter 2. The implications and limitations of my project are presented. The results discuss how the project affects future research and how it is communicated with others. Finally, I discuss how the project will benefit the profession.

Major Learnings

One of the major learnings I take away from this project is the power of collaboration. The value of community is inherently present in this project as I explore how to create community connections between families/caregivers and schools. The common goals that schools and families/caregivers should have are the best interest of students in mind. My hope for this project was to create connections between families/caregivers and teachers on a subject that has been all the buzz in schools recently, as we see that these skills are important to the development of the students.

Another major learning I am taking away is the benefits of bilingual content. I worked on the website in English first and took time to create a second one in Spanish with the same content. One bonus of both websites is that they are user friendly in both

languages. I found it most useful to take the content in English and change it over to the Spanish website. I believe that this is due to most resources I found were in English. Once again this reflects what many parents find when they go to find resources online. A language barrier because most content is in English if we look up educational information. I hope that with these websites I can help parents in my district to better navigate the subject and communication with the teachers and educators behind the teaching of SEL.

Literature

The capstone reviewed literature on the following topics: Social and Emotional skills, School-Family/Caregiver Relationships, and Equity and Social and Emotional Learning. These sections were used to discuss: *How can we make Social and Emotional Learning more accessible for 1st grade families and caregivers in order to reinforce social and emotional skills outside of school?* A few key concepts from the literature best contributed to the completion of this capstone project.

First, School-Family/Caregiver Relationships were one of the main focuses of the project, as I created a way for collaboration by all parties. As stated by Clarke, a “healthy” relationship between schools and families/caregivers consists of the following elements: trust, sensitivity, and equality. In addition, these relationships also require actions such as: communicating effectively, building trust, showing respect, sharing learning experiences, and resolving conflicts (2010). My website has all the required actions needed to maintain a healthy relationship through itself. The parties can communicate effectively, through the survey or contact methods, and there is a place to

bring forth shared experiences that can help the families/caregiver and educators in the pursuit of reinforcing social and emotional skills.

Next, equity was a concept discussed in the literature review. Such as looking at the study by Clark (2022) that argued that it is important to name inequities and make spaces for different emotions that come from different perspectives. This concept influenced my capstone because it is best practice in all subjects to provide the content in an equitable way. My website is equitable through language as well as access. The use of English and Spanish can help with families who might have challenges finding resources because of a language barrier. Also, my website can be accessed through phones, tablets, and computers to best cater how families/caregivers are able to connect to online resources. Equity continues to be the goal of the website as I find new ways to improve it for all the members of the 1st grade community.

These key concepts discussed the question: *How can we make Social and Emotional Learning more accessible for 1st grade families and caregivers in order to reinforce social and emotional skills outside of school?* The literature helped understand that by creating opportunities to collaborate and communicate about our students, we can make space for different emotions that come from all the perspectives within a school community. That being said, the website can reflect what social and emotional learning may look like for different groups within a community.

Implications and Limitations

An implication from this project is that when we create collaboration with families and caregivers on SEL, it helps improve and apply these skills outside of school. This idea can be applied to other subjects but this does not necessarily mean giving out

homework. It is important for families/caregivers to focus on the skills or quality of the work rather than the quantity. That is why there is no submission of worksheets or log of lessons completed. The idea is for families/caregivers to give these lessons a try and focus on the skill at hand.

One of the limitations of this project was limited knowledge of other ways to include different cultures in the website. While I continue to make changes and continue using the website, I hope to reflect the other communities in the district and their ideas. I have made the lessons as broad as possible in hopes that people take them and change to what fits best, but I know that as an educator I need to continue learning about my students in order to reflect their cultures and ideas on the website.

Another implication of this project was the inability to add additional resources for parents on SEL. This is due to copyright restrictions and the lack of curriculum in the district where this project was made. I have a placeholder for the future use of the website to include resources teachers may develop or see useful for parents to have when they are using the website.

Results

In order to continue the work I have started with this project, future research will be based around other ways to create connections between schools and creating a community with families/caregivers and other community members. The impact of creating a community in a classroom also has the same effects when we create a community with the people involved with the students life outside of school. The research can include what it looks like to create these resources for families/caregivers in other subjects and find the outcome in student's learning.

The results of this research and project will be communicated with my colleagues and other educators that wish to implement this project as part of their collaboration with families and caregivers. The first year of the website is used as a point of discussion in order for my team and myself to collaborate on what can change on the website to better serve the students. The website will adapt to the needs and changes that the 1st grade team sees necessary for the students to continue practicing their social and emotional skills.

This project benefits teachers and educators, along with families and caregivers, in a post-pandemic society. It gives families/caregivers and teachers a way for students to continue learning social and emotional skills in all settings. The website is set up for students and families/caregivers to use during the school year in addition to the content in school, but in the same way it can be used if there is once again a need for distance learning.

Summary

The reflection in this chapter discussed the things I have learned as I completed research to answer the question: *How can we make Social and Emotional Learning more accessible for 1st grade families and caregivers in order to reinforce social and emotional skills outside of school?* In Chapter 4, I reflected on what creating a website in two languages taught me and how important having common goals as educators and families/caregivers can help with SEL growth. The implication and limitations of this project were shared and the results to be communicated with a team of colleagues.

With this project, I hope to create a source of collaborations between families and caregivers, and schools. In the creation of the website, I learned that collaboration

between families and caregivers with school is necessary for the social and emotional learning of students in all contexts. Social and emotional learning will continue to be part of my philosophy as an educator as I strive to provide opportunities to practice these skills in my future classes. I acknowledge that this has to be done in an equitable way. An equitable approach to social and emotional learning can help students apply these skills to their experiences.

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