

Social and Emotional Learning Strategies to Support Students in Challenging Schools

Zandra K. Marulanda

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology
Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA
May 2010

Acknowledgements

I want to express my deepest appreciation to faculty members Dr. Madalienne Peters, Dr. Linda Sartor, Dr. Sarah Zykanov and to my colleagues for their guidance and support during this research. I am also grateful to the teachers who welcomed me into their classrooms and for their encouragement and continued support during this learning process. Last, but not least, thank you to my close friends, loving partner and dear family for believing in me and valuing the work that I do.

Table of Contents

Title Page	1
Acknowledgements.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Abstract.....	5
Chapter 1 Introduction	6
Statement of Problem.....	8
Purpose.....	9
Research question	9
Theoretical Rationale	10
Assumptions.....	13
Background and Need.....	14
Chapter 2 Review of the Literature.....	16
Reasons Teacher Turnover Rates are higher in Challenging Schools	16
Key Components of Social and Emotional Learning	17
How SEL can be used to Help Teachers Teach in a Challenging School District	18
Chapter 3 Methodology	22
Sample and Site.....	22
Access and Permissions	22
Data Gathering Strategies	22
Data Analysis Approach	23
Ethical Standards	23
Chapter 4 Analysis.....	25
Description of Site, Individuals, Data.....	25
Analysis of Themes.....	26
Chapter 5 Discussion	30

Summary of Major Findings	30
Comparison of Findings with Existing Studies	31
Limitations of the Study.....	32
Implications for Future Research.....	33
Overall Significance of the Study	33
References.....	35

Abstract

New and veteran educators often face particular challenges in the classroom. Problems include classroom management, student academic achievement, and job satisfaction. This research examines the effects of implementing a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) approach for students as part of the regular education for elementary public schools. SEL is an approach to help students engage in positive social interactions, make responsible decisions, recognize and manage emotions, and solve problems effectively while also achieving academic success.

Research indicates that adopting a SEL program school-wide is beneficial for both students and teachers. A learning environment where students and teachers learn the SEL concepts together, speak the same SEL language and practice utilizing the concepts and tools results in school-wide development and growth. It is evident through the help of a SEL program and the teacher's collaborative efforts, students and teachers are able to adapt and adopt new attitudes and beliefs which in effect enhances learning and reshapes the school culture.

Chapter 1 Introduction

A man married a woman whose brother was blind. One day, on a hunting trip with her brother, this man was amazed at the blind man's ability to sense a bird here, smell water near, and hear a group of warthogs before they came dangerously close. Later that day, they set two traps. The man carefully camouflaged his own trap with twigs and leaves but left his blind brother-in-law's trap exposed. "He can't see anyway," he thought to himself. The next day when they checked the traps, he saw in his own trap a small brown bird. In his brother-in-law's trap was a bird the color of the rainbow whose feathers would make his wife gasp with joy. As he opened the traps, he switched the birds and handed the small brown bird to his brother-in-law, who touched the bird and carefully put it in his pouch. Later, on the walk home they were discussing an argument between neighbors and the man, impressed with the wisdom of his blind brother-in-law, asked, "Why do people fight?" The blind man answered, "Because they do what you have just done to me." The man was ashamed. He took the colored bird from his pouch and gave it to his brother-in-law. "I am sorry, brother." They walked in silence for a while. "How do people become friends again?" His brother-in-law smiled and said, "They do what you have just done to me."

The Blind Man Catches the Bird, a tale from Zimbabwe

This is a simple yet eloquent story that illustrates the significance of collective consciousness and orientation. The transition from the *I* to *we* does not only instill integrity and character but shows the importance of finding a way to work collaboratively. The moral of this story can be applied to anyone in any field. Empathy, compassion, understanding, tolerance, cooperation and collaboration, are qualities that are vital for students and adults to improve upon

in order to function effectively in any learning or working environment. While these are the goals I strive for in my classroom, I was faced with an experience that was unlike what I imagined.

As a recent graduate of the teaching credential program at Dominican University of California, I accepted a summer teaching position for a local school district that is located in Marin County. I was assigned to teach a five week combo class which consisted of third, fourth, and fifth graders. Since I had been exposed to many different teaching styles and had the opportunity to work with students from diverse backgrounds during student teaching, I felt excited, anxious, and ready to put my teaching practices into action.

Before summer school started, I planned five weeks of interactive lessons that were loaded with fun activities that encouraged students to work together in a collaborative learning environment. However, these lesson plans, my seating arrangements, and even my focus came to a drastic halt after the first day. Based upon my observations, students were unable to sit in cooperative learning groups because they could not respect one another's personal space. They were also unskilled at working with one another, and instead were engaging in negative social interactions that included bickering, fighting, teasing, and bullying. In addition to being mean and disrespectful to one another, they were defiant and rude to me and the teacher assistant. By the second hour, most of the students had made it verbally clear that they did not want to be in school and simply refused to participate or do the assigned work.

Unmotivated, undisciplined, disrespectful, frustrated, and angry were symptoms of the students in my classroom. It was then that I realized that I was not mentally or physically prepared to teach in such a challenging learning environment. I was at wits end for the next few days, trying to figure out how I was going to manage this classroom and how I was going to

engage the students in their learning efforts when they were unable to interact cooperatively and communicate effectively. In observing my students' classroom behavior the first day, it was apparent that they were having social and emotional problems. They were visibly angry, frustrated, insecure and apathetic. In my effort to find ways to teach these students, I researched and discovered social and emotional learning (SEL).

Statement of Problem

In 2006, the Policy Fellows of the Teacher Leadership Institute at the San Francisco Education Fund conducted a research study about why teachers stay or leave high-needs or low-performing schools in the San Francisco Unified School District. They discovered that not only does a higher turnover rate occur in minority and low-performing schools, but high turnover confounds attempts to close the achievement gap because of a lack of experienced teachers, institutional memory, and continuity (Has, C. et al., 2007). This study also reveals that schools with below average base Academic Performance Index (API) scores had twenty-two percent teacher turnover versus six percent at schools with above average API scores.

In addition, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) states that a teacher's decision to stay or leave a particular school is contingent on a variety of factors—ranging from a teacher's personal characteristics to their satisfaction with the school's environment. Most often the key decision to stay or leave the school is contingent on the level of success teachers encounter in raising their students' academic performance. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) also notes that new teachers in particular are at risk of leaving the profession within their first year of teaching if they are unprepared and unsupported to teach in challenging situations since facing

students with social and emotional problems can be especially demanding and disheartening to a new teacher.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the effectiveness of using SEL to support educators to teach students with social and emotional problems. Social and emotional problems include: negative interactions between peers and teachers, engaging in physical and/or verbal altercations, lacking the motivation or drive to participate in class, and defying authority. It is important that educators are competent in integrating a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) approach along with the academic curriculum to help reduce negative social interactions and increase academic achievement.

Research question

Will the use of Second Step, a SEL curriculum, help teachers feel better prepared to teach in challenging school districts? A Social and Emotional Learning curriculum is a program that supports the five teachable principles to help students acquire skills and knowledge necessary to be successful team members and problem solvers in a learning environment. The five teachable principles include: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship building skills, and responsible decision-making. For the purpose of this research, challenging schools is defined as a learning environment with frequent physical or verbal altercations amongst students, low socio-economic status, and lack of parent involvement in school programs. Other challenging factors include a variety of social problems that comprises dysfunctional families,

absent parents, drug, alcoholism or violence in home. Behavioral issues in a classroom involve swearing, bullying, school yard fights and classroom disruptions.

Theoretical Rationale

This section explores the theoretical rationale behind social and emotional learning. I begin with a look at social emotional learning and the reasons why the schools should integrate SEL programs with academic curriculum. After reviewing SEL, I explore how interest in SEL sparked with the publication of Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* and Howard Gardner's *Multiple Intelligences*. These two theories on intelligences and competence help frame the social and emotional learning model. To better understand the concept of competence; I read the definition of competence in the Miriam-Webster dictionary and review the work of Robert W. White *Motivation Reconsidered: The Concept of Competence*. In closing, I reference Elias' and White's work to further emphasize the importance of social and emotional learning to reduce behavior problems in a challenging learning environment.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a conceptual framework for school and academic improvement that addresses social and emotional skills essential for all students. The SEL skills are designed to create attitudes, and behaviors that promote healthy social relationships, personal well-being, and academic achievement. The SEL approach is founded on the notion that behaviors are caused by particular risk factors and optimal learning emerges from relationships that are both supportive and challenging (Elias & Weissberg, 2000). In an effort to reduce negative social interactions at school, maximize learning, and develop key skills in social and emotional learning, Maurice Elias and Joseph Zins recommend that schools integrate SEL

programs with academic curriculum to enhance student strengths and prevent classroom problems.

Interest in SEL sparked in the mid-1990s with the publication of Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* (1995). Goleman defines emotional intelligence as a human skill which includes how an individual handles their own feelings, how well one empathizes and get along with other people (Edutopia, 2009). He proposes that individuals are born with general emotion intelligence that determines their potential for learning emotional competencies. Goleman also believes that children who are better able to manage their emotions and empathize with others will in turn pay better attention, take in and retain information better. Per Goleman, emotional competence is a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work or school. He believes our emotional intelligences determine our potential for learning the practical skills that are based on its five elements of competency: self-awareness, motivation, self-regulation, empathy, and adeptness in relationships (Goleman, 1995). It is important to note that Daniel Goleman is a co-founder of Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) which was established in 1994.

Howard Gardner defines human cognitive competence as a set of abilities, talents or mental skills called "intelligences" (Gardner, 1993). For Gardner, human beings are known to have different kinds of intelligences that reflect different ways of interacting with the world and people. Gardner's multiple intelligence theory seeks to describe how the human mind operates on the contents of the world and how individuals use their intelligences to solve problems. This is important when studying social and emotional learning because according to Gardner, intelligence is a set of skills that make it possible for a person to solve problems in life and is the

potential for finding or creating solutions for problems (Gardner, 1993). Additionally, it is necessary for children to explore and develop their *intrapersonal intelligence* which encompasses having an understanding of yourself, knowing who you are, what you can do, how you react to things and to explore and develop their *interpersonal intelligence* which includes having the ability to understand other people. Fundamentally, these intelligences and skills are necessary in order to succeed in a learning and working environment.

Hand in hand, these two theories on intelligences and competence help frame the social and emotional learning model because they both explore the understanding of yourself, managing one's emotions and being empathetic. By exploring the social and emotional competences of Goleman and Gardner, educators can help children develop healthy behaviors by promoting social and emotional competence to prevent them from engaging in maladaptive and unhealthy behaviors.

In the Merriam-Webster, *competence* is defined as 1) a sufficiency of means for the necessities and conveniences of life and 2) the quality or state of being competent (Merriam-Webster, 2009). Both Goleman and Gardner express that competence is elemental in acquiring knowledge or emotional intelligence. White (1959) proposes that competence is a central component in theories about the development of the self. White asserts that humans have an innate need to achieve a sense of competence and that this need serves as a fundamental motivating force in human behavior. According to White, the concept of competence as having motivational properties is an essential component of any biologically sound view of human nature (1959). White also affirms that competence cannot be obtained simply through behavior motivated by drives or instincts but that the need for competence is contingent on behavior that

shows an unrelenting focus on the environment and is exploratory and experimental. White's concept of competence is a central component in theories about the development of the self that Goleman and Gardner believe can enhance self-awareness, empathy, classroom motivation and [community building] in schools (Norris, 2003).

Elias and Zins echoes and supports White's theory by asserting instruction in SEL needs to be provided in the context of caring, safe, well-managed, and participatory classrooms, schools, and other learning environments. They believe that the social and emotional learned skills need to be reinforced in the school, home and community to reap the benefits of this new learning strategy (Zins & Elias, 2007). They also claim that all children might benefit from social-emotional instruction, including those who are at risk, those beginning to engage in negative behavior, and those already displaying significant problems (Zins & Elias, 2007). It appears that providing social and emotional learning might prevent behavior problems in a challenging learning environment. By promoting social and emotional competence, one can hope to eliminate the negative social interactions and behaviors that plague a safe, productive and healthy classroom.

Assumptions

Teacher turnover rates are higher in low-performing and minority schools than schools that are meeting their Academic Performance Index (API) scores (Has et al., 2007). My assumption is that there are higher teacher turnover rates in challenging districts because new teachers are not prepared for student behavior challenges they face in such districts and experienced teachers choose to move to less challenging school districts. It is also possible that teachers might not have the necessary skills, experience or tolerance to assist or address students with social and emotional difficulties. In addition, if teachers are spending more hours trying to

manage classroom conflicts because of behavior issues that stem from social and emotional problems, there is less time for the students to master the academic content. Given these assumptions, I presume that integrating a social and emotional learning approach into the academic curriculum can help reduce negative social interactions and increase academic achievement.

Background and Need

According to Loeb and Darling-Hammond (2005), a number of studies have found that new and veteran teachers are likely to leave schools serving high proportions of low-achieving, low-income and minority students for more economically and educationally advantaged schools. Teacher turnover—including both *movers*, who leave one school or district for another; and *leavers*, who exit the profession temporarily or permanently—is 50% higher in high-poverty than in low-poverty schools, and new teachers in urban districts exit or transfer at higher rates than their suburban counterparts (Loeb & Darling-Hammond, 2005). Teachers tend to leave their jobs because of unfavorable working conditions, above all job dissatisfaction. Working conditions include poor student behavior, lack of student participation or motivation, lack of continuity in instruction, little parental support, and lack of administrative support. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), the outcome of Teacher Education and American Future rests on the teacher's ability to teach much more effectively, especially to students who have been least well supported in our society and our schools. Given the challenges teachers and students face, growing evidence suggests that a key component in meeting educational goals for children is to help them develop strong social and emotional skills early in life. To nurture and develop children's social and emotional learning, schools and teachers must be willing to integrate a SEL learning curriculum as part of their academic standards.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

This chapter describes literature relevant to the research purposes of this paper.

It is organized into three sections: (1) reasons that have been identified to explain why the teacher turnover rate is higher in challenging schools, (2) key components of SEL, and (3) how SEL can be used to help teachers teach in a challenging school district.

Reasons Teacher Turnover Rates are higher in Challenging Schools

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) challenging environments generally increase the likelihood of teachers transferring to different schools or leaving the profession entirely. The decision to leave the profession entirely or to move to a more economically and educationally advantaged schools is contingent upon their working and learning environment. As noted earlier by Darling-Hammond (2005), new and veteran teachers are likely to leave schools serving high proportions of low-achieving, low-income and minority because of the stresses of teaching in challenging learning environment. Stresses of teaching in a challenging learning environments include: disruptive behavior, negative social interactions, physical, if not, violent altercations, and student's lack of motivation to participate. According to Abel and Sewell (1999), teacher stress is specifically defined as conditions of negative effects, such as frustration and anxiety that result from the aspects of the job. Abel and Sewell (1999) point out that student misbehavior, delinquency, truancy, relationships with students and poor working conditions are the best predictors of burnout for teachers working in challenging school districts.

A more recent study by Ken Futernick reveals that teachers are less concerned with compensation (though they are not unconcerned with it) than they are with a whole range of

particulars about their work environment, specifically described, the teaching and learning environment (2007). According to Futernick (2007), the teaching and learning environment refers to the instructional, collegial and systemic conditions which make teaching a highly satisfying profession and remind those who have chosen it that they are making a positive impact on students and society. By ensuring that essential support systems are in place it will enable teachers to become more effective, and increase the likelihood that teachers will remain committed to schools in which they are teaching. Now, in order to drive teacher turnover rate down, it is necessary to explore ways to create conditions in which teachers can teach and teach well. The implementation of a social and emotional learning program will not only boost the students' learning and engagement but it will also enhance the teachers' classroom experiences making the environment more effective, rewarding and sustainable.

Key Components of Social and Emotional Learning

The Collaborative Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization whose mission is to establish social and emotional learning (SEL) as an essential part of education. In an effort to promote children's success in school and life and to support the healthy development of all children, CASEL has designed and implemented a social and learning program with five teachable principles to help students acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful team members and problem solvers. According to CASEL (2009), SEL is based on rigorous research in multiple fields clearly indicating that our emotions and relationships affect how and what we learn. A growing body of research findings demonstrates that SEL promotes positive development among children and youth; reduces problem behaviors; and improves academic performance, citizenship and health-related behaviors (CASEL, 2009).

CASEL identifies five teachable competencies that allow children to acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills associated with the core areas of social and emotional competency. A list of the components includes:

- Self-Awareness: identifying and recognizing emotions, accurate self-perception, recognizing strengths, needs and values, self-efficacy
- Social awareness: perspective taking, empathy, difference recognition, respect for others
- Self-Management: impulse control and stress management, self-motivation and discipline, goal setting and organizational skills
- Relationship Skills: communication, social engagement, and relationship building, working cooperatively, negotiation, refusal and conflict management, help seeking
- Responsible Decision-Making: problem identification and situation analysis, problem solving, evaluation and reflection, personal, social and ethical responsibility

It is through these core competencies that students are able to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations constructively and ethically (CASEL, 2009). It can also instill a feeling of efficacy which in turn fosters social and emotional competencies for all students. According to CASEL (2009), SEL programs promote social and emotional development and use of these competencies in the context of creating safe and supportive schools help children feel cared for, respected, connected to school and engaged in learning.

How SEL can be used to Help Teachers Teach in a Challenging School District

According to Norris (2003), research shows that any successful change that is to take place at school is directly related to the skill and ability of the teachers. It is in the classroom where students learn how to work with one another, communicate, make decisions, and problem-

solve. Without the proper guidance, exposure and practice in developing their key social and emotional learning skills, students will not be able to work collaboratively and will continue to display negative behaviors such as arguing, name calling, teasing and fighting in the classroom and out on the playground (Norris, 2003). To minimize disruptive behaviors in class, teachers must be equipped with the knowledge and tools to help reinforce respect, responsible behavior, sound decision-making, and effective problem-solving. According to Zins and Elias (2007), social and emotional learning is the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems and establish positive relationships with others, competencies that clearly are essential for all students.

In a recent study by Taylor and Dymnicki (2007) they have found that the SEL intervention has enhanced students' success in a variety of ways including improved attendance, school connectedness, prosocial behaviors and achievement test performance and have weakened negative outcomes such as disruptive conduct, violence and aggression. In addition, Taylor conducted a meta-analysis of 44 studies that included a follow-up data collected six months or more after interventions ended. Preliminary findings showed that SEL instruction and supportive environments enhances participants' development beyond the duration of the intervention. These findings show that SEL strategies can impact a students' learning in the classroom but also build character, integrity and develop skills that are vital for success in school and life.

Additionally, research by CASEL (2008) shows that SEL program effects were achieved in student populations that were diverse racially-ethnically, socio-economically, and geographically (i.e. urban, suburban and rural). This information is pertinent as it shows the immense impact SEL programs can have on students learning and character and relationship

building in challenging learning environments. SEL works because it creates positive school learning environments and provides social and emotional competency instruction, both which results in greater academic performance and better long-term life outcomes (CASEL, 2009). According to CASEL's research, these elements are mutually reinforcing because classrooms are filled with socially and emotionally skilled students that are more caring and safe, and in turn, these positive learning environments provide authentic opportunities for students to use and further develop their social and emotional competencies (2008).

Given this information, it is important for administrators, schools and teachers to be willing and committed to integrating social and emotional learning skills into their schools and classrooms. To create positive school learning environment teachers, first and foremost, must cultivate caring teacher-student relationships. In addition, CASEL suggests that classrooms should be well-managed, participatory, hold high expectations for all students and use instructional and classroom management strategies that address students' social and emotional needs as it provides an environment that is motivating and psychologically and physically safe (2008).

CASEL suggests many different ways to integrate social and emotional competency into core subjects. Some ways SEL can be promoted in core subjects includes: language arts and empathy skills, science experiments with the problem-solving framework and using SEL instructional practices which include cooperative learning so that SEL can become a part of routine classroom practice throughout the day (2008). CASEL also notes that SEL provides a shared language and mutually reinforces set of strategies that help overcome fragmentation and strengthen program effectiveness in addressing the core elements (2008). In addition to what can be done in the classroom, CASEL promotes the notion of investing in ongoing professional

development to provide high quality implementation of the SEL program. Providing skills training for all adult members of the school community is just as important as practicing SEL skills in the classroom for the children because everyone is being held accountable to teach, model and reinforce social and emotional skills in a variety of settings beyond the classroom. All these efforts and more contribute to the holistic well-being of the student as it nurtures and develops the students' social and emotional competencies.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This section describes the steps and precautions in this research. It examines the sample size, access and permissions, data gathering strategies, data analysis approach, and ethical standards.

Sample and Site

Teachers and students at a local K-6 school in Northern California were observed during the implementation of lessons in the program Second Step, a social and emotional learning program. This K-6 school is a Title 1 School with a School-Wide Program. The majority of the students are eligible for subsidized meals with approximately 74.5 % receiving free lunch and approximately 7.5% receiving reduced-price lunch. This elementary school is comprised of 135 students with majority of the students being Black or African American. There are 7 full-time teachers and the class size averages 15 students. For the school year 2007-2008, this school's API was at 808 but for the 2008-2009 school year the API dropped to 734.

Access and Permissions

Access to the site has been obtained by virtue of the researchers past work experience in the district. Letters of consent were obtained from the principal and teachers prior to beginning of the study. A formal IRB from Dominican University was available for review and consent to participate letters from the participants will be collected.

Data Gathering Strategies

Most of the data were collected through classroom observations and interviews with teachers. Observations were held on Mondays during the school-wide Second Step lesson from

the SEL curriculum. Interview schedules with questions for teacher interviews were created based on research about Second Step and the lesson observations. Additionally, field notes were used to document lesson observations and teacher interviews.

Data Analysis Approach

To analyze the information obtained I crossed reference my observations with current research to determine if Second Step promotes positive learning environments and/or enhances the teacher's job satisfaction and morale. Positive learning environments include: caring teacher-student relationships, well-managed classrooms that hold high expectations for students, participation from all students, students feeling connected to peers, teachers and their school and use of instruction and management strategies that address the students' social and emotional needs. Field notes and interview transcripts were made available to teachers for review to allow them to make corrections, clarify and elaborate on the data. I have triangulated what has been written in the research about the Second Step program, what is observed in lesson observation and what teachers say in their interviews to compare and validate the findings of the research.

Ethical Standards

To ensure that my research methods are ethical I completed and followed the standards set forth by the Dominican University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS). I maintained clear and open communication with the school site, principals, teachers, and Dominican University to uphold standards and procedures. Confidentiality of the participants involved in the study was assured in according to IRBPHS. This proposal was reviewed and accepted by the IRBPHS at Dominican University of California, and assigned Number 8054.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Description of Site, Individuals, Data

For the purposes of this research, teacher interviews and observations during their Second Step curriculum were necessary to become familiar with the implementation and effects of the social and emotional learning program that was adopted during the 2009-2010 academic school year. The elementary school is located in Marin County situated in North San Francisco Bay. This K-6 school is a Title 1 School with a School-Wide Program. The majority of the students are eligible for subsidized meals with approximately 74.5 % receiving free lunch and approximately 7.5% receiving reduced-price lunch. This elementary school is comprised of 135 students with majority of the students being Black or African American. There are 7 full-time teachers and the class size averages 15 students.

The individuals interviewed are full-time elementary instructors who implement a Second Step lesson every Monday. One is a second grade teacher who has been teaching for 21 years, a third grade teacher who has been teaching for 13 years and a learning resource teacher who has been teaching in the district for 8 years. In the previous years, these teachers have implemented a variation of their own social and emotional learning program in their classrooms in an attempt to alleviate negative social interactions and behaviors. One teacher used Making Meaning which is a K-8 reading comprehension curriculum that combines reading comprehension with students' social and ethical development. Making Meaning is a program that uses nonfiction and fiction reading books to teach students comprehension strategies while developing their social value. Another teacher tried to integrate a variation of Responsive Classroom which is an approach to elementary teaching that emphasizes social, emotional and academic growth in a school community. The Responsive Classroom program is designed to develop the students' social and

emotional skills. It is important to note that these teachers have made an effort to integrate some form of social and emotional learning to address the needs of the students in their classroom. However, with little or no support from the school like a school-wide adoption of an SEL program; their efforts continued to fall short.

The data collected is comprised of interview questions regarding the teacher's teaching experience, challenges they see in teaching in their school setting, factors that led the school to adopt a social and emotional learning program, short and long-term goals for the school since the implementation of the program, and behavioral and academic changes they have observed since the implementation of the program. In addition, observations during the Second Step curriculum provided information on how the teacher presents and discuss the lesson. Students also had the opportunity to practice key concepts during a role-playing activity with puppets and community (classroom) meetings.

Analysis of Themes

In discussing the benefits of Second Step, the teachers interviewed explained that they feel better supported in teaching social and emotional competency because everyone is using a program that uses a common language and practice to teach the concepts. To maintain continuity and cohesion, every teacher is needed to reinforce the concepts, speak the SEL language and provide authentic opportunities and tools to help students problem-solve, make responsible decisions, and more. The teachers find the Second Step lessons engaging for the students because it provides exercises like role-playing and skits, to give students and teachers an opportunity to act-out certain scenarios to better prepare them to handle similar situations. The teachers have found these lessons to be especially helpful because it also gives the students a

chance to make text-to-self connections and allows them to work with their peers to reflect on ways to problem solve. Class meetings also provide a safe environment where students can talk about their feelings and issues that have not been resolved. The teachers believe the more practice and exposure their students have with Second Step problem-solving, conflict management and cooperative work, the easier it will be for them to develop their social and emotional competencies.

It is important to note that teachers in the past were driven to implement their own variation of a social and emotional program to support students with social and emotional issues. With little support from the students' families, or lack of parent knowledge or participation to teach, model, and practice social and emotional competency, students did not have the tools or understanding how to deal with their emotions, work with one another, or resolve conflicts. Given the circumstances, it became the teacher's responsibility to address the social and emotional needs to help the students function in a learning environment. It was not until the implementation of a school-wide SEL program that they realized that their efforts fell short in the classroom because they did not have the support from their colleagues, administration and supporting staff. This realization is important because it emphasizes the notion that in order for any SEL program to be successful and beneficial for the students and teachers there has to be collaboration and support across all levels in the school and/or district.

In addition, the teachers have noticed that the benefits of using a school-wide SEL program is most evident during recess and lunch break because this is the only time that students across grade levels and classrooms are mingling and playing together. If and when, an altercation or conflict occurs, it has been observed that any teacher, administrator or staff is prepared to step-in and utilize the appropriate protocol to ensure that the students are beings

supported in their conflict management efforts. The appropriate protocol includes asking the right questions to give the students an opportunity to discuss, resolve and reflect on the present matter and to address the issue right away. The students also have an understanding of what is expected of them and are able to reflect and address the issues in a timely manner, instead of holding onto their anger, frustration, or sadness and allowing the unresolved emotions get in the way of their academic learning. The teachers have all expressed that this has saved an enormous amount of time and energy and everyone is able to move forward without taking too much time away from core subject lessons. Since the adoption of Second Step, teachers are not only feeling supported in their efforts to meet the social and emotional needs of their students but they are also beginning to notice a shift in students' behavior and engagement in class.

As noted above, the teachers interviewed have all observed a shift in their students' behavior and level of engagement in class. Prior to the implementation of the program, teachers have struggled with students who refused to do the assigned work or participate in class discussions. Most often, class time was used to discipline as opposed to teaching. The student's disruptive behaviors were not only harming their academic performance but were hindering the teachers' ability to connect to their students and cultivate deep meaningful relationships. Since the adoption of Second Step, the teachers have noticed that the students are beginning to use *their words, not fists* (Anonymous (personal communication, February 22, 2010) in their classrooms and outside. In addition, the students are using more *I messages* (Anonymous, personal communication, February 22, 2010) and are starting to become more comfortable discussing their feelings and dealing with their emotions in a safe and reflective manner.

In addition to exercising their communicative skills, the teachers have observed that their students are developing their self and social awareness. Due to the fact that the number of verbal

or physical altercations in the classroom have decreased, the teachers believe that the social and emotional learning program has increased the students' ability to refrain from participating in disruptive behavior which includes: getting up out of their seats, calling-out, laughing at their peers, refusing to do work, and interrupting teachers and other speakers.

Now, with a social and emotional learning program in place, students are learning how to communicate effectively, engage in respectful social interactions, and are more in tune to their peers and teachers' feelings. More importantly, the teachers are noticing that their students are exhibiting more confidence and self-esteem inside and outside of the classroom. As a result, students are more inclined to: participate in class discussions, partake in school activities, contribute to their classroom community, and take interest in their school work, all of which have contributed to a significant increase in the students' academic performance.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

Major findings in this research include students' improved academic performance, students exhibiting more self-confidence and self-awareness and increased collaboration amongst teachers, administration and supporting staff. There is an improvement in student's academic performance because less time and energy is exerted during class time on discipline and class management. Since the implementation of the social and emotional program, students are equipped with tools to help them engage in positive social interactions and conflict management, and as a direct result are able to engage in group work, projects and classroom discussions.

In addition, students have developed a better understanding of their roles in class and the expectations of the teacher. In effect, students are beginning to better manage their time in class and are being less disruptive, i.e. getting up out of their seats out of boredom, calling-out at inappropriate times, teasing others in class and making poor choices. As noted earlier, with less distractions and disruptions, students are able to participate in group activities that allow them to exercise what they have learned, work in a cooperative and collaborative manner and reflect on their behavior and/or work efforts.

Lastly, collaboration amongst teachers, administration and supporting staff to support the students in developing their social and emotional competencies is crucial to maintain fidelity and uniformity. Adopting a SEL program school-wide is beneficial for the students but is also helpful for the teachers because they are not burdened with the responsibility to enrich their students' social and emotional competencies alone. Instead, they are participating in a learning environment where students, teachers, and adults learn the SEL concepts together, speak the

same SEL language and practice utilizing the concepts and tools. As a result, everyone in the school is learning and growing together. Given the information above, it is evident through the help of a social and emotional learning program and the teacher's collaborative efforts, students and teachers are able to adapt and adopt new attitudes and beliefs which in effect enhance everyone's learning experience.

Comparison of Findings with Existing Studies

The benefits of implementing a social and emotional learning program in a challenging learning environment have proven to be highly beneficial for students and teachers at the school observed. In reviewing previous research and/or literature available on social and emotional learning, it is apparent that most, if not all, research shows that social and emotional learning is essential to nurture socially and emotionally competent people. By giving students an opportunity to learn and practice how to work together, manage emotions, resist temptation, make good decisions and act responsibly in classrooms, helps develop and nurture successful students and lifelong learners and workers.

During a CASEL forum, Daniel Goleman spoke about raising awareness of the value of SEL in an interview hosted by Edutopia. In his interview, Goleman stressed the importance of SEL in schools because it helps kids become more self-aware, make sound decisions, manage impulse and emotions and tune in to other people (Edutopia, 2009). He also pointed out the prosocial behavior which includes the ability to work collaboratively and cooperatively, act responsibly in class, get along with others, are all essential ingredients to achieve success (Edutopia, 2009).

Additionally, the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child indicates that emotional well-being and social competence provide a strong foundation for brain development

and emerging cognitive abilities (Mindess, et al., 2008). Mindess, et al. reinforces the notion that programs like Second Step, Responsive Classroom, Interplay Solutions and teacher efforts are significant ways to incorporate social and emotional learning into primary curriculum.

Furthermore, Mindess, et al. concludes that programs like these help teachers move away from a fragmented and often reactive approach to children's social and emotional well-being to a proactive approach and a shared responsibility for children's social and emotional health (2008).

In closing, it is especially important to note that Goleman points out that if children are not getting these skills in life outside of school, school [might be] the only place that we can be sure that every child has a chance to learn it (Edutopia, 2009).

Limitations of the Study

Certain limitations to this study include limited amount of time spent in the classrooms, observing and interviewing only three classrooms and teachers, and the overall success or lack of integrating SEL skills practiced at school into the students' home life. It is important to note that this study was conducted within a limited time frame, therefore all data gathered for the research was collected in a period of three weeks. In addition, only three teachers and classrooms were observed during the Second Step program. This could possibly skew the data obtained because less than half of the classrooms and teachers were observed and interviewed. There is also a disconnect between the school community being trained and versed in using SEL language and concepts and families at home who do not incorporate SEL into their homes. While the students are successful in utilizing the social and emotional skills acquired in class, the chances of the students transferring these skills nurtured and encouraged in a school setting could be hindered in a different environment that does not foster or embrace SEL practices.

Implications for Future Research

Integrating a social and emotional learning curriculum should not only be conducted or implemented in challenging school districts but should be made available to students everywhere. School districts should be encouraged to invest time, energy and money to recruit knowledgeable SEL trainers so that teachers are prepared to teach SEL curriculum. Social and emotional learning should also be integrated into the academic curriculum so that every child has an opportunity to learn and practice SEL skills that have been shown to help develop students' character and relationship building skills. Finding a way to integrate SEL and core academic subjects is necessary to provide a versatile and formative education. In doing all of the above, would teacher turnover be lowered as a result of SEL training and curriculum?

Additional research regarding SEL and teacher preparation programs is also needed to help determine if it helps recruit prepared and knowledgeable teachers in challenging school districts. Another side of SEL to explore is if teachers are more effective if taught SEL in the credential program? Lastly, the disconnect between SEL in school and at home should be explored so that the students continue to get SEL support outside of school.

Overall Significance of the Study

The overall significance of this study suggests that social and emotional learning enhances and develops the students' learning experiences, increases academic performance, and reshapes an entire school culture. By integrating an SEL program that promotes personal growth and character development, students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to face issues that may have once been debilitating and redirect their time and energy participating in group projects that fosters collaboration, conflict resolution and deep learning. Teachers, on the other hand, no longer have to micro-manage their students or lose valuable time disciplining or

correcting unwanted behaviors and instead can incorporate fun and interactive lessons that promote social and emotional learning in a safe, supportive, collaborative and sustainable learning environment.

References

- Abel, M. H., & Sewell, J. (1999). Stress and burnout in rural and urban secondary school teachers. *Journal of Educational Research*, 92(5), 287. Retrieved November 4, 2009, from ERIC database.
- Alliance for Excellent Education. (2009). *Understanding and reducing teacher turnover*. Retrieved July 12, 2009, from <http://www.all4ed.org/files/TeachTurn.pdf>
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2009). *Collaborative for academic, social, and emotional learning*. Retrieved July 3, 2009, from <http://www.casel.org/>
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2008). *Research implications for the safe schools/healthy students core elements*. Retrieved March 5, 2010, from http://www.councilofcollaboratives.org/files/EDC_CASELSELResearchBrief.pdf.
- Competence. 2009. In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved July 14, 2009, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/competence>
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). Teacher education and the American future. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1), 35-47. Retrieved March 5, 2010 from ERIC database.
- Edutopia. (2009). *Daniel goleman: A view on emotional intelligence*. Retrieved November 4, 2009, from <http://www.edutopia.org/daniel-goleman-emotional-intelligence>

Edutopia. (2010). *Selling SEL: An interview with Daniel Goleman*. Retrieved March 8, 2010, from <http://www.edutopia.org/daniel-goleman-sel-video>

Elias, M. J., & Weissberg, R. P. (2000). Primary prevention: Educational approaches to enhance social and emotional learning. *Journal of School Health, 70*(5), 186. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Futternick, K. *A possible dream: Retaining California teachers*. Retrieved February 1, 2010, from http://www.calstate.edu/teacherquality/documents/possible_dream.pdf

Gardner, H. (1993). *Multiple intelligences*. New York: BasicBooks.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York, NY England: Bantam Books, Inc.

Has, C., Hones, K.E., Hippard, P., Falls, S., Gold, S. & Marshall, V. (2007).

High teacher turnover in low-performing schools. Retrieved July 3, 2009, from http://www.sfedfund.org/resource_files/TLIabs_TLIpolicyfellows.pdf.

Loeb, S., Darling-Hammond, L., & Luczak, J. (2005). How teaching conditions predict teacher turnover in California schools. *PJE. Peabody Journal of Education, 80*(3), 44-70.

doi:10.1207/s15327930pje8003_4.

Mindess, M., Min-hua Chen, & Brenner, R. (2008). Social-emotional learning in the primary curriculum. *Young Children, 63*(6), 56-59. Retrieved November 4, 2009, from Academic Search Complete database.

Norris, J. A. (2003). Looking at classroom management through a social and emotional learning lens. *Theory into Practice, 42*(4), 313-318. Retrieved November 4, 2009, from Academic Search Complete database.

Taylor, R. D., & Dymnicki, A. B. (2007). Empirical evidence of social and emotional learning's influence on school success. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation, 17*(2), 225-231. doi:10.1080/10474410701346725

Understanding and reducing teacher turnover. (2008). *Education Digest, 73*(9), 22-26. Retrieved November 14, 2009, from Academic Search Complete database.

White, R. W. (1959). Motivation reconsidered: The concept of competence. *Psychological Review, 66*(5), 297-333. doi:10.1037/h0040934

Zins, J. E., & Elias, M. J. (2007). Social and emotional learning: Promoting the development of all students. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation, 17*(2), 233-255. doi:10.1080/10474410701413152