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Evaluating The Cultural Responsiveness Of Language, Strategies And Visuals In Social Emotional Curriculum

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EVALUATING THE CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS OF LANGUAGE,
STRATEGIES AND VISUALS IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL CURRICULUM

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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“it is not half so important to know as to feel”

- Rachel Carson *Sense of Wonder*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Amidst global pandemic COVID-19, society as we know it is being forced to develop new mindsets, create solutions and swiftly adapt to the ever-changing circumstances in which we find ourselves. No one is immune to the impact of such an unprecedented time, and we will likely see the ramifications for years to come. Education in particular has faced some unique challenges. As districts flow between in-person and distance learning models, both students and staff are experiencing waves of emotional highs and lows. I have felt the ebb and flow of these emotions as an educator myself, and have witnessed students struggling to manage it all. Now more than ever, it is clear that the duty of an educator extends far beyond academic instruction. Posters line the halls of my school with phrases like “You are Strong”, and “You are loved” to encourage both students and staff as we navigate this strange school year. One piece of gratitude I hold onto, is that my district was able to safely manage a hybrid learning model for the first 10 weeks of the school year. In these 10 weeks, that seemed to go too quickly, I was able to develop the beginnings of a relationship with my students. Building trusting relationships with students is a high priority, as I have seen the impact it has on student growth.

A frequent talking point at the beginning of any school year is how to build relationships with your students. Educators know that establishing connection with students, builds a greater sense of community and belonging. Social emotional learning

has become not only a commonly used phrase, but also a subject found on the daily schedule in classrooms. Schools have embraced social emotional awareness, especially now when the world seems to be desperate for emotional regulation. District-wide social emotional curriculums are becoming more and more common. These programs help to facilitate the learning of “soft skills” or social emotional skills that are not explicitly covered in the academic subjects, and yet are crucial to living in a community. Social emotional learning (SEL) is high on my priorities as a teacher because I have seen how these skills empower students to dream big and accomplish their goals. For the purpose of this research, SEL will be defined using a recently refined definition expressed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning as:

the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, 2020, paragraph 1).

CASEL is an active leader and catalyst for evidence-based SEL curriculum, guiding research, advocating for federal and state policies and providing educators with evidence-based resources in the area of SEL.

At the root of this research is a curiosity to better understand the effectiveness of social emotional curriculums. SEL has such powerful implications for student growth and learning. As I considered my research, I reflected on my experience as a teacher, as well as my relationships with students. I have had some incredible relationships with students,

who have taught me so much about how to become a better educator. Some of the most memorable moments I have are of students sharing something unique or personal about themselves; be it a family practice or cultural tradition. In a cooking class I was teaching, a student shared a Venezuelan recipe with the class - and it gave him such pride to be able to share a piece of his unique identity with others. Reflecting on the beauty cultural diversity brings to a classroom, I decided to look at SEL through the lens of cultural relevance and responsiveness.

While the field of culturally responsive pedagogy has been around for decades, it seems as though the discussion is becoming more and more apparent in education. Extensive research supports the use of culturally responsive teaching methods to increase student success. Gloria Ladson Billings, a professor of Urban Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, has devoted over 25 years to the field of culturally responsive teaching practices. In her 1995 work *Theory into Practice*, she articulates the necessary indicators for culturally responsive teaching:

- (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.160).

Experts in this field including Ladson-Billings, are propelling this movement forward with a recognition that today's classrooms demand greater cultural awareness. Django Paris, an associate professor of language and literacy at the University of Michigan

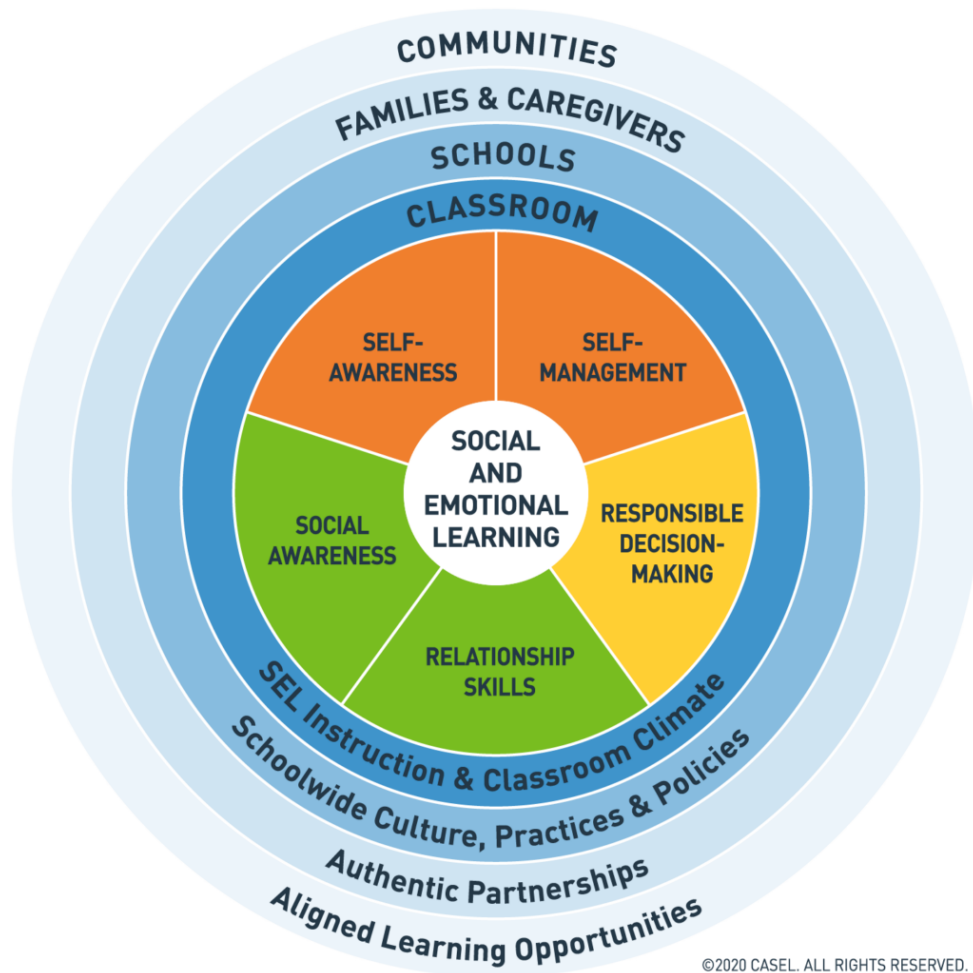
introduced “culturally sustaining pedagogy” (Paris, 2012), in an attempt to embrace the always-evolving shifts in culture and education. Culturally sustaining pedagogy “includes all of the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being that our students and communities embody—both those marginalized and dominant” (Paris, 2012, p. 96)

Given the current socio political climate of our country, and the pressing need to push culturally relevant teaching further, I have selected to focus on evaluating the cultural responsiveness of language, activities and strategies of SEL curriculums. The intersection of SEL and culturally responsive pedagogy hold the potential for such meaningful experiences for students. Chapter One of this capstone will describe a brief background of social emotional learning, expectations of culturally responsive curriculum, and the personal and professional journey that has led me to investigate this topic.

SEL Mandates

Social emotional learning is recognized at federal, state and local levels of government as an important element in education. Federal legislation, Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) which was authorized in December of 2015, “requires states to develop plans that address standards, assessments, school and district accountability, support for struggling schools, support for educators, and ensuring a well-rounded education for all students that prepares them for career and college” (MN Department of Education, 2019, paragraph 8). Leaders at the Minnesota Department of Education have interpreted a “well-rounded education” being inclusive of rigorous academic instruction, participation in fine arts and physical health activities and explicit instruction on social

emotional learning. The state made significant efforts towards SEL in Minnesota including definitions and resources on the topic. MN has adopted the framework developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a group dedicated to the social emotional well-being of students. This framework targets 5 core components of SEL and include: Relationship skills, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and responsible decision-making, as illustrated in Figure 1 CASEL Wheel and Competencies. The wheel also illuminates how comprehensive SEL is. Families, communities, policies, practices and curriculum selection all influence the outcomes for students. In my experience as an educator working with SEL curriculum, it is a much more effective tool when used consistently across the district and with family involvement. Explicitly teaching these topics with students can be transformative for individuals, as well as for classroom culture. I have found so much value in SEL, but I have a lingering curiosity on how such curriculums impact students in the non-dominant culture.

Figure 1*CASEL Wheel and Competencies*

Note: From CASEL SEL Core Competencies.
 (<https://casel.org/core-competencies/>) Copyright 2020, CASEL.

Culturally Diverse Classrooms

I consider my experiences teaching student populations high in cultural diversity a privilege and invaluable opportunity. I think back on my first special education class, in a classroom of just 11, I had students identifying Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Black, White, and Native American. The classroom community was rich in racial, socioeconomic and

linguistic diversity, and it manifested in the learning styles of each student. As our society becomes increasingly composed of more racial and ethnic diversity, so will our classrooms, which is why this research is so important. There is a great deal of research focussed on the achievement gap as it relates to race, however most of the research focuses on the academic and behavioral interventions. There is a lack of research looking at the social emotional gap in learning among students from the non-dominant culture.

“Research has shown that culture influences the learning process and social adjustment of students, and providing culturally appropriate practice is a main concern of the teaching profession” (Robles de Melendez & Beck, 2007). It would be irresponsible as educators to neglect the influence of culture on student learning. Cultural identity and social emotional awareness are tightly intertwined, as will be discussed later in this capstone. SEL and Culturally Responsive curriculum and pedagogy are in need of assessment and evaluation to ensure students of all cultures are given the foundational tools for success.

It should not be overlooked, that while our classroom desks are filled with students of diverse backgrounds, educator desks are filled by a majority of white people. The societal unrest of 2020, has stirred up a movement for racial and social justice in a powerful way. Movement towards racial and social reconciliation will only happen when those of us situated in the white community begin the work of dismantling our implicit bias and false sense of superiority. As a white, female educator, I have found myself wrestling with my own biases this past year. I see racism in my own teaching, and in my own classroom; it’s uncomfortable and unsettling. So unsettling that I am compelled to change. There is a bright future ahead for educators as we explore new pathways for

learning and teaching. It is a necessary and fruitful journey that will bring about a more equitable and connected school community.

Personal Social Emotional Awareness

Over the last several years, I've invested in learning about my own social emotional well-being, through various disciplines. I have started a journey inward, to identify my own emotional tendencies and how they manifest in my behavior and decision-making. Learning to recognize my own patterns of thinking and behavior has been empowering. I am more capable of understanding my relationships with myself and others. I have been able to identify areas of strength and weakness, and improve upon my emotional awareness. It's been an incredibly grounding journey for me as I have created a better understanding of myself. Emotions have purpose and intentionality. They enable us to adapt and engage with our environment, and rather than feel "out of control" when an emotion is stirred up, I have learned to lean into the emotion and explore what purpose it's serving.

One of the most valuable things to understand about ourselves is how emotions influence our relationships with others. Working through my own social awareness has helped me identify that my emotional well-being and peace of mind is dependent on the well-being of those around me. This manifests into patterns of behavior like, avoiding confrontation and disagreements with others, because the potential for causing distress is overwhelming for me. It manifests into behaviors of being easily able to take the perspective of others. I can place myself in the shoes of those around me and "mediate" discussions with ease. As with most things, however, there's a flip side to my emotionally

motivated behaviors. A weakness I often struggle with is being able to name a vision for myself. Because I naturally tune into the desires of others before myself, I am not a good advocate for my needs. In high school and college I would get frustrated with myself when it felt like I didn't have anything to add to a discussion because I was too busy considering the perspectives of others. Socratic seminars for example, which seemed to be heavily used in my education, were used to facilitate a large group discussion. For someone who's tendency is to understand others before understanding themselves, this method of learning was quite challenging, and exhausting. But I couldn't identify that as a student, and subsequently I often had low self-esteem in these situations. I felt left out of the class, and immense stress if my grade depended on participation.

As I learned to understand myself better, I've learned to communicate my needs and preferences more effectively. I'm able to name my tendency towards being a listener, which has been important in the relationships with my professional peers as well as personal relationships. I finally felt like I had a role, and that role was valid and important. I was lucky enough to grow up in a family, community and culture that was largely affirming of my social emotional manifestations, though I know that is not the story for everyone. A popular term that's used to describe the emotional maturity of a person is their *emotional intelligence*. I wonder what personal growth would take place in our students if we taught them how to use emotional intelligence to better understand themselves and their peers.

SEL in My Profession

During my first year as a special education teacher I was working with Kindergarten - 3rd grade students with mild to profound special needs in Saint Paul. Though I was the teacher in the room, I ended that year learning far more than my students had. My students taught me how complex the human experience is. As I've mentioned before, culture and life experiences shape how we engage with the world and the people in it, and my students brought hundreds of life experiences into the classroom that had shaped their opinions, values and behaviors.

In the field of special education, teachers make sincere attempts to capture a student's abilities through documentation, which is intended to show progress. Students are described through evaluations, progress reports, and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). And while I found myself amid 20-30 page evaluation reports and 10-15 page IEPs, I found that my students were so much more than could ever fit onto the pages. To truly know a student is deeper than what can be expressed in words. Teachers who invest in relationships with their students, who share frustrations and achievements with their students, are the teachers who learn the wholeness of their class. There's so much we learn through building relationships with one another that just can't be captured by an assessment, whether it be formal or anecdotal. "Supportive interpersonal relationships function as an important resource for promoting students' academic skill development" (Kiuru, et al., 2015, p.435).

There's also a limitation in assessing a student through a singular teacher's perspective. Just as every student brings a unique cultural lens into the classroom, so do

teachers. What I found so valuable in special education, was that the families were invited into the classroom several times a year for due process meetings and check-ins. Having families bring their culture into the classroom was incredibly powerful for me to understand how each family navigated their child's learning. Through conversations and building relationships with my students and their families I was able to meet student needs in a way that was consistent with family expectations.

Later in my career I worked with transition-aged students, 18-21 year olds with special needs. I heavily invested in building relationships and a sense of trust with each student on my caseload. I set clear expectations, and followed through on what I said. Students knew I was consistent, which for many of my students who were on the Autism spectrum, was crucial to building a relationship with me. Most of my students had some form of clinical anxiety, depression or mood disorder that inhibited their ability to cope with daily stressors. How humbling it was to have students trust my ability to walk with them through scary and unpleasant emotions. Through my persistent demonstration of empathy and genuine care, students learned they could be honest with me. They learned that when they felt emotional, I could be a steady presence. They weren't afraid to name the anxiety they were feeling, because I could also name it, and wasn't upset in the least by it. To help students in the midst of emotional dysregulation, I used the Zones of Regulation curriculum (Kuypers & Winner, 2011). This curriculum uses colors, adjectives and visuals to help students identify their emotions. Giving a name to their emotional state was not the end goal of using the Zones, but rather a starting point for them to reflect on. It gave us a shared language to explore the emotion, and give a sense

of control. This important work certainly didn't happen on the first day, or week, or even month in my classroom, and for some it took the course of a school year before they were able to explore their emotions with me. And yet, when they were able to analyze their feelings, they were empowered to own those emotions. They were able to cope with those, and understand that their emotions are an important part of themselves.

Significance of Social Emotional Awareness

A couple years after I began using the Zones of Regulation curriculum, I attended a district-led training on anxiety. It was at this training that I was told for the first time that I don't need to "fix" the anxiety in my students. I learned that emotions are never wrong and it is not my job as an educator to make student emotions go away. My job *is* to teach students how to manage their emotions in a manner that facilitates growth. It was at this training that I made a transformative shift in my understanding of what it means to educate students, who are not only academic learners, but also social and emotional beings. I began incorporating more social emotional development into my teaching, because it mattered to the success of my students socially and academically.

I don't think it's any secret that when emotions feel unmanageable, people act out in illogical ways that lead to undesirable outcomes. Understanding yourself is empowering. Prior to my realization that emotions are in fact helpful, I had been trying to help students move past their emotions to reach new spaces. I've since learned that what students really need help to do is learn how to sit in their anxiety, and fear and not let it influence their decision-making. If students learn how their emotions are triggered, they can learn strategies to help them cope with it. There is so much hope to be found in the

realization that our emotions are never wrong. They may be complex, or confusing or unexpected. However they are not a bad part of us. They are a manifestation of what's happening in our bodies, and signify the wonderful complexity of us as individuals. Learning to manage emotions is a much more useful skill than learning to ignore them.

I leaned into the staff I was working with at the time and asked questions of my colleagues with mental health experience. They all affirmed the idea that student emotions are not to be ignored or modified, but rather integrated into their learning experiences. There's so much to be gained for students and our future world, if we invest in their emotional well-being from the start.

Summary

Understanding the influences of social emotional learning on student outcomes is both deeply personal and professionally relevant as I continue to journey in the field of education. My experience with students with significant vulnerabilities in social awareness and emotional maturity, is the anchor in this research. I believe that approaching students as social and emotional beings will dramatically change their outcomes for the better.

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I will provide an overview of related literature on the topic of social emotional learning and curriculum. Subsequent chapters will address the methods used for data collection and measurement of social emotional curriculum outcomes as well as common themes that emerged within the data. The final chapter will reflect on the major findings of this research and suggest recommendations for future social emotional curriculum design and implementation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The following literature review supports the investigation of social emotional development and the question: *How culturally responsive are the language, activities and strategies of SEL curriculum?* The goal of this review is to present research that supports the belief that a student's social emotional well-being has a significant influence on their ability to thrive socially and academically. This core dimension of human development has been extensively researched in children, as it has proven to be an indicator of positive life outcomes.

Decades of research in social and emotional development have left us with a body of knowledge that tells us that (1) social, emotional, and cognitive development are intertwined in the brain and in behavior and influence school and life outcomes; (2) social, emotional, and cognitive skills and competencies grow in supportive relationships and are influenced by experience and context; and (3) there are programs and practices that have been shown to be effective in supporting these skills and competencies (Jones, et. al, 2019, p.129).

This review will explore several themes relating to social, emotional and cognitive development. The first section will focus on defining what emotional

intelligence is, and how it shows up in classrooms . The second section will focus on reviewing the neuroscience research that investigates the physiological basis for social and emotional development. The third section will examine the influence of social emotional health on student achievement. The last section will review several approaches to implement social emotional curriculum, including an analysis of their strengths and limitations. The last section provides important context for the research that will be described in Chapter Three.

Emotional Intelligence

Before diving into the topic of social emotional learning, it's wise to first explore an increasingly significant term within the field of education known as emotional intelligence. This term has become a bit of a buzzword in education as we're understanding more about the brain's processes of learning. In this section we will address two questions: What is emotional intelligence, and what does an emotionally responsive environment entail?

Defining Emotional Intelligence

The idea of emotional intelligence can be traced back to the early 1900's, however it is still a relatively new lens through which educators understand learning. In 1983 Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences brought light to two foundational elements of emotional intelligence; intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences. The first being how one relates to themselves, and the latter referring to how one relates to others. His research is one of many that have formed our understanding of social emotional learning. Modern definitions of emotional intelligence vary due to the expanding

research, however there are key elements that can be generally assumed: personal traits, social characteristics, and emotional attributes (Humphrey, Curran, Morris, Farrell, & Woods, 2007). Some frameworks narrow emotional intelligence into 5 core areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Mahoney, 2019). Each core area encompasses a set of skills that enable a person to recognize and manage their emotions and the emotions of others in a positive and productive manner. These skills also promote resiliency, empathy, responsible decision-making and effective communication (Mayer & Salovey, 1993).

A prominent source for research on SEL is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Based out of Chicago, IL, this group of advocates has over two decades of research on student achievement, neuroscience, health, employment, psychology, classroom management, learning theory, economics, and the prevention of youth problem behaviors. It has been their research and the research of many others, that illuminate the importance of not only educating a child's mind, but also their heart.

Emotionally Responsive Classroom

Think back to the days of elementary school and imagine one of your favorite classrooms. Picture the layout of the room. Did you have your own desk, what did your cubby look like, could you see outside? Think of your teacher, what feelings come up when you think about your relationship to them? What were your relationships like with your peers? When asked to reflect on school experiences, most adults don't remember the exact lessons they were taught, but rather they recall elements of the classroom

environment. They recall class pets, better than daily reading routines. Field trips seem more clear in our memory than the science lesson preceding it. The school environment is full of opportunities for emotional intelligence to be nurtured and matured. Students are expected to communicate with their teacher and peers, develop relationships with peers, regulate their emotions and manage the school environment which varies dramatically from their home environment. Beginning in primary school, children are learning crucial social skills through the interactions with their teachers and classmates that will have a lasting effect on their development. (Leflot, et al., 2011). Decades of research demonstrates that social learning and academic learning are strongly intertwined; each having significant influence over the other.

Creating a safe and emotionally supportive environment is a critical element in a student's learning. Feelings of security and belonging stimulates student learning, while feelings of insecurity and stress hinders their ability to engage in learning. Teachers have an incredible responsibility to design not only a physical space that's conducive to learning, but also an emotional environment that fosters feelings of safety and trust. Research on student learning demonstrates that students who feel secure in their environment are able to engage in higher level thinking, than peers who feel insecure, or stressed. Stress inhibits the brain from learning by creating strong connections in the limbic region over the neocortex of the brain where most of our learning occurs (Halupka, 2003).

One of the most important markers of a socially supportive classroom is students having a strong sense of trust with their teacher. Several studies have shown that students

who trust their teacher, and able to out-perform students who do not feel trust. A popular example of this phenomenon is known as the marshmallow Test. This test has been replicated many times by various groups since it gained public attention, and the results give useful insight into the role of environment and relationships on behavior. In this study, children were given a marshmallow on a plate by an adult. They were told that the adult was going to leave the room, and while they were gone the child could make a choice: they could eat the marshmallow when the adult left, or they could wait until the adult came back, and if they waited they would be given a second marshmallow. The results of the study found that “[children] will wait four times longer for a treat when the child trusts the adult offering to keep his or her word, and when the environment feels secure to the child” (Sparks, S.D., 2013, p.3). Trusting the adult increased the child’s ability to delay gratification. This finding is important for educators, because it illustrates the power trusting teacher-student relationships. Students who trust their teacher are more likely to be able to delay gratification in their learning. A practical application of this would be during skill development. Students who trust their teacher will support them, even through errors, are more likely to stick with a concept that’s difficult, thus achieving higher academic rigor than students who do not feel their classroom or teacher can be trusted to support them.

Another study was done to measure how emotional engagement and grit impacted later literacy achievement for dual-language students experiencing socioeconomic stress. Researchers collected data three times during four months. Student stress was measured by student reporting, grit and engagement was measured by teacher reporting and literacy

achievement was measured by a performance task. “Results indicated that latent stress impacted later literacy achievement via the mediator of engagement” (O’Neal, 2018, p.149). In this case, stress was found to have had a negative impact on student socioemotional engagement, which in turn affected literacy achievement. This example further supports the claim that learning and social emotional engagement are tightly intertwined. Designing an effective social emotional curriculum necessitates that socioemotional engagement and academics are integrated in the same lesson, and not isolated from one another.

While most of the research thus far has taken place in western countries and within younger populations of students, the following study focussed on secondary students in India and examined the preventive, therapeutic and moderating effects of emotional intelligence. The hypotheses of the study proposed that having a higher level of emotional intelligence would decrease the effects of stress on student learning and psychological well-being (Marikutty, 2016). Four measures were used in the study to determine the relationships between emotional intelligence, adolescent stress, psychological well-being and academic achievement. Three of the four measures were self-assessments completed by the students. The first measure was an Emotional Intelligence Scale where students rated items using a 5-point scale. The second measure was an Adolescent Stress Questionnaire in which students again used a 5-point scale to rate stressors they had experienced in the last year. The third measure was a Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire which covered 12 subtopics including self-esteem, life satisfaction, personal control, social support, wellness, tension,

meaninglessness, positive affect, daily activities, somatic complaints, suicidal ideas, and general efficiency. The final measure of academic achievement was retrieved from official academic records.

Results of the study revealed that students who scored higher on the emotional intelligence measure, also scored higher on the Psychological well-being Questionnaire. Specifically, 6 of the 12 subtopics on the questionnaire had a strong relationship to emotional intelligence; self-esteem, meaninglessness, tension, daily activities, general efficiency, and total well-being. The relationship between emotional intelligence and stress had a strong negative correlation. Students who reported higher levels of stressors, also indicated a lower level of emotional intelligence. It is also worth noting that the impact of emotional intelligence is highest for the stress of peer pressure, followed by stress of home life, future uncertainty, and stress of school performance (Marikutty, P. J., & Joseph, M. I. , 2016). Additional findings of the study were that students with higher levels of emotional intelligence were able to control their emotions more effectively and more easily perceive the perspectives of others. These behaviors have had a positive effect on their classrooms as they prevented social friction between peers (Marikutty, P. J., & Joseph, M. I. , 2016). As this study indicates, the school environment holds some of the greatest stressors in a student's life. It's important as educators to be aware of the stressors our students face, and make every attempt to acknowledge and mitigate them.

Research on Emotional Intelligence consistently demonstrates that a student's ability to function in a productively positive manner is significantly influenced by their ability to cope with stress. Building emotional intelligence within our students will create

classroom environments where students feel safe and supported.. Empowering students with strategies to gain control over their emotions will create classrooms in which students are able to empathize with one another and reduce tension within schools.

Neuroscience of Emotional Intelligence

The field of neuroscience has been a field of study for centuries as people have desired to understand human intelligence, consciousness, and vital body functions. Our modern definition of neuroscience encompasses all sciences concerning the structure or function of the brain and nervous system. This field of study is highly significant in the study of social emotional health, as well as academic achievement, which are two main focuses of this capstone thesis.

The human brain has an estimated 100 billion neurons, also known as brain cells, that form a web of connections which are strengthened by our repeated experiences. Studies on brain development indicate that the brain is a constantly evolving organ; generating new growth, pruning insignificant connections, organizing and reorganizing neural pathways and much more complex processes. All of these functions allow humans to experience the world and adapt to their ever-changing environment. Neuroscience combines the disciplines of biology and psychology to capture the manifestation of human cognition. Before diving into the technical side of cognition, it's crucial to acknowledge that biology is at the root of all of our experiences. Thoughts, feelings, decisions, learning habits and behaviors are outward manifestations of our internal biological processes. Reciprocally, our brain development is an experience-dependent process (Darling-Hammond, et.al 2020).

Throughout life, and to an extraordinary degree in young people, the brain develops in relations to opportunities to engage in actively and safely with rich and meaningful environments, social relationships and emotions, and socially transmittes ideas and information. Consistent with foundational work in education and psychology, research is revealing that the brain's malleability, the evolutionary plasticity that allows us to adapt to the demands of our environments and to learn, is triggered and organized largely via socially enabled, emotionally driven opportunities for cognitive development. (Immordino-Yang et al, 2019, 185).

The field of neuroscience has made clear that our brain's are literally wired to connect. The physical structure of a neuron is designed to communicate with other neurons using chemical transmitters that pass through a structure known as the dendrite. Once a connection or neural pathway is created it can be made strong through experiences that reinforce the connection. The more a neural pathway is reinforced, the more influence it has in our cognition. This section will investigate how social and emotional experiences play a large role in the neural pathways developed in our brain.

It has been accepted in the field of neuroscience that our brains respond to hormones that are secreted during emotionally significant experiences. The hormone adrenaline for example is secreted when we get excited or scared to signal our brain that attention to this event is important. Immordino-Yang (2019) discusses *socially triggered hormones*, which suggest that humans are able to co-regulate one another's physiology through our interactions with one another (p.188). This idea is often evident in

mother-baby relationships. Crying babies who are comforted by their mother's close contact, show a decrease in blood pressure and stress hormones just minutes after an upsetting incident. Interestingly enough, the mother's blood pressure and stress hormones also normalize with the baby, and hormones related to bonding increase (Gunnar, 1998). In this scenario the mother and baby socially triggered a change in hormones. If the comforting behavior of the mother is repeated over and over, the baby's bonding hormones will strengthen neural pathways that build a secure attachment to their mother. Socially triggered hormones can also have negative impacts on brain development as well. For example, a child who experiences repeated stressors without being comforted, will develop strong neural pathways of prolonged anxiety, inhibiting their thinking, reasoning and memory (Briggs-Gowan et al, 2015). This research is incredibly important in education because it demonstrates how the quality of student relationships and interactions with teachers and peers, shape brain development and in turn promote physical health. (Immordino-Yang, 2019).

Another important area of neuroscience to explore is how the different regions of the brain communicate with one another to build emotional intelligence. The amygdala; the region of the brain responsible for emotions, and the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex; the region responsible for interpreting social intentions, are two regions of the brain that must have strong neural pathways to promote emotional development (Finlay, 2018). While emotions continue to be researched today, it is agreed upon that an increase in the amygdala triggers several body responses. These responses might be autonomic such as an increased heart rate or sweating which can be triggered in both positive and negative

experiences. As mentioned before, responses may be a releasing of hormones from the endocrine system. And finally, a behavioral response such as the freeze, flight or fight response may be elicited.

Stress responses inhibit the brain's ability to execute decision-making skills. (Adolphs, R., et. al, 2018). Stress responses produced by a threat to emotional security also inhibit the brain from accessing working memory (Beilock, Rydell, & McConnell, 2007), which impairs reasoning and judgement. It is therefore important the amygdala and other regions of the brain are not communicating stress responses while a student is in their learning environment. The brain cannot physiologically complete the higher-level thinking tasks when emotional responses in the brain and body are occurring. For students who experience chronic stress, there's a high risk for discrepancies in academic achievement due to the state of their brain. Oftentimes, cultural differences between students amplify stressors about social/cultural norms.. In the next section we will discuss research on culturally responsive curriculum design, and the importance of using inclusive language, activities and strategies.

Culturally Responsive Curriculum Design

As researchers dive deeper into SEL, the connection between a student's well-being and their cultural context become almost inseparable. Social emotional competencies in teachers, allows for more culturally authentic and relevant teaching. Social emotional competencies in students, allows for a more empathetic classroom culture and increased capacity for achievement. Leveraging the cultures in a classroom as

a way to inform teaching practices, will have a powerfully positive impact on student learning and outcomes.

The cultural capital of a classroom is often undervalued and under taught in our white-focussed society. Teaching practices have largely been modeled after strategies that work for white people. The language we use and the activities selected, have been normed by the bias of a predominantly white educator workforce. An analysis of teacher prep coursework and new teachers in Massachusetts, came to the assertion:

“It is crucial for new teachers to develop an understanding of how strength-based approaches (rather than deficit views and approaches) to race, ethnicity and class are linked to the cultivation of social-emotional well being” (Donahue-Keegan, et al., 2019, p. 154).

Using the lens of culturally responsive teaching, can bring a higher level of equity into education. Rather than focussing on the gaps in student achievement, a culturally responsive approach gives attention to the environment surrounding each student, and identifying the strengths developed from their experiences. This approach shifts the focus from what’s wrong with the student, to how can the teacher better understand a student’s cultural context.

Teacher attitudes towards student culture have immense influence over student outcomes. Their opinions and perspectives manifest in their instruction, through their interactions with students, how much attention given to students, classroom expectations, classroom routines, and the teaching materials selected. It is therefore pertinent that culturally responsive approaches begin with educating teachers on cultural competence

and on the selection of culturally responsive curriculum. Educational researcher and author Geneva Gay emphasizes the need for curriculum content to culturally be influenced in her book *Culturally Relevant Teaching*. She suggests that teachers and students critically evaluate their textbooks, trade books, science, math and social studies curriculum, asking themselves, how does this affect knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors towards ethnic and cultural diversity (2000). Sources of classroom resources should represent the cultural diversity with the classroom.

A recent systematic review of 66 SEL intervention studies was completed by social emotional researcher and evaluator, Tia Navelene Barnes, Ph.D at the University of Delaware. She evaluated dissertations or peer-reviewed articles published between 1996 and 2016, in urban K-12 settings (Barnes, 2019). She found that most SEL programs are being implemented during school hours, facilitated by school personnel like teachers, counselors, school social workers and other support staff (Barnes, 2019). She evaluated the cultural responsiveness of interventions based on researchers' reports of how the interventions were developed. If the intervention was based on cultural knowledge of the participants, she classified it as culturally responsive (Barnes, 2019). Through her research, she found only 9 of the 66 interventions to be culturally responsive (Barnes, 2019). This is quite significant, given that she focused on urban areas with high cultural diversity, and an indicator that culturally relevant content is widely missing is SEL curriculums.

There is an obvious need for research on culturally responsive SEL strategies, and curriculum. The next section of this review will discuss the academic and socioemotional

achievement discrepancies between students who are emotionally secure in their classroom, and those who are not.

Student Achievement

Student achievement in schools is measured in many ways. The most prominent assessments used are of academic achievement. A multitude of factors can influence a student's academic achievement, though this section will focus on the social emotional well-being of students as it relates to their achievement.

Researchers have long looked at relationships within family dynamics to find patterns of success, however school relationships are proving to be highly significant in predicting student outcomes as well. Several studies have examined the effect of teacher and peer relations on skill development. In one study, a group of kindergarten students were followed for 4 years to assess the influence teacher and peer relationships had on academic performance. The kindergarteners were assessed using an academic measure on the following three skills: initial phoneme ID, letter knowledge and math number sequence. In grades 1-3, teacher affect of students was measured using a rating tool in which the teachers assessed their satisfaction, joy, helplessness and stress in regards to target students. In grades 1-3, student acceptance was measured using a sociometric in which students circled the names of students of whom they like to spend time with during breaks. In grade 4, the students were again assessed using an academic measure on skills that correlated with the skills assessed in kindergarten: reading fluency, reading comprehension, fluency in arithmetic skills and arithmetic reasoning.

Results of the study found student relationships with their peers were significantly associated with their attachment to their teacher. Students who obtained a favorable score on the teacher affect measure, also scored high on the peer acceptance measure. Researchers suggest that when children have warm and supportive teacher-child relationships, they are able to use their teachers as resources for their other social relationships, including peer relationships (Howes et al., 1994). Positive interactions and affirming feedback from the teacher towards specific students, increased that student's positive relationships with their peers. The more a teacher reported showing positive affect for a student at one time point, the more accepted the student was by his or her peer group at the next time point (Kiuru, et al., 2015). Furthermore, "The higher the level of positive teacher affect for a student in grades 1 and 2, the greater that student's peer acceptance in grades 2 and 3, and the higher the student's academic skills in grade 4" (Kiuru, et al., 2015, p. 440).

A similar longitudinal study was completed with a group of students beginning in kindergarten and ending in grade 8. In this study however, researchers were focussed on determining if teacher-student relationships in early elementary grades were a significant indicator of behavioral and academic outcomes. Results of the study found that the relational styles of young students had a strong and persistent relationship with performance in academic and social situations in later years. (Hamre, B. K., 2001). In this study, the most significant correlation was found among students whose relational style in kindergarten was marked by conflict and overdependence (Hamre, B.K., 2001). These

students were more likely to have negative behavioral and academic outcomes later in their education.

While academic achievement is an indicator of future outcomes for students, it is important to recognize that student achievement can not be reduced to content knowledge alone. Schools are highly social environments, and a large part of being a student, is having the skills to work collaboratively with others. Researchers from the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning in Chicago examined four SEL programs to determine their outcomes in the competencies of academic performance, positive social behaviors, social relationships, reduction in behavior problems and psychological distress, and preparing young people to succeed in college, work, family, and society (Elias, 2014; Jones & Kahn, 2017). The first and largest study encompassed 270,000 students from kindergarten through high school. After the initial study, three more studies of a smaller scale were completed. Results from the initial study were echoed in the results of subsequent studies, strengthening the relevancy of the results. The two most notable findings found by Mahoney (2019),

Compared to control students, students participating in SEL programs showed significantly more positive outcomes with respect to enhanced SEL skills, attitudes, positive social behavior, and academic performance, and significantly lower levels of conduct problems and emotional distress (p.20).

Additional findings of significance were that SEL programs had stronger influence in the short-term, over long-term. This is not surprising, as most education interventions require an on-going component to maintain skills. This result suggests SEL programming should

be integrated systematically into all levels of education to see the benefits long term (Mahoney, 2019).

Educators are continually seeking out creative solutions to close achievement gaps among students. The results of social emotional curriculum implementation, declare a strong influence on the academic success and positive social emotional outcomes for students. The results indicate that students in preschool through high school benefit greatly from participation in SEL programs. There is extensive research to support the benefits of systematic integration of SEL programs. The next section will review several models of SEL programs, their benefits and limitations.

Approaches to Social Emotional Learning

The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence has developed an evidence-based SEL approach called RULER which stands for Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing and Regulating emotions. This approach is intended to be implemented into large systems such as entire school or school districts rather than classroom by classroom. A distinct characteristic of their approach is that an intense focus on building the emotional awareness of the adults of an organization. During the first year of implementation, the approach requires teachers, principals and support staff to be trained extensively in using the emotional strategies that will later be used with students. Marc Brackett, the Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence is up front that this approach asks a lot of school professionals (Brackett, 2017). The *RULER* approach includes 4 research-based tools used for mood identification, emotional triggers, conflict management and setting emotional classroom norms. Advanced curriculum has also been

developed to help teachers integrate the emotional language into other core subjects (Brackett, 2017). One strength of this approach is in the continuity from grade to grade. Staff are highly trained in the approach before implementation with students, which creates a succinct experience for students from one year to another. Another strength reported by teachers who use this approach is that urgent classroom issues surface, when they may have otherwise gone undetected (Brackett, 2017). Two limitations of this approach have been identified. The first one is how time-intensive it can be to train all staff members. The approach emphasizes the importance to having all adults trained and comfortable with using the strategies themselves, which can take time. Another limitation is that it's up to the educator to understand when cultural norms of students differ from the dominant cultural norms of a classroom. There is risk that false assumptions about behaviors may be made unintentionally due to the diversity of cultural norms in our schools.

The Committee for Children has devoted decades to researching and developing resources to support the social and emotional well-being of children. Their *Second Step* program is one of the most widely used SEL programs in the U.S. (Low, 2018). According to their website, the organization was founded in 1975 and was initially formed to protect victims of child sexual abuse (Committee for Children). The group has since evolved into a large global non-profit and developer of curriculum for SEL, bullying prevention and child protection. The first edition of their SEL curriculum, *Second Step* was released in 1985. In 2012 the program was revised to address new skill areas including attention, inhibitory control and working memory (Low, 2018). “The approach

proposes that explicit instruction in, opportunities to practice, and reinforcement of social-emotional skills intended to improve problem solving skills for learning and ultimately, academic achievement” (Low, 2018, p. 416). Lessons are grade-specific and lesson cards are provided with a teacher script. The lessons are 20-40 minutes in length to be scheduled into the daily schedule. A two-year longitudinal study of the impacts of Second Step found that this approach did in fact appear to enhance classroom skills for learning and emotion management. There was not however significant data that demonstrated increased academic achievement. Overall the program seemed to be most beneficial as intervention for students with emotional skill deficits, however it did not act as a preventative tool (Low, 2018). Researchers concluded that a longer study would need to be completed in order to understand the full impact of *Second Step* on students achievement in both academic and social spheres.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), is a non-profit based out of Chicago with a mission to “make evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool through high school (Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, 2020). They have been completing research on social emotional learning for about 20 years, and complete reviews of evidence-based SEL programs to help educators select approaches that enhance social and emotional competence. Over the course of their reviews, CASEL has developed the acronym SAFE to represent the most effective strategies in SEL curricula. The elements identified are, “(1) Sequenced—connected and coordinated activities to foster skills development; (2) Active—active forms of learning to help students master

new skills; (3) Focused—containing a component that emphasizes developing personal and social skills; and (4) Explicit—targeting specific social and emotional skills” (Durlak et al., 2010, 2011). Relationships with adults and peers are again found to be essential in the social and emotional development of students. It has also been shown to be more effective when lessons are embedded daily within other content areas to provide opportunities to practice the skills in practical and meaningful ways. Just as the RULER approach emphasized, investing in quality staff training increases effectiveness of programs. (Collaborative for Social Emotional Learning, 2020).

Summary

The current literature on SEL illustrates a picture of incredible potential for our students. It captures the kinetic nature of human development as our cultures and societies continually evolve. The hard work of scientists and the innovation of technology allows for deeper understanding of the neuroscience behind our social and emotional dependency to interact with others, beginning at birth and continuing through our life. Greater understanding of emotional intelligence competencies gives shape to how we teach about emotional awareness. It’s clear that further research is necessary to measure the extent of the influence SEL has on student achievement, especially for culturally diverse populations.

Chapter three will describe the research paradigm and methods to be used for data collection on the cultural responsiveness of social emotional learning curriculums. It will provide a thorough description of the quantitative research methods that will analyze

SEL curriculums. The succeeding chapters will examine results and discuss implications and recommendations for social emotional curriculum implementation.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

Overview

The research completed in Chapter Two suggests that social emotional competence is an indicator of student outcomes in academic and social settings, which eventually predicts positive life outcomes (Jones, et. al, 2019). In light of this research, educators are presented with the incredible responsibility to address student's social emotional needs through practices that effectively promote social emotional competence. My research aims to evaluate the cultural responsiveness of specific SEL curriculum, in pursuit of gaining a better understanding of how cultural responsiveness and furthermore cultural sustainability plays a role in SEL. This research will not only benefit myself, but other educators working with SEL curriculum in their classrooms.

My research supports the mission of initiatives set by the state of Minnesota to increase awareness and understanding of effective SEL. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) formed a work group in 2015, tasked with exploring the latest research on SEL. Their mission was to review best practices and develop SEL resources for schools which included district implementation guidelines, professional development resources, as well as assessment guidance. MDE's work group concluded that social emotional learning necessitates a comprehensive approach, as expressed in this statement from MDE's SEL Implementation webpage,

Successful SEL implementation is not achieved through a stand-alone program or an add-on lesson; it must be a central part of how schools, communities and families value and support the social, emotional and academic development of their children (MDE, 2020).

As school district policies and state and federal mandates begin reflecting the social emotional needs of students, curriculums are updated and adapted to be more inclusive; meeting a larger audience. It has become clear that every child deserves a curriculum that is accessible and meaningful to them. This is largely the rationale for this research.

“Curriculum plays an essential role in students’ lives, not only because it serves as a tool for their learning and growth, but because it influences how students understand the world and locate themselves within it” (Peoples, 2019, paragraph 2). I want to empower students to see themselves as a valued member of their society; seen, heard and acknowledged as humans capable of successful social skills and emotional intelligence. Empowering students, begins by providing them access to equitable and culturally sustaining resources at school.

Acknowledging that many curriculums in the United States, including SEL curriculums are biased towards white culture. It is crucial to see this research through a lens of cultural equity. As a white teacher-researcher, I found that I needed to stay vigilant about not allowing my own bias to project into the results of this research. I focussed my study on identifying the objective qualities of each curriculum including the language, teaching strategies, activities, pictures and visuals in each program. The research

methodology reflects the ongoing cultural sustainability research of CASEL and the New York Metropolitan Center for Research. Both of these groups have created tools for evaluating SEL curriculum through a culturally responsive framework. These frameworks shaped the one developed for this study. The remainder of this chapter will describe the research methods, the curriculums evaluated and the research tools and processes used in data analysis.

Research Paradigm

This project used quantitative research methods. The design was somewhat influenced by the study of Tia Navelene Barnes reviewed in Chapter 2, in which SEL interventions were evaluated using an evaluation framework. Similarly, in this research I applied an evaluation tool to two SEL curriculums to determine the presence or absence of elements that are identifiable as culturally responsive. By using quantitative methods, I was able to yield concrete data points that express the trends within each curriculum.

As John Creswell states in his book *Research Design*, “In a quantitative project, the problem is best addressed by understanding what factors or variables influence an outcome” (2018, p.99). After reflecting on my own experiences as a teacher who uses curriculum, I determined the variables I would evaluate in each curriculum to be Strategies/Activities, Language, and Visuals. The data I collected about each of these variables allowed me to draw conclusions about the overall cultural responsiveness of each curriculum.

Curriculum Selection

The first step in my research process was to identify how many, and which

curriculums I would be reviewing. Given that I am a teacher-researcher, I felt it best to evaluate the curriculum that I am currently connected to. I teach in an elementary school located in a suburban school district just outside of the Twin Cities. The district in which I teach has adopted two SEL curriculums: Second Step and Caring School Communities. As I began my preliminary research into these two programs, it came as a delight that these curriculums are two of the most widely used programs across the United States. I hope that in selecting these two curriculums, that my research can be practically beneficial for educators who are considering these programs, or who already use them in their classrooms. I will now give a brief overview of each curriculum's development and approach.

The first curriculum I analyzed was the Second Step program. This curriculum was developed as a K-5, classroom-based curriculum designed to increase school success and decrease problem behaviors (Committee for Children, 2020). Second Step is one of the most widely adopted SEL programs in the United States (Low, S., et. al, 2019). Concepts are introduced during lessons that utilize key vocabulary words, pictures, video, and/or audio elements. Students then have opportunities to practice the concept through skill practice, group discussion, individual writing, or partner work (Committee for Children, 2020). The eight core topics addressed in Second Step are: (1)Empathy, (2)Emotion Management, (3)Emotion Recognition, (4)Problem Solving, (5)Impulse Control, (6)Calming Down, (7)Communication, (8)Assertiveness. This curriculum is intended to be implemented by classroom teachers as part of their daily teaching.

The second curriculum I analyzed was Caring School Community. This curriculum, designed by Collaborative Classroom, is a comprehensive program for grades K–8. The curriculum is founded in building a whole school community through relationships, grade-specific instruction, school leadership guidance and creating calm learning environments (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018). Similar to Second Step, social skills are explicitly taught through daily lessons by the classroom teacher. The core areas of focus are Beginning-Of-The-Year Skills, Self-Management Skills, Interpersonal Skills and Executive Function Skills. In addition, the curriculum encourages classroom routines that cultivate community including morning meetings, closing circles, weekly choice time, random pairing partner work, building relationships with buddy classes and school staff, as well as weekly at home connection activities (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018).

Research Tool

The primary tool used for the curriculum analysis was a framework adapted from evaluation tools developed by CASEL and the New York Metropolitan Center for Research. The Framework and the various elements that were evaluated in each curriculum are outlined in Appendix A. The framework includes attributes identified by CASEL and the New York Metropolitan Center for Research as indicators of culturally sustaining practices. Each attribute was selected in order to ensure a comprehensive assessment of each curriculum.

There are 32 items listed in the Culturally Responsive Framework (see Figure 2) As research was conducted, and patterns emerged, each listed item was marked as either

“Attribute Present” or “Attribute Not Present”. In order for an “Attribute Present” to be selected for an item, the curriculum must have demonstrated evidence of the item consistently in the lessons and materials evaluated. If an item was demonstrated only once during the review or was absent from the materials, the item was marked “Attribute not Present”. This criteria was determined based on the science currently known that supports repetition and in learning.

Figure 2

Culturally Responsive Framework

Activities/Strategies	Attribute Present	Attribute <u>Not</u> Present
Class time is balanced with periods of teacher-led instruction, student talk and interaction, and time to work/reflect alone.		
There are references to different ethnic and cultural traditions, languages, religions, names (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
Social situations and problems are not seen as individual problems but are situated within a societal context (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
Curriculum and instructional activities promote or provoke critical questions about the societal status quo. They present alternative points of view as equally worth considering (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
The curriculum presents different points of view on the same event or experience, especially points of view from marginalized people/communities (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
The curriculum provides avenues for students to connect learning to social, political, or environmental concerns that affect them and their lives and contribute to change (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
The curriculum encourages students to take actions that combat inequity or promote equity within the school or local community (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
Guidance is provided on customizing and supplementing the curriculum to reflect the cultures, traditions, backgrounds and interests of the student population (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		

Guidance includes, for specific lessons, a range of possible student responses that could all be valid, given the range of student experiences and perspectives (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
The assignments/activities allow students to incorporate content related to diverse and/or underserved populations (Portland).		
Students are able to express their learning in several ways, which have been informed by student input and instructor knowledge of individual students' strengths and needs.		
Guidance is provided on being aware of biases and gaps between one's own culture and the culture of their students (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
Guidance is provided on engaging students in culturally sensitive experiential learning activities (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
Guidance is provided on teaching children of diverse identities in culturally responsive ways - including but not limited to English Language Learners (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
Students lead routines during SEL instruction (CASEL 2019).		
Students share their perspectives during SEL instruction (CASEL 2019).		
Students reflect on their experiences during SEL instruction (CASEL 2019).		
Student grouping varies so that each student gets to know and work with everyone else (CASEL 2019).		
Activities allow students to explore issues that are important to them and co-create solutions to improve the classroom, school, or community (CASEL 2019).		
Language		
The curriculum does not communicate negativity or hostility toward people of marginalized backgrounds through verbal or nonverbal insults, slights or snubs (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
The curriculum communicates an asset-based perspective by representing people of diverse races, classes, genders, abilities and sexual orientations through their strengths, talents and knowledge rather than their perceived flaws or deficiencies (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		

Materials use the voices of people from different cultures, genders, classes, sexualities and with differing abilities are heard (Breiseth et al., 2020).		
Curriculum guides educators to learn about the language skills students bring to the classroom (Breiseth et al., 2020).		
Curriculum provides guidance on mindfulness of different communication styles, patterns, and norms that students may use (Breiseth et al., 2020).		
Activities present a diverse range of poetry, music, or other forms of expression into the classroom on a regular basis (Breiseth et al., 2020).		
Pictures/Visuals		
BIPOC characters are represented.		
White characters are represented (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
Racially Ambiguous characters are represented (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
People with Disabilities are represented (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
Diverse ethnicities and nationalities are portrayed – not all Asian families are Chinese, not all Latinx families are Mexican, etc. (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
Characters of color are main characters and not just sidekicks (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		
Diverse family structures (ie. single parents, adopted or foster children, same-sex parents, other relatives living with the family, etc.) are represented (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		

Second Step

With the framework I developed in hand, I began my research with the Second Step curriculum by completing a required online training which covered an overview of the K-5 program. I spent 90 minutes completing the three modules which covered 2

subtopics: Overview, Teaching the Lessons and Reinforcing Skills and Concepts. This gave me a better understanding of how the curriculum is presented to students. I then determined it necessary to examine a specific grade level's materials for a more in-depth look at the cultural responsiveness of the curriculum. I chose to examine the materials for grades 1 and 4. Evaluating materials from both a lower and upper elementary grade-level allowed a glimpse into the broader elementary experience with Second Step.

Grade 1 Process

I began with the first grade materials which included Weekly Lessons, Follow Through Activities and Home Link Activities,. In this section I will describe my findings for each component.

In total, there are twenty-two weeks of lessons provided in this program for 1st grade. Each week, one 20-25 minute lesson is taught, followed by 5-10 minute reinforcement activities the remaining days of the week. Each week of activities is focussed on one of four subtopics, which progress throughout the year. The first five lessons focus on Skills for Learning, the following five lessons focus on Empathy, the following six focus on Emotion Management, and the final five weeks focus on Problem Solving. These subtopics align closely with the five goals of SEL programs as identified by CASEL; "Self Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making" (CASEL, 2021). I selected the first three lessons in each subtopic to explicitly analyze. In total, I analyzed 12 weeks of curriculum of the total 22 provided for 1st grade.

For each week of curriculum, I started by reading through the entire lesson plan, making note of the activities and teaching strategies that were used, as well as the language provided by the curriculum. Second Step is unique in that it provides a script for the educator to use each lesson, word for word. I then analyzed all of the photos, videos and music selections in each week's materials. I kept a tally of who was represented in each visual, and whether or not the person expressed a positive or uncomfortable emotion. My intention in collecting this data will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four. In an attempt to be thorough, I made additional notes about each lesson to include things like what guidance is provided to the educator in the teacher's manual, and how student responses are elicited.

The final component I analyzed were the Home Link activities that are provided as an at-home activity for families to review content and apply SEL in their home environment. Each week there is a handout that is sent home. I made note of the activities offered to families and the language used in the directions.

Grade 4 Process

I repeated an almost identical analysis process with the Grade 4 materials. Similar to the Grade 1 materials, the Grade 4 program is composed of 22 weekly lessons, Follow Through Activities, and Home Link Activities. The Grade 4 curriculum is divided into the same three subtopics as the Grade 1 materials: Empathy, Skills for Learning, Emotion and Problem Solving. I selected the first four lessons in each subtopic to capture the year-long scope of the curriculum. In total, I analyzed 12 of 22 weekly lessons and

activities provided. I again evaluated the activities and strategies, language, and visuals to identify the culturally responsive attributes listed in the CR Framework.

Caring School Community

I began my research with the Caring School Community (CSC) curriculum by reading an overview of the approach, which is included in the introductory pages of each grade-level's Teacher's Manual. I learned of the components of the curriculum, as well as the priorities within SEL. This step gave insight into the overall scope of the curriculum, as well as the intention behind the strategies and language that are used.

Grade 1 Process

In grade 1, the CSC materials include thirty weekly lessons, weekly home link activities, ten community chats, three trade books, a discipline handbook, and a cross-age buddies activities handbook. The thirty lessons progress through 6 subtopics during the year; Starting the Year, Building Classroom and School Community, Being a Responsible Learner and Community Member, Getting to Know my Feelings, and Caring about others. I selected twelve of the thirty weeks of lessons to analyze in-depth, including their Home Link activities. I also analyzed three of the ten Community Chats, which target specific issues related to classroom life.

In addition to the weekly lessons and Home Link Activities, I also analyzed the three trade books that accompany the grade 1 materials. I read through each book, as well as how the curriculum guides the educator to use the books within a lesson. I made note of the activities and language used to discuss the books, as well as the characters represented in the illustrations of each book.

Another component of the CSC curriculum are Cross-Age Buddy Activities. This component of the curriculum includes a handbook of activities to be used between two classrooms of different grade-levels, 1-2 times a month. The Cross-Age Buddy Activities span grades K-5, though I will only share the results of this component under the grade 1 Results in Chapter Four. It should be noted however that these results are representative of the program K-5.

The final component of CSC that I evaluated was the Caring School Discipline booklet, which “provides detailed guidance for how to support students with challenging behaviors...” (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018e). The booklet provides guidance on how to implement multiple, systematic interventions for commonly seen behaviors in the grade band for which it is designed. I analyzed the guidance for two or the behaviors in the K-1 booklet.

Grade 4 Process

In grade 4, the CSC materials include ten weekly lessons, weekly home link activities, eighteen topic week lessons, three trade books, a discipline handbook, and a cross-age buddies activities handbook. The ten weekly lessons are taught during the first ten weeks of school and focus on setting up the classroom environment as a community. Each week focuses on a different topic such as *Getting to Know One Another*, or *Taking Care of Our Classroom and Ourselves*. These lessons are contained within the Teacher’s Manual for Grade 4. I evaluated all 10 weeks of lessons in the Teacher’s Manual, as well as their corresponding Home Link activities.

In addition to the teacher's manual, there are eighteen Topic Week booklets. Each booklet is a stand-alone week of lessons focussed on a specific topic. Six of the topics relate to School Life, four related to Character Building, and seven relate to Social Issues. The topic weeks are taught in the order of best fit determined by the classroom teacher. weeks are intended to be used in the order determined by the teacher. I selected six of the eighteen topic weeks to review in my analysis.

Finally, I reviewed the Caring School Discipline booklet (Grades 2-5). Similar to the Discipline booklet for K-1, this booklet identified common behaviors for the 2-5 grade band. Each behavior includes guidance on how to implement multiple, systematic interventions to address the issue. I analyzed guidance for two behaviors in the 2-5 booklet.

Data Analysis

The pacing of this capstone was fluid, moving quickly at times, and slowing at others. This progress of this research was dependent on the researcher's pace, as well as the availability of the curriculum resources. Given the nature of qualitative research, keeping organized data was crucial to maintain clarity. A spreadsheet was developed to organize data and prepare for data analysis. The spreadsheet was a record of the lessons evaluated, the activities, language and visuals included within each lesson, as well as researcher notes about each lesson. This spreadsheet was added to as the review was being completed to capture each curriculum's unique elements thoroughly. The spreadsheet documented evidence of the items listed in the Culturally Responsive Framework that was developed for this study.

Summary

Curriculum evaluation and analysis is an essential step in maintaining high standards for educational materials and instruction. The model I have selected will allow the study to identify areas of strength and weakness within a curriculum as it pertains to cultural sustainability. This research is important in ensuring equitable social emotional learning for all students, regardless of cultural background. Chapter Four will present the findings of this research, sectioned by curriculum and grade-specific materials.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The research completed in this study was designed to gather data on how culturally responsive SEL curriculums are, by using a systematic review. Over the last 12 weeks, I have become well-acquainted with the components and approach of the Second Step program, and Caring School Community program. I will begin this chapter by describing the results from my Second Step analysis, and then describe the results from Caring School Community. A summary of the overall findings associated with the Culturally Responsive Framework precedes an in-depth analysis of the Grade 1 and Grade 4 materials for each curriculum.

Second Step Results

After a thorough review of the Second Step program, I considered each of the 32 items listed on the CRT. Twenty-seven items were marked “Attribute Present” after repeated evidence of the item was found within the curriculum. Five items were marked “Attribute Not Present” due to either minor evidence or the absence of the item in the curriculum. Figure 3 presents the Second Step findings.

Figure 3*Second Step Culturally Responsive Framework*

Activities/Strategies	Attribute Present	Attribute <u>Not</u> Present
Class time is balanced with periods of teacher-led instruction, student talk and interaction, and time to work/reflect alone.	X	
There are references to different ethnic and cultural traditions, languages, religions, names (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Social situations and problems are not seen as individual problems but are situated within a societal context (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Curriculum and instructional activities promote or provoke critical questions about the societal status quo. They present alternative points of view as equally worth considering (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
The curriculum presents different points of view on the same event or experience, especially points of view from marginalized people/communities (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
The curriculum provides avenues for students to connect learning to social, political, or environmental concerns that affect them and their lives and contribute to change (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		X
The curriculum encourages students to take actions that combat inequity or promote equity within the school or local community (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Guidance is provided on customizing and supplementing the curriculum to reflect the cultures, traditions, backgrounds and interests of the student population (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		X
Guidance includes, for specific lessons, a range of possible student responses that could all be valid, given the range of student experiences and perspectives (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
The assignments/activities allow students to incorporate content related to diverse and/or underserved populations (Portland).		X
Students are able to express their learning in several ways, which have been informed by student input and instructor knowledge of individual students' strengths and needs.	X	
Guidance is provided on being aware of biases and gaps between one's own culture and the culture of their students (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	

Guidance is provided on engaging students in culturally sensitive experiential learning activities (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Guidance is provided on teaching children of diverse identities in culturally responsive ways - including but not limited to English Language Learners (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Students lead routines during SEL instruction (CASEL 2019).	X	
Students share their perspectives during SEL instruction (CASEL 2019).	X	
Students reflect on their experiences during SEL instruction (CASEL 2019).	X	
Student grouping varies so that each student gets to know and work with everyone else (CASEL 2019).	X	
Activities allow students to explore issues that are important to them and co-create solutions to improve the classroom, school, or community (CASEL 2019).	X	
Language	Attribute Present	Attribute <u>Not</u> Present
The curriculum does not communicate negativity or hostility toward people of marginalized backgrounds through verbal or nonverbal insults, slights or snubs (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
The curriculum communicates an asset-based perspective by representing people of diverse races, classes, genders, abilities and sexual orientations through their strengths, talents and knowledge rather than their perceived flaws or deficiencies (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Materials use the voices of people from different cultures, genders, classes, sexualities and with differing abilities are heard (Breiseth et al., 2020).	X	
Curriculum guides educators to learn about the language skills students bring to the classroom (Breiseth et al., 2020).	X	
Curriculum provides guidance on mindfulness of different communication styles, patterns, and norms that students may use (Breiseth et al., 2020).	X	
Activities present a diverse range of poetry, music, or other forms of expression into the classroom on a regular basis (Breiseth et al., 2020).	X	
Pictures/Visuals	Attribute Present	Attribute <u>Not</u> Present
BIPOC characters are represented.	X	

White characters are represented (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Racially Ambiguous characters are represented (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
People with Disabilities are represented (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		X
Diverse ethnicities and nationalities are portrayed – not all Asian families are Chinese, not all Latinx families are Mexican, etc. (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Characters of color are main characters and not just sidekicks (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Diverse family structures (ie. single parents, adopted or foster children, same-sex parents, other relatives living with the family, etc.) are represented (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		X

The initial training for Second Step, which I completed online, was a thorough overview of the program’s approach and strategies. Each week, a lesson was to be taught and followed up with daily 5-minute reinforcement activities throughout the remaining days of the week. The guidance in the training encouraged teachers to use wait time, a combination of verbal and non-verbal response methods, calling randomly on students, using partners during class discussions and assignments, and pre-teaching vocabulary to English Language Learners. All of these strategies are evidence of culturally responsive teaching and are listed in the CRF.

One of the most distinct characteristics of the Second Step curriculum is how heavily the lessons rely on visuals. Each lesson focuses around a photo of a social situation, a music video, and brief video lessons of school-related situations. These materials are provided to the teacher as a hard copy, but are also able to be streamed from their online platform. In my analysis I evaluated materials in the online format.

Grade 1 Activities and Strategies

I will begin this section by describing the types of activities used to teach concepts. There was consistently a whole class “Brain Builder” at the beginning of each lesson. Examples of these activities include: Simon Says, My Turn Your Turn, Clap and Wait, Step or Stay, Move or Wait, Idea Machine, and Shape Moves. The goal of these activities is to provide opportunities to practice a skill. Table 4.1 lists the Brain Builders and the Skills practiced in each activity:

Table 4.1

Second Step Grade 1 Activity Samples

Brain Builder Activity	Skills Practiced
My Turn Your Turn	Watching and listening for cues, following directions.
Think Turn Tell	Brainstorming an idea and sharing with a partner
Simon Says	Listening for cues, following directions.
Clap and Wait	Watching and listening for cues, following directions.
Step or Stay	Listening for cues, following directions.
Move or Wait	Watching and listening for cues, following directions.
Shape Moves	Watching for cues
Idea Machine	Watching and listening for cues, brainstorming an idea and sharing with the class

All of the above activities are led by the teacher, and repeated multiple times throughout the year. The repeated exposure to these activities, allows students to consistently practice the foundational interpersonal skills of listening to others, watching for cues and sharing with others. It is an indicator of the curriculum’s approach to skill

building. These skills learned in 1st grade will be built upon as the student advances to the upper elementary level.

I next analyzed the types of student responses elicited in the lessons. The CRF includes several items concerned with how students are taught to express their learning. I found that each lesson elicited both verbal and non-verbals responses from students multiple times throughout the lesson. There are plenty of opportunities for students to express their experiences and learning in a variety of ways. Examples of verbal response strategies include: whole class discussion and partner sharing. Examples of non-verbal response strategies include: thumbs up/down, head nodding, raising of hands, asking students to copy a model of body language, short answer written response and drawing/sketching. The initial lesson at the beginning of the week is heavily structured around whole-class explicit instruction, whole class discussion and partner sharing.

The follow-through activities which are intended to be used on subsequent days, are more often focussed on whole class application of concepts, whole class reflection, personal reflection and partner work. Examples of follow-through activities include: illustrating feelings, writing sentences or words about experience with feelings, think turn tell about a topic-specific question, watching the music video again, role playing a scenario, or having a class discussion about an actual classroom scenario/issue. These activities are meant to apply the skill they learned about in the initial lesson to their actual classroom experience.

In addition to the in-class activities, each week a Home Link handout is sent home to reinforce skills in the home environment. They are intended to inform families about

the week's lessons, as well as give ideas to apply the skills in real-life situations. At the top of each Home Link is a brief summary of what skill their student learned this week and why the skill is important. There are prompts written out to encourage discussion with the student and a short activity to complete together. Examples of activities include, drawing a picture, playing a game, practicing a skill while doing a chore, and short answer written responses.

Grade 1 Language

The next component I will present is the language used in the curriculum. Language has the ability to shape our understanding of concepts and can either provide opportunities or define limits of one's self. One of the items on the CRF references asset-based language as a culturally responsive practice. Asset-based language, is a language that focuses on the abilities of a person, rather than on their deficiencies. "To serve all children in high-quality ways, teachers need to be aware of and value cultural capital, "the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged" (Yosso, 2005, p. 69). I found that the Second Step language in the videos and teacher scripts is almost exclusively asset-based language. Table 4.2 lists language samples from the curriculum. Each sample is paired with one of the items from the Cultural Responsiveness Framework.

Table 4.2*Second Step Grade 1 Language Samples*

Cultural Responsiveness Framework Items	Language Sample (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018)
The curriculum does not communicate negativity or hostility toward people of marginalized backgrounds through verbal or nonverbal insults, slights or snubs. (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019)	“Feeling disappointed is uncomfortable. It can make your tummy hurt and your body feel a little tense. We all feel disappointed sometimes.”
The curriculum communicates an asset-based perspective by representing people of diverse races, classes, genders, abilities and sexual orientations through their strengths, talents and knowledge rather than their perceived flaws or deficiencies. (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019)	“Abraham uses a way to focus his attention that his teacher taught him last year”
Materials use the voices of people from different cultures, genders, classes, sexualities and with differing abilities are heard (Breiseth et al., 2020)	“Think about the other children in the video. Did they feel the same way as Sally or Louisha? (No.) What were some of the feelings the other children had?”
Students reflect on their experiences during SEL instruction. (CASEL 2019)	“Think about what you did that helped you be successful in the game”
The curriculum encourages students to take actions that combat inequity or promote equity within the school or local community. (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019)	“Subtracting big numbers is new and difficult for Nikki, and she can’t figure out how to do it. Can you think of a time when you felt frustrated trying to learn something new or difficult?”
The curriculum encourages students to take actions that combat inequity or promote equity within the school or local community. (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019)	“Everyone feels angry sometimes, but it’s important to calm down so you don’t let those feelings get you in trouble. Remember, it’s never okay to be mean or hurt someone else.”

Grade 1 Visuals

As mentioned previously, the Second Step curriculum heavily relies on visuals to convey key concepts. In this section I will describe results of my analysis of the weekly music videos, photos and lesson videos.

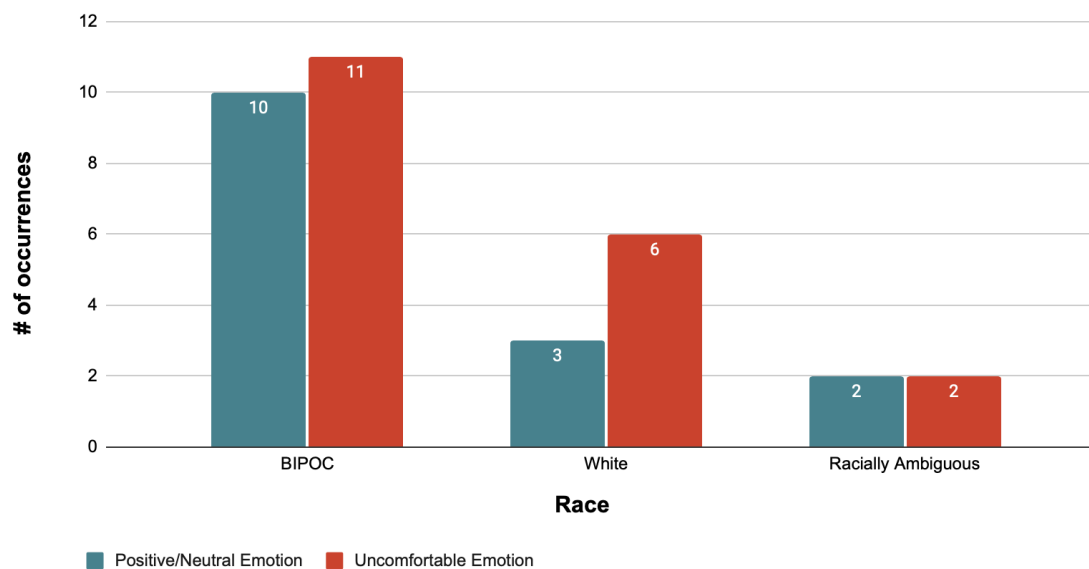
Most weeks, students watch a music video as an introduction to a skill being taught or as a review. The style of music, and the graphics used in these videos vary week to week. Some examples of music styles used are: hip hop, rock, acapella, easy listening, and caribbean. The variety in style of music is an indicator of cultural responsiveness. Music is often greatly influenced by culture, and many groups find identity in the music they listen to. Most of the videos use racially ambiguous cartoon characters, animal characters or no characters at all. The acapella-style music video is an exception, and includes representation of racially diverse characters. Overall these videos appeared to be visually neutral as far as representation of different people groups, and expose students to a wide variety of music styles.

After watching the music videos, each lesson presents a photo snapshot taken from the video lesson. In my analysis I determined that evaluating the video would be sufficient to collect data on both the video and snapshot. The lesson videos are brief, only 1-4 minutes in length. Each video lesson presents a school-related issue such as off-task behavior, disagreeing with a peer, difficulty sharing, or dealing with anger and frustration. In each video, there is some sort of issue needing to be resolved. Students use the photos and videos as conversation starters. Through the various activities described above, students identify the issue in the scenario, discuss the skills that the characters use or should use, and determine what actions students should take moving forward.

As I began my review of the photos and videos, I started to take notice of the race of characters in each scenario. A significant number of items on the CRF address the representation of characters by race. I determined that I would keep track of White and

Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), and Racially Ambiguous characters in each video lesson to get a sense of which groups were represented. My initial tally further distinguished between races included in the BIPOC population, however I found myself making assumptions based on my own bias about race, which would invalidate my results.

I wanted to take this data point a step further by identifying the type of emotion each character was representing. I was curious if BIPOC and White characters represented positive and uncomfortable emotions proportionally, or if one group consistently represented one type of emotion more than another. I chose to not adopt the labels of positive and negative emotions, and instead chose the labels of positive and uncomfortable emotions. My decision to use the word uncomfortable removes the stigma of an emotion being “bad”. Within this study, I define a positive emotion as an emotion that promotes peace within a person or among others such as joy, excitement, peace, calm, and happiness. I define an uncomfortable emotion as an emotion that does not promote peace within a person or among others such as stress, anger, anxiety and worry. Figure 4 shows the results of the grade 1 materials. Of the twenty-four characters represented in the Grade 1 materials I analyzed, twenty-one were BIPOC, nine were White and four were Racially Ambiguous. Of the fifteen positive emotions, ten were BIPOC, three were White, and two were Racially Ambiguous. Of the nineteen uncomfortable emotions, eleven were BIPOC, six were White, and two were Racially Ambiguous.

Figure 4*Second Step Grade 1 Emotion Representation by Race****Grade 4 Activities and Strategies***

I will begin this section by describing the types of activities used to teach concepts. Weekly lessons are taught in a 35-40 minute block on the first day of the week, and then reinforced with daily 5-minute reinforcement activities. Table 4.3 lists examples of the activities used in the initial lesson, as well as the activities used later in the week for reinforcement. Each activity is paired with the skill being practiced.

Table 4.3*Second Step Grade 4 Activity Samples*

Lesson Activities	Skills Practiced
Whole Class Discussion	Brainstorming an idea and sharing with the class
Partner Assignment (written short answer)	Working with a partner and demonstrating learning
Problem Solving Poster	Introduction to Problem Solving Skills

Think Turn Tell	Brainstorming an idea and sharing with a partner
Telephone (Whole Class Game)	Listening to a peer
Reinforcement Activities	Skills Practiced
Reflective Writing	Reflecting on and demonstrating learning
Class Discussion	Brainstorming an idea and sharing with the class, listening to others' perspectives
Practicing Breathing Techniques	Calm Down Techniques
Role Playing Scenarios	Applying Problem Solving Strategies
Making observations during a classroom routine	Identifying SEL skills in a real-life context

The above activities are led by the teacher, and repeated multiple times throughout the year. The repeated exposure to these activities, allows students to consistently practice the foundational interpersonal skills of listening to others and empathy, emotional management and problem solving. The skills in the 4th grade materials build upon skills from previous years, and many of the routines such as Think, Turn, Tell, Calming Down Techniques, Problem Solving Strategies are consistent throughout the curriculum.

I identified the types of student responses elicited during these activities. I found that each lesson elicited both verbal and non-verbal responses from students multiple times. There are plenty of opportunities for students to express their experiences and learning in a variety of ways. Examples of verbal response strategies include: whole class discussion, partner sharing, and small group discussion. Examples of non-verbal response

strategies include: thumbs up/down, head nodding, raising of hands, asking students to copy a model of body language, short answer written response and drawing/sketching.

The follow-through activities which are used on the days after the initial lesson, are more often focussed on whole class application of concepts, whole class reflection, personal reflection and partner work. Examples of follow-through activities include: creating a feelings Venn Diagram about a school situation, practicing deep breathing skills before a test, writing sentences or words about an experience with feelings, think turn tell about a topic-specific question, watching the music video again, role playing a scenario, or having a class discussion about an actual classroom scenario/issue. As with the grade 1 materials, these activities are meant to apply the skill they learned in the initial lesson to actual classroom experience.

In addition to the in-class activities, each week a Home Link handout is sent home to reinforce skills in the home environment. Unlike the grade 1 handouts which are written for a family member to facilitate, the grade 4 handouts are written for the student to initiate with someone at home. They are intended to provide opportunities to practice their SEL skills with someone at home. Examples of activities include, role-playing a scenario, using a checklist to identify listening skills when you are talking with someone, short answer responses to questions, and writing out a step step plan of how to use their skills at home.

Grade 4 Language

Now I will explain the language used in the 4th grade materials. Overall the Grade 4 language is similar to the Grade 1 language. It's apparent that the students are

able to explore the SEL topics with more depth, however the same language is used throughout. Much of the teacher script uses questioning to draw out language from the students. The questions are increasingly eliciting higher-level thinking skills. The grade 4 materials included more explicit language around feelings and emotions than the lower-elementary materials. For example language is given to talk about anxiety as “the uncomfortable feeling you get when you are worried about something that might or might not happen” (Second Step, 2021). Table 4.4 lists language samples from the curriculum. Each sample is paired with one of the items from the Culturally Responsive Framework.

Table 4.4

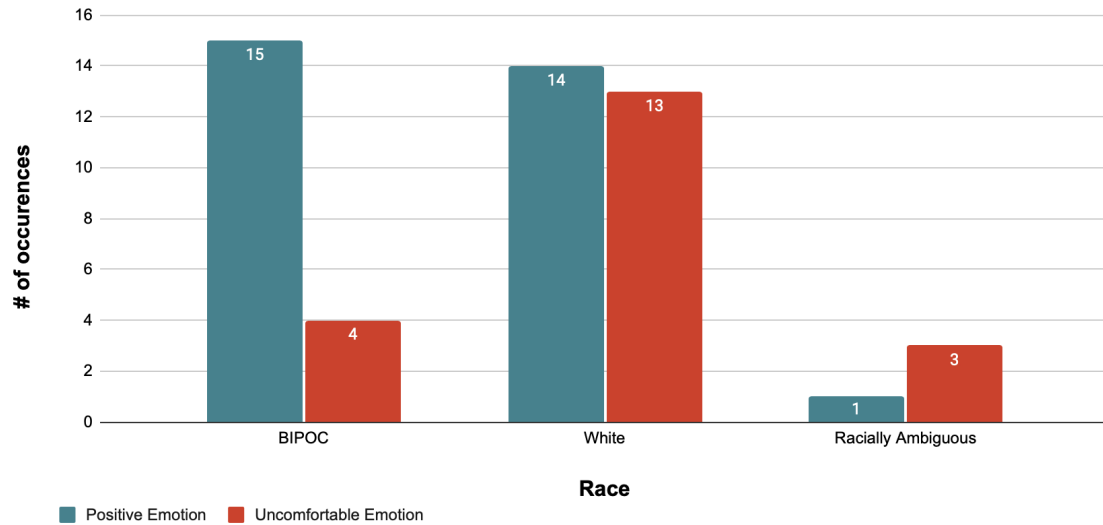
Second Step Grade 4 Language Samples

Cultural Responsiveness Framework Items	Language Samples (Committee For Children, 2021b).
The curriculum communicates an asset-based perspective by representing people of diverse races, classes, genders, abilities and sexual orientations through their strengths, talents and knowledge rather than their perceived flaws or deficiencies.(Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019)	“When you are trying to state a problem you are having with another person without blame, avoid putting the other person in your statement. Stay away from “you, he, she, or they always do this”
Activities allow students to explore issues that are important to them and co-create solutions to improve the classroom, school, or community. (CASEL 2019)	Think of a time during the day that you can use these Problem-Solving Steps” “Maia counted forward from one, but you can count other ways, too. Can anyone think of a way to count that could help you calm down?”
The curriculum encourages students to take actions that combat inequity or promote equity within the school or local community. (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019)	“What would happen on our playground if more students solved problems with the steps?” “What are some things you think Derek and Enrique need to consider as they make their plan to replace Ashok’s card?” “How did Necie’s voice sound? What did she do with her face and body? What kind of words was she using?”

Grade 4 Visuals

As mentioned in the grade 1 results, the visuals included in the Second Step program are the starting point of each lesson. The grade 4 visuals are consistent with the grade 1 program which include music videos, snapshot photos and lesson videos. I used the same process to evaluate the week selected in the Grade 4 curriculum. I'll begin by presenting what I found in the Music videos. The 4th grade materials include 3 music videos. Each one represents a different music style; Mamba, Rock and Reggae. The first music video shows a White student working through the skill of seeing a situation from another person's perspective. There are other White and BIPOC characters that play minor roles in the video as well. The second music video shows a student working through how to calm down. The BIPOC character is guided through each step by a White adult character. The third video has cartoon characters that progress through the problem solving process.

The next set of data I will share was gathered from the visuals included in the Lesson Videos. Figure 5 shows the results of the number of White and BIPOC students represented in the videos and whether they were expressing a positive or uncomfortable emotion. Of the fifty characters represented in the Grade 4 materials I analyzed, nineteen were BIPOC, twenty-seven were White and four were Racially Ambiguous. Of the thirty positive emotions represented, fifteen were BIPOC, fourteen were White, and one was Racially Ambiguous. Of the twenty uncomfortable emotions, four were BIPOC, thirteen were White, and three were Racially Ambiguous.

Figure 5*Second Step Emotion Representation by Race*

In addition to the Grade 1 and Grade 4 materials, I also reviewed the 5 classroom posters that are supplied by the program, and are used across grade levels. The five posters cover the following topics: Empathy, How to Calm Down, Problem Solving, Fair Ways to Play, and Skills for Learning. All of the posters use cartoon-like children, with varying skin tones, and hair colors/styles. The language on the posters is minimal, focused on skill development, and intended to be a visual reminder for students practicing skills in the classroom. The K-1 materials also include 4 Listening Rules Cards that depict photos of 4 students demonstrating listening skills; Voice Quiet, Body Still, Ears Listening, Eyes Watching. These cards include 3 BIPOC students and 1 White student.

Second Step Summary

In summary, the Second Step Curriculum demonstrated cultural responsiveness across the activities, strategies and language provided in their materials. The strength of this program undoubtedly lies within the visual components. The photos, video lessons and music videos are representative of a culturally diverse audience. The next section of chapter 4 will present the results of the Caring School Community Curriculum review.

Caring School Community Results

After a thorough review of the Caring School Community program, I considered each of the 32 items listed on the CRT. Twenty-nine items were marked “Attribute Present” after repeated evidence of the item was found within the curriculum. Three items were marked “Attribute Not Present” due to either minor evidence or the absence of the item in the curriculum. Figure 6 presents my findings.

Figure 6

Caring School Community Responsive Framework

Activities/Strategies	Attribute Present	Attribute <u>Not</u> Present
Class time is balanced with periods of teacher-led instruction, student talk and interaction, and time to work/reflect alone.	X	
There are references to different ethnic and cultural traditions, languages, religions, names (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Social situations and problems are not seen as individual problems but are situated within a societal context (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Curriculum and instructional activities promote or provoke critical questions about the societal status quo. They present alternative points of view as equally worth considering (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
The curriculum presents different points of view on the same event or experience, especially points of view from marginalized people/communities (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	

The curriculum provides avenues for students to connect learning to social, political, or environmental concerns that affect them and their lives and contribute to change (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
The curriculum encourages students to take actions that combat inequity or promote equity within the school or local community (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Guidance is provided on customizing and supplementing the curriculum to reflect the cultures, traditions, backgrounds and interests of the student population (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Guidance includes, for specific lessons, a range of possible student responses that could all be valid, given the range of student experiences and perspectives (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
The assignments/activities allow students to incorporate content related to diverse and/or underserved populations (Portland).	X	
Students are able to express their learning in several ways, which have been informed by student input and instructor knowledge of individual students' strengths and needs.	X	
Guidance is provided on being aware of biases and gaps between one's own culture and the culture of their students (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Guidance is provided on engaging students in culturally sensitive experiential learning activities (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Guidance is provided on teaching children of diverse identities in culturally responsive ways - including but not limited to English Language Learners (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Students lead routines during SEL instruction (CASEL 2019).		X
Students share their perspectives during SEL instruction (CASEL 2019).	X	
Students reflect on their experiences during SEL instruction (CASEL 2019).	X	
Student grouping varies so that each student gets to know and work with everyone else (CASEL 2019).	X	
Activities allow students to explore issues that are important to them and co-create solutions to improve the classroom, school, or community (CASEL 2019).	X	
Language	Attribute Present	Attribute <u>Not</u> Present

The curriculum does not communicate negativity or hostility toward people of marginalized backgrounds through verbal or nonverbal insults, slights or snubs (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
The curriculum communicates an asset-based perspective by representing people of diverse races, classes, genders, abilities and sexual orientations through their strengths, talents and knowledge rather than their perceived flaws or deficiencies (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Materials use the voices of people from different cultures, genders, classes, sexualities and with differing abilities are heard (Breiseth et al., 2020).	X	
Curriculum guides educators to learn about the language skills students bring to the classroom (Breiseth et al., 2020).	X	
Curriculum provides guidance on mindfulness of different communication styles, patterns, and norms that students may use (Breiseth et al., 2020).	X	
Activities present a diverse range of poetry, music, or other forms of expression into the classroom on a regular basis (Breiseth et al., 2020).		X
Pictures/Visuals	Attribute Present	Attribute <u>Not</u> Present
BIPOC characters are represented.	X	
White characters are represented (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Racially Ambiguous characters are represented (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
People with Disabilities are represented (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).		X
Diverse ethnicities and nationalities are portrayed – not all Asian families are Chinese, not all Latinx families are Mexican, etc. (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Characters of color are main characters and not just sidekicks (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	
Diverse family structures (ie. single parents, adopted or foster children, same-sex parents, other relatives living with the family, etc.) are represented (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019).	X	

The goals of the Caring School Community curriculum are rooted in developing trusting relationships within the classroom, as well as the greater school community. The

program uses explicit teaching of social skills, and teacher-specific guidance for classroom management and facilitation that promotes inclusion of all students (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018a). The program consists of daily morning and closing circles, weekly class meetings, Friday choice-time, weekly home connection activities, buddy classroom activities and a Caring School Discipline Handbook. Each grade level's materials differ slightly, as I will describe in the grade-specific results below.

In comparison to the Second Step Program, the Caring School Community's scope of SEL is much wider. Second Step is largely focussed on building skills in the classroom and at home through explicit instruction and reinforcement skills. The Caring School Community program employs these same strategies, and additionally provides opportunities for students to engage in SEL with the larger school community through Cross-Age Buddies, school-wide discipline strategies and lessons that invite various staff members into the classroom.

Grade 1 Activities and Strategies

The grade 1 teacher's manual includes 30 weeks of lessons, 10 Community Chats focused on specific school-related topics and 3 trade books that explore SEL topics. I evaluated twelve weekly lessons, three Community Chats and all three trade books.

The most prominent routines in the program are the daily morning and closing circles which is where I will begin sharing my results. Morning and closing circles are designated times to build classroom community through discussion, skill practice and whole group activities. In my review, I found these meetings to be well balanced between teacher-led instruction and student talk and interaction.

Each morning circle begins with a scripted greeting in which students interact directly with their peers. The same greeting is used for one week. The language for the greeting is provided by the curriculum, along with any gestures such as a handshake or high five. Most greetings engage students one on one, but occasionally the entire class greets each classmate using a special chant, song or poem. Sometimes these greetings are goofy or silly, and other times they are more typical greetings like a handshake. After the greeting is complete, the teacher shares daily announcements and reviews the schedule for the day. The greeting and teacher updates are consistent everyday of the week.

After the morning circle, the class engages in a short activity that varies day to day. On Wednesdays, the class engages in a weekly routine called Secret Student. During this activity, the class uses three clues provided by a student, to identify the classmate who wrote them. Once identified the class interviews them to learn more about them (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018a). On Fridays, the class discusses the Home Connection Activity that will be sent home over the weekend, and identifies which family member they will complete the activity with. Table 4.5 highlights the activities that occur on the other days of the week, during the weekly class meetings, or Community Chats. Each activity in the table is accompanied by the skills that the activity addresses.

Table 4.5

Caring School Community Grade 1 Activity Samples

Lesson Activities	Skills Practiced
Secret Student	Listening to a peer. Asking questions to learn more about a peer.

Partner Chat	Listening to a peer. Sharing ideas with a peer.
Story Cards	Identifying emotions of others and perspective-taking.
Feeling Faces	Identifying emotions of others. Role playing emotions.
Home Sharing	Making a plan to practice SEL skills at home.
Quick-Write	Reflecting on SEL learning and application of skills.
Community Chat Activities	Skills Practiced
Whole Class Discussion	Sharing ideas with a large group. Application of SEL skills.
Staff Interview	Asking questions to learn more about a staff member.

The student responses elicited during the morning and closing circles is almost exclusively verbal. However, students are provided opportunities to respond through independent or partner writing almost daily using the Follow-Through Activities. Many of the activities begin with independent reflection, partner sharing/writing and then whole class discussion. There are also several activities in which students are acting out a scenario or using body language to respond. Nestled among the weekly activities are Teacher Notes and Facilitation Tips that guide the teacher through specific strategies to use within the classroom. The following Facilitation Tips are situated within a discussion activity, and are just two examples of how the curriculum guides teachers to engage students' voices and perspectives.

“...avoid repeating or paraphrasing the students’ responses during class discussions. It is easy to habitually repeat what students say when they speak too softly, or to paraphrase their responses when they don’t speak clearly. Doing this teaches students to listen to you but not necessarily one another” (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018a, p.126).

The following Facilitation Tip is an example of the curriculum providing an opportunity for students to lead routines in the classroom.

“Consider having students use “tag” to call on the next person to speak in class discussions (rather than having you call on each speaker). This helps students talk more directly to one another, rather than filtering each comment through you” (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018a, p. 332).

Each day ends with a brief closing circle. A scripted closing is provided by the curriculum, as a way for students to say goodbye to one another. The closing remains the same for one week. During this time, students are also asked a reflection question about what skills they observed happening in the classroom that day.

The final area of activities that I reviewed were the Home Activities. The curriculum suggests community events such as back to school nights and open houses as a way to build a relationship with families, and also encourages, communicating regularly with families, sending student progress communication home and maintaining an open and non-judgemental stance towards families (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018a). The weekly hangouts that are sent home on Fridays include discussion prompts and either a reflective writing prompt, or short activity for the student to complete with someone at home. The topic of the home activity directly relates to the topics in class the prior week.

Grade 1 Language

Each lesson in the program is thoroughly described in the teacher’s manual. Language samples from the curriculum are listed in Table 4.6. Some of the samples are

the scripted greeting and goodbye statements for students to use, and some of the later samples are scripted questions to be asked by the teacher.

Table 4.6

Caring School Community Grade 1 Language Samples

Morning Circle Language Sample (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018a).	Closing Circle Language Sample (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018a).
Greeting: “This is my friend, [Rosario].”Class responds “Hi [Rosario]” (p 37).	Goodbye: “Bye, bye [Susie]!” Class responds “Bye, bye [Susie]!”(p.37).
Greeting: Partner Handshake. “Good morning [Ivan]”(p.101).	Goodbye: Partner Handshake. “Goodbye [Ivan]”(p101).
Greeting Song: “Here we are together, together, together. Here we are together in a circle on the rug. There’s [Ms. Dillard] and [Sierra] and [Christopher] and.... Here we are together all sitting in [Room 2]. Good Morning!” (p.132).	Goodbye: Elbow Bump - “Goodbye, [Phillip] (p.132).
Greeting: Happy Day - “Happy Monday [Sumiko]!” “Happy Monday [James]!” (p.273).	Goodbye Song: - “A Monday, a fun day, Today is now a done day. We’ll say goodbye, But you and I, Will have another fun day. Goodbye everyone!” (p. 273).
Connect and Reflect: “When did someone treat you in a friendly way today?” (p.103).	Goodbye Song: “It’s time to say goodbye to all our friends. Goodbye!It’s time to say goodbye to all our friends. Goodbye! It’s time to say goodbye, let’s all smile and wink an eye.It’s time to say goodbye to all our friends” (p. 265).
“Why do you think it is important to be able to work on your own?” (p.216).	“How did you feel when [] ” “Why is it a good idea to let other people know when you feel [] ” “When you feel [] what can you do to help yourself?” (p.264).
“Show us your picture. Who is caring and kind in your picture? How are they caring and kind?” (p. 322).	“When did someone treat you in a friendly way today?” (p.103).

Most of the reflection questions given to the teacher, requires that students apply the SEL skills they are learning about to a real life situation. The language across the

lessons is focussed on identifying SEL skills, rather than a lack of skills. Even in a situation where a student is struggling to use SEL skills, the prompt is always identifying what is going well, or how the student could use SEL skills. This is an example of an asset-based mindset, rather than looking for what is going wrong in a situation.

Grade 1 Visuals

The Caring School Community program does not include many visuals within the weekly lessons, however I reviewed the illustrations of the three picture books used in the 1st grade kit. The first book is titled *Mouse Was Mad*. Its illustrations depicted animal characters including a mouse, bear, hedgehog bobcat and hare. The mouse expresses anger most of the book, and the other animals try to help him calm down using strategies that work for them like stomping, screaming and hopping. In the end, the mouse finds that moving his body like the other animals does not help at all. For him, he is able to calm down by standing still and breathing. The illustrations show that the animals all respond to anger in different ways, and that what works for one animal, does not work for another. This book is used to discuss how our bodies feel when we get mad, and how we can use strategies to calm our bodies down.

The second book titled *How to Heal A Broken Wing*, depicts a white family who find a bird with a broken wing. The family takes the bird home, feeds it, wraps its wing and creates a safe bed for the bird. The story is used to explore ideas of helping others, kindness, caring behaviors and how to solve problems with the help of others.

The third book titled, *Ten Little Fish* is a counting book about a family of fish. While the content and visuals do not explicitly teach SEL skills, the book is used to guide activities with a partner, and learning how to work and communicate with a peer.

In summary, the visuals of each of these books do not necessarily promote cultural diversity, given that most of the characters are animals and only one family is depicted, however the illustrations do present several perspectives within each story, which is an important part of culturally responsive materials.

Cross-Age Buddies Activity Book

One of the strategies Caring School Community uses to build school-wide relationships is through a Cross-Age Buddy program. This component of the curriculum is a chance for one classroom to be matched with another classroom for a school year. Accompanying each grade level's kit is an activity book. The buddy book is a collection of activities intended to "develop positive relationships by pairing older students from one class with younger students from another class"(Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018d, p.1). The book is identical for each grade level. I will share results from my review of this resource under this section, though it applies to the Grade 4 materials as well. The booklet recommends that classes who are matched should be separated by at least 2 grade levels. These buddy classrooms should be kept the same for the entire year. The buddy activities are intended to be completed 1-2 times a month. There is guidance on how to match students within each class to ensure a positive experience, and taking special considerations when matching a student with special needs.

The activities for buddies to do with one another incorporate a variety of academic disciplines including art, science, health and nutrition, math, language arts, social studies and physical education. Some examples of buddy activities include: collaborative art, buddy interview, tour of a school area, shared writing activity and read alouds. These activities provide opportunities for students to practice listening skills, non-verbal communication, and sharing materials with someone outside of their classroom community.

Caring School Discipline K-1

Another resource included in each grade levels' kit is a Caring School Discipline Handbook. The grade 1 kit includes the K-1 handbook which serves as a guide for handling the most common behavioral issues among K-1 students. First and foremost, the handbooks express the importance of identifying the root of behavioral issues, and then provides a process to address the issue. The handbook does not encourage frequent use of behavioral incentives and punishments due to their extrinsic nature in shaping behavior (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018b).

For each behavior, the guide outlines three levels of action for the teacher to take. Level 1: Respond in the Moment Intervention, Level 2: Student Conference, Level 3 Individual Learning Plan (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018b). Level 1 actions are meant to de-escalate the situation and allow the student to regain self-control. An example of an intervention is walking with the student down the hall to calm their body. Level 2 actions provide space for the student to reflect on the situation with an adult to help both the teacher and student understand the possible cause. An example of

this may be a meeting with the teacher after class or later in the day. Level 3 actions include collecting data on the behavior and then scheduling a meeting with caregivers to prepare a plan. The plan will include a process to monitor, support and assess the student. Strategies in each step should build accountability and trust between the student and school staff (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018b).

The following statement was found in the introduction of the handbook and explicitly acknowledges the cultural disparities in the area of school discipline:

“Excessive use of punishments in American public schools, particularly overuse of suspension and expulsion, has led to grossly disproportionate numbers of disadvantaged students- particularly poor African American and Latino boys- being pushed out of school prematurely into lives of truancy, limited choices, and increased likelihood of incarceration...” (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018b,p.viii)

The guide also explicitly states that educators need to be aware of their own emotions when responding to behaviors concerns, and to avoid yelling, arguing or threatening a student, and these strategies do not build relationships (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018b). Both of the above examples from the handbook demonstrate a thoughtfully planned, culturally sensitive process for dealing with behaviors in school.

Grade 4 Activities and Strategies

The grade 4 activities are quite similar to the grade 1 kit, however there are several differences that I will discuss in this section. First, the teacher’s manual includes only 10 weeks of lessons. After the first 10 weeks of school, the teacher utilizes a set of

18 Topic booklets for the remainder of the year. Each booklet focuses on a specific situation in one of three areas: School Life, Character Building and Social Issues. These booklets include a week’s worth of lessons, in a similar format to the initial 10 weeks, though these units can be taught in the order determined best by the teacher. Like the grade 1 materials, there are 3 trade books included in the kit. For my review I evaluated the first ten weekly lessons, six of the Topic Booklets and all three trade books.

Many of the routines in the grade 4 program reflect the routines in grade 1. Each day begins with a morning circle, and each day ends with a closing circle. On Wednesdays, the Secret Student activity from the younger grade levels, shifts to a similarly Spotlight Student activity. Each week a student is selected to be the spotlight student. They use a designated area in the room to post artifacts about themselves, and during the morning circle students “interview” them. Other examples of weekly activities are listed in Table 4.7

TABLE 4.7

Caring School Community Grade 4 Activity Samples

Lesson Activities	Skills Practiced
Spotlight Student	Listening to a peer. Asking questions to learn more about a peer.
Two Truths and a Lie (Partner Game)	Getting to know a peer. Turn-taking.
Feelings Cards	Identifying emotions of others and perspective-taking.
Whole Class Discussion	Sharing ideas. Listening to peers. Reflecting on SEL skills.
Home Connection Sharing	Reflecting on SEL skills applied at home.
Partner Quick-Write	Reflecting on SEL learning and application of skills.
Letter/Picture to Buddy	Communicating through words/pictures.

Read Alouds	Identifying social emotional issues and brainstorming solutions.
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Partner Handout	Applying SEL skills. Collaborating with a peer.
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For most of these activities, the class begins as a whole group, and then students work with a partner to complete a handout, chat or activity relating to the topic from the whole group portion. The curriculum suggests that students work with the same partner for one week, and then be assigned a new partner at the beginning of the following week. This ensures that students have opportunities to work with different students throughout the year which is a culturally responsive teaching strategy identifying the CRT Framework.

Similar to the Grade 1 materials, the Home Activity Handouts extend the learning from the classroom, into the student's home environment. A discussion prompt is usually provided, along with a brief activity to complete with someone at home.

Another routine that Caring School Community recommends across all of the Elementary Kits is providing Choice Time at the end of the week. The teacher's manuals suggest providing 15-20 minutes on Fridays for students to select an activity such as reading, writing, drawing, playing, games or completing a project. Choice time is for students to practice their social skills in the classroom (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018c). Guidance is provided to teachers to call out when they see SEL skills being used during this time. The suggested norms for this time include, using indoor voices, being actively involved in an activity and not watching or waiting (Center for the

Collaborative Classroom, 2018c). Choice time is another example of the curriculum using student voice, as well as providing an opportunity for students to lead SEL routines.

Grade 4 Language

The language in the grade 4 lessons, is undoubtedly built upon the language taught in the younger grade levels. The Step for Problem Solving is the same, the Breathing and Calming Down language is the same. Many of the greetings and good-bye samples are similar, though become more involved as the year goes on. Language samples from the curriculum are listed in Table 4.8. Some of the samples are the scripted greeting and goodbye statements for students to use, and some of the later samples are scripted questions to be asked by the teacher.

Table 4.8

Caring School Community Grade 4 Language Samples

Morning Circle Language Sample (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018c).	Closing Circle Language Sample (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018c)
Greeting: “Hi [Isador]! Welcome to 4th grade.”	Goodbye: “See you tomorrow [Jeannie.]”
Greeting: Fist bump - “Good morning [David].” (p. 124).	Reflect and Connect: “What is one thing that made you happy at school today?”(p.125).
Greeting: Mix and Mingle - Students shake hands and say “Good morning [Ingo]. I hope you have a great day today.” (p. 158).	Goodbye Song: The More We Get Together (interjecting different verbs - sing, play, work...)(p.158).
Greeting: “Good morning [Frederico]” and roll a ball to this student.”(p. 118)	Reflect and Connect: “How did you solve a problem fairly today?”(p.118)
Greeting: “Hello, 4th grade, I’m [Zenna. I went camping with my family summer.]”(p. 53)	Reflect and Connect: “What is one class meeting rule you followed today? What did you do to follow it?”(p. 54)
Discussion: “Why is moving responsibly in the	Reflect and Connect: “Who is a staff member you saw

classroom important?”

today? What was he or she doing? How did you greet him or her?”

“What will you do next time you work in a group to make sure everyone gets to share?”(Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018f, p.4)

“ What ideas do you have that’s different from [Emma’s] idea?” (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018f, p.10).

Once again, there is a pattern in how the language the teacher is given, encourages students to use an asset-based approach in their SEL. Most of the reflective prompts ask how students were able to use SEL skills, and not on their shortcomings. It’s also important to note that much of the language in the grade 4 curriculum states the “why” behind SEL, by providing the outcomes of using their skills. For example, after sharing one way a student was able to be kind in the classroom, the teacher may ask how that act of kindness impacted other students.

Grade 4 Visuals

As with the Grade 1 materials, the Grade 4 materials for Caring School Community program does not include many visuals within the weekly lessons. In this section I will review the illustrations of the three picture books used in the 4th grade kit. The first book is titled Happy Like Soccer. It is a story about a girl named Sierra, who plays on a soccer team with girls who seem to have very different home-life circumstances from hers. Sierra is black. She lives in an apartment in the city with her Auntie. The other girls on the team are of mixed racial and ethnic background, and live in suburban neighborhoods and homes. The illustrations of the other girls' families portray families with two parents, some with one parent, some with siblings and some without. The story and visuals depict the differences between Sierra and her teammates from the perspective of Sierra. Being part of the soccer team has made her aware of several

differences between her life and the life of the other girls. She lives in a city, the other girls live in the suburbs. She rides the bus, and the other girls ride in cars. Sierra shares a bedroom with her Auntie, and the other girls have their own bedrooms. Sierra's family sometimes miss soccer games because they work evenings and weekends, while the other girls have families who work weekdays. The illustrations in this book are a great starting point for discussion about perspective-taking and understanding how unique everyone's life experience is.

The second trade book I reviewed is titled, *A Boy and a Jaguar*. This book is an autobiography of American Zoologist, Alan Rabinowitz. In the story, young Alan struggles with a stuttering impediment. He struggles to communicate and feels broken for most of the story. His family tries to help him by trying special groups, medication and group therapy. None of these attempts are successful. The boy and all of the characters from the boy's childhood are white. When the boy is older he takes a trip to Belize to study jaguars. The characters he meets while there are all men of color. Alan finds his voice and uses it to save the habitats for jaguars. The curriculum uses this story to discuss how not feeling heard can lead to being ignored, mistreated and hurt. This also emphasizes the importance of listening to others.

The third book in the grade 4 materials is titled *Those Shoes*. The main character is Jeremy, a black boy who lives with his grandma. Several kids at school are getting new high top shoes. Jeremy's shoes break during gym class. He gets teased for wearing the school's spare shoes. He tries finding a pair at a second hand store, The story raises the difference between wants and needs, as well as a sense of belonging. Overall, in my

review of the three picture books, I found them to be culturally responsive materials. The stories and illustrations represent both white and BIPOC characters proportionately.

Various family structures are depicted, and unique home life circumstances are explored.

Caring School Discipline 2-5

The Caring School Discipline Handbook is a guide for handling the most common behavioral issues within the 2-5 grade band. The format of the Handbook is identical to the one provided in K-1 Kits. As mentioned previously, it is focused on identifying the root of behavioral issues, and building trusting relationships between students and staff each step of the way.

For each behavior, the guide outlines three levels of action for the teacher to take. Level 1: Respond in the Moment Intervention, Level 2: Student Conference, Level 3 Individual Learning Plan (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018e). Most of the strategies in a Level 1 response is the same from the younger grade bands. The Student Conference guidance includes scripted responses and questions to ask the student when the student is calm. These prompts are non-threatening and help guide the student towards greater self awareness, self-confidence, and understanding of their impact on the school community. Some examples from the handbook include: “Why is it important that everyone follows the rules? What happens if some people don’t follow the rule?” (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018e, p. 29). “What do you think about what I’ve just said? (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018e, p. 34). “It is your responsibility to act respectfully to everyone. I know that you are capable of correcting your attitude and

making the right choices from now on” (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2018e, p.35).

The Level 1 and 2 Interventions are primarily focussed on building trust between the student and the classroom teacher, and may also include the student’s primary caregiver. Level 3 Interventions include the teacher, student, school support staff and the student's primary caregivers to assist in the support and accountability of the students behavior. The progression through the levels is intentional to provide opportunities for relationship building.

Caring School Community Summary

In summary, the Caring School Community Curriculum demonstrated exceptional evidence of cultural responsiveness across the activities, strategies, language and visuals provided in their materials. The resources provided in this curriculum extend SEL from the classroom, into the larger school community through school-wide discipline, classroom matching, and involvement of school staff.

Chapter Five will focus on the purpose of this research and revisit the literature review to highlight the original research question. Limitations of the study, and the implications for educators will be discussed as well as a brief personal reflection on the capstone.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Purpose of Study

As I begin the final chapter of this capstone I would like to bring the focus back to the purpose of my study. This capstone was developed out of a passion for equity in education for students of all cultural backgrounds. An important aspect of education are the classroom skills, problem-solving and self-regulation skills. In the final chapter of my capstone, I focus on the major findings of my research and how these findings support the existing literature. I also discuss the limitations of my study and the implications for educators. The chapter will close with a personal reflection on this research.

Major Findings

Through my research I have identified the strengths and weaknesses in cultural responsiveness of the Second Step and Caring School Community SEL programs. Both of these programs demonstrated culturally sustaining activities, strategies, language and visuals. As I look forward to what my research can do for future planning, perhaps the most meaningful findings were elements that were missing from each curriculum - the items that were marked “not present” on the CRF. Knowing what is missing in these programs, can shed light on the areas that educators need to be most vigilant about.

The strengths of these SEL programs are abundant. Caring School Community and Second Step provide an excellent foundation for SEL. Students engage in a variety of activities to experience SEL in their classrooms and schools. Both of these programs

offer weekly home application opportunities that involve the families of students. The language is clear, direct and asset-based. No hostility is expressed towards any group of people. Students are able to express their learning through multiple forms of verbal and non verbal communication. Second Step is exceptionally accessible for visual learners, as each lesson is accompanied by a video and photo. Caring School Community offers an extensive collection of resources to guide SEL in all aspects of the school like the Buddy Activity Booklet and Caring School Discipline Handbook.

There were three items on the CRF that were marked “not present” for both curriculums. These are important to make note of, to ensure that future curriculum does not have the same missing pieces. Two of these items are listed under activities and strategies. The third item is listed under visuals. These items are in Table 5.1

Table 5.1

Attributes Not Consistently Present In Either SEL Curriculum

The curriculum provides avenues for students to connect learning to social, political, or environmental concerns that affect them and their lives and contribute to change. (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019)

Guidance is provided on customizing and supplementing the curriculum to reflect the cultures, traditions, backgrounds and interests of the student population. (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019)

People with Disabilities are represented. (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019)

In my review, I found few examples of the activities explicitly connecting content to the political or environmental concerns that affect students. While political and environmental issues can be a delicate subject to discuss without bias - these

conversations are important in how students learn to connect their learning to the real-world. I felt the curriculums lacked examples for teachers in these areas.

The second item marked “Attribute Not Present” in each curriculum is guidance on customizing the curriculum to reflect the cultures, traditions, backgrounds and interests of students. While the introduction and overview of the curriculums emphasized the importance of getting to know the students, there was again little explicit guidance in the weekly lessons on how to customize instruction. I feel that educators need prompts or examples of how this may look in the classroom. Teachers already do so much to prepare for the lessons they teach, so the more guidance provided, the more likely the lessons will include these types of meaningful customizations.

The final item marked “Attribute Not Present” in both curriculums is a lack of representation of the disabled community. When speaking about cultures, we often think of ethnicity or race that connects people with similar backgrounds, experience and beliefs. The disabled communities however, are a culture bonded not by a region or tradition, but by their needs and abilities. Students will undoubtedly encounter peers with disabilities, and therefore it is important for visuals to reflect people of all abilities.

I want to emphasize that these shortcomings are few among the many items that were marked “Present” on the CRF. Overall the Second Step and Caring School Community programs provide an excellent model for SEL instruction. Identifying areas where growth is needed, will only help inform future curriculum to be even more culturally responsive.

Revisiting Literature Review

The work I have completed, began with a review of existing literature on emotional intelligence, neuroscience, emotionally responsive classrooms, cultural responsiveness and the various approaches to SEL. There was already strong evidence to support the notion that social emotional awareness decreases stress and improves student learning and overall well-being (Marikutty, 2016). The positive connection between SEL and academic success is clear. It is also clear that social emotional stamina is necessary for classrooms to engage with culturally responsive teaching, discussion and activity (Donahue-Keegan, et al., 2019). What is less clear is the connection between SEL and Culturally responsive teaching. Research supports that these two disciplines are intimately connected, they are often recognized by educators as two distinct domains (Donahue-Keegan, et al., 2019). I positioned my research at the intersection of cultural responsiveness and SEL to document the interconnectedness of the two.

The framework I developed for my study was derived from the existing literature's findings that emphasized providing opportunities for students to practice SEL skills with their peers. As, described in Chapter 2, the brain's learning "is organized largely via socially enabled, emotionally driven opportunities for cognitive development. (Immordino-Yang et al, 2019, p. 185). It is therefore crucial that educators foster space in their classroom for cultural awareness and recognition, in unison with social emotional learning. The social emotional and cultural awareness of a classroom, has a powerful influence on the learning of students.

The items identified in each curriculum are indicators of a culturally responsive

approach. My hope is for my research to be nestled among others as an example of how to critically evaluate curriculum for culturally sustaining practices and materials. I hope that educators are able to use this research to advocate for an equitable and culturally sustaining curriculum.

Implications for Educators

I believe this research can be valuable for educators facilitating SEL with or without these specific curriculums. I think a major take-away for educators is to be critical of the resources provided in a curriculum. Determine if your curriculum activities, strategies, language and visuals reflect the students in your classroom. Are all students engaged in the curriculum? If not, ask students for feedback. Be critical of the activities being used, are they equitable and accessible to all students? Ensure that there are opportunities for your students to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas in creative ways.

Completing this research also opened my eyes to my own shortcomings in the area of culturally sustaining teaching practices. I questioned the language I was using and questioned how my own bias was influencing this study. I believe these are opportunities of growth for me, as I'm sure it is for fellow educators. I hope that when these questions come up, educators would lean into opportunities to grow their understanding and use of culturally sustaining language and strategies. Some of this work will become personal, and that's okay to model for our students. We can show them that we're social emotional learners too.

Limitations

My research aimed to evaluate the cultural responsiveness of SEL curriculums through a systematic review. The review was structured around the Culturally Responsive Framework I developed to gather data on activities, strategies, language and visuals. One limitation of my study is that I selected only a portion of each curriculum to evaluate. I identified the units in each curriculum and then selected an equal number of lessons from each unit to analyze. This allowed me to see a full year's scope of content, and gave an overall sense of each curriculum, however it was not a complete collection of all the activities, strategies, language and visuals used. Because I did not evaluate every lesson in each curriculum, my major findings describe the overall patterns and intentions of cultural responsiveness, though they do not reflect the curriculums' in their entirety.

Future Studies

For future studies, I believe it will be important to observe the student experience of SEL curriculums. My study focussed on the quantitative items that expose students to culturally responsive materials. I believe it is duly important to understand how students perceive the materials in regards to cultural responsiveness. Such studies would inform the effectiveness of the strategies, activities, language and visuals used within an SEL curriculum.

Conclusion

I have gleaned so much from this research. My passion for SEL was the driving force behind much of this work, and as I reflect on the process I know that I have only strengthened my commitment to providing an equitable education for all students. The

evidence of culturally sustaining strategies, activities, language and visuals within the Second Step and Caring School Community curriculums are heartening. Both of the curriculums presented culturally diverse characters, language, music, and utilized scenarios that represented a broad array of sociocultural contexts. I am grateful that schools have these options for SEL curriculum. I am also grateful that curriculums such as Second Step and Caring School Community show a dedication to an inclusive approach; serving students of all cultural and social backgrounds. The intentionality of these programs brings me great optimism as I look towards the future of education. I know that SEL will continue to grow in our education system, and look forward to the continued work towards culturally sustaining practices and resources.

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