

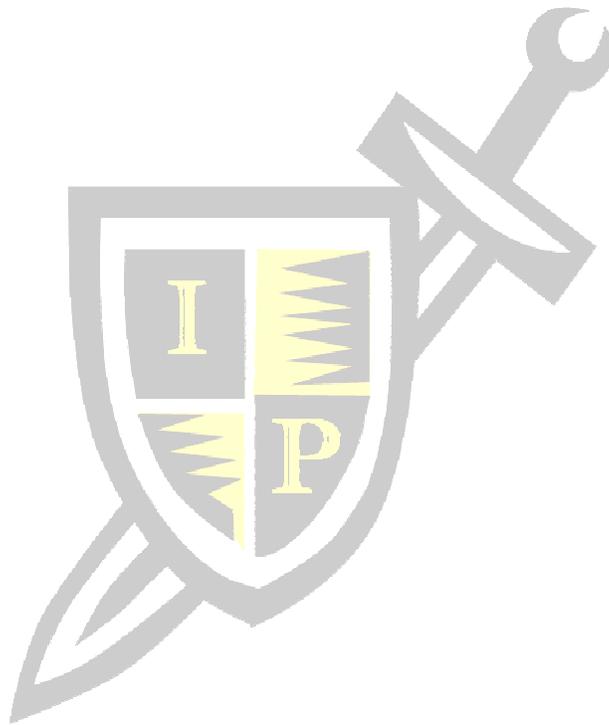
## **Infusing SEL into the final internship experience for future teachers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on advancing Social Emotional Learning into the final internship to help teacher candidates effectively deal with the stressors they face in their intern classes.

Keywords: Social Emotional Learning, student teachers, teacher education, prosocial, social emotional competence, student teaching stress



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## INTRODUCTION

In teacher education programs, the culminating experience for students training to become teachers is usually the final internship. The final internship, often referred to as student teaching, is meant to provide teacher candidates with the opportunity to fully integrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they have acquired and practiced during their teacher education program and apply these traits in the classroom. Successful completion of the internship leads to graduation and eligibility for professional licensure. The importance and impact of the final practicum experience is profound in teacher training. During this final comprehensive phase of training, teacher candidates become immersed in the role of the teacher and at the same time begin their journey of ongoing professional development. Candidates enter the final internship semester as students and exit, if all goes well, as a licensed educators.

Teacher candidates' entering this phase of professional development are confronted with unique challenges which may be triggers for stress. Stress is defined as unpleasant, negative emotions a student teacher may experience related to some aspect of the final internship which results in anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression (Kyriacou, 2001). For instance, the role reversal characteristic of the final internship may be discomfiting for some individuals. In a relatively short span of time, these pre-service teachers are experiencing significant changes in role expectations (Hourcade, Parette, & McCormack, 1988). They must transition from full-time college student to full-time student teacher in charge of a classroom of P-12 students. They transform from passively receiving information by sitting in college classrooms to actively teaching in the schools. Their responsibilities escalate from completing a handful of class assignments in coursework to planning, implementing and managing all instruction offered in the course of a school day – 5 days a week.

Other sources of stress in student teaching include the candidate's apprehension of the final internship experience in and of itself. At this point in their professional development their knowledge of child development and pedagogy is still naive and they are being asked to be both the student and the teacher (Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007). Although most teacher preparation programs offer a series of practica to help prepare their students for the final internship, many students still face this full-time experience with some fear and trepidation. This culminating experience also marks the end of a person's 4-year undergraduate college career. At the end of the experience, the student teacher will enter the adult world of work and leave college life behind. Another unnerving aspect of the final internship for many is the frequent evaluations of the intern's performance by university supervisors, school administrators, and the cooperating teacher.

To help prepare student teachers for success in the final internship, it behooves teacher educators to acknowledge the existence and effects of stress student teachers experience. Research indicates the effects of stress on student teachers is significant leading to lower work productivity, higher levels of absenteeism, fatigue, nervous tension, self-doubt, and failure to continue in the profession (Broiles, 1982; Huberman, 1993; Zabel & Zabel, 1981). These outcomes of stress are particularly troubling for institutions where continued program approval hinges upon candidates procuring and keeping jobs after graduation. It is therefore important for institution's to provide interns with means for successfully dealing with the stress inherent in the final internship experience.

## **STRATEGIES TO EFFECTIVELY DEAL WITH STUDENT TEACHER STRESS**

Kokkinos and Stavropoulos (2016) contended that the final practicum is the most powerful influence in pre-service teacher education. Teacher educators who work with this population are sure to agree. Because of the significant impact this final internship has on the developing teaching candidate, it is important for teacher educators to grasp their apprehensions and understand the emotions they experience during the experience. More importantly, however, those overseeing this phase of the interns' development must provide the student teachers with the skills and strategies needed to circumvent and effectively deal with stress.

Bradley (1984) provided insight into how the key people working with interns, the building administrator, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor could employ strategies to keep excess stress to a minimum for student teachers. Suggestions for the building administrator included meeting with the intern to share expectations and set parameters of the job in the academic setting, sharing evaluation methods and tools, and emphasizing the importance of possessing a calling for the profession. Cooperating teachers were advised to spend time having the intern observe while modeling how to teach, allowing interns to ease into teaching by starting with a subject in which they excel, having the intern start by working with individual students, then small groups, and finally the whole class of students, and spending time building a supportive, caring relationship. Recommendations for the university supervisors included conducting three-way conferences with the intern team at least twice a semester, discussing the evaluation system used, and specifically sharing strategies with the intern on how to handle stressors inherent in the position.

Kyriacou (2001) studied coping mechanisms for experienced teachers and found that the most frequent strategies used effectively by this population included:

- Keeping problems in perspective,
- Avoiding confrontations,
- Relaxing after work,
- Controlling feelings,
- Enhancing time-management skills,
- Effectively discussing concerns and expressing feeling with others,
- Dealing with problems as they arise,
- Ensuring a healthy home life,
- Planning ahead and prioritizing;
- Recognizing personal limitations.

As effective as these strategies promise to be for in-service teachers, Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson and Hymel (2016) asserted special attention be given to equipping teachers in training with the mechanisms needed to deal with stress at their level of professional development to help them acquire the ability to promote the success of the students they work with in their internship. They suggested turning to the research on Social Emotional Learning as a means to cultivate the skills needed to nurture the development of qualities to effectively deal with stress.

## **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) as the method of employing strategies and procedures for teaching

the following pro-social competencies, skills, and behaviors to individuals: self-awareness and management, social awareness, reasoned decision making, and the ability to initiate and maintain healthy relationships. SEL is the process of attaining prosocial competencies which include the abilities to identify and manage one's emotions, develop concern and caring for others, develop and sustain positive relationships, make healthy and responsible decisions, and effectively deal with challenging situations (Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson & Hymel, 2016). Those who embrace the concepts of Social Emotional Learning tend to demonstrate a high degree of Social Emotional Competence (SEC). Research by Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson and Hymel (2016) indicated teachers who are socially and emotionally competent are more adept at fostering caring, safe, nurturing, and healthy learning environments which promote greater student achievement.

### **INCORPORATING SEL INTO THE FINAL INTERNSHIP**

Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd (2013) found that SEL is not being adequately addressed in teacher preparation programs. Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson and Hymel (2016) encouraged teacher educators to provide ample and meaningful opportunities for teacher candidates to apply SEL knowledge and skills in their student teaching. They went on to recommend teacher educators make intentional efforts to devise the most effective educational practices that promote SEL in their teacher candidates.

An important message to relay to future teachers is that at the core of their profession is relationship building. They will need to learn that the close relationship between a knowledgeable, caring teacher and his or her student is essential to learning success. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) suggested teacher educators infuse social emotional intelligence training into programs so that candidates are offered the opportunity to develop the social emotional competencies and skills needed to positively impact student learning. The training will also provide candidates with resources needed to infuse SEL into their teaching. Ideas for bringing this type of training into the final internship will be discussed below.

### **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TRAINING**

Emotionally Intelligent Teacher Training was developed by Brackett and Caruso (2006) to assist in the development of teacher skills and competencies directly related to social emotional learning. Teachers who participate in the one-day training learn strategies for effectively noticing, comprehending, and managing emotions in the classroom environment. The training is interactive and offers participants the resources needed to create sincere, encouraging, secure, and dynamic learning environments for their students. Brackett and Katulak (2006) described how they designed a workshop to offer specific strategies which provides detailed information regarding the ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions. Components of the program, originally written for in-service teachers, when slightly adapted, can be implemented in teacher education to provide teacher candidates with strategies and practices for constructively dealing with the stressors encountered in student teaching. The adapted training also provides candidates with opportunities to further their own social emotional development (Almerico, 2016).

The training includes a series of questions student teachers are asked to consider about an anticipated or a past experience. The questions interns should contemplate in order are:

- How might/did each person feel?
- What might/did each person think about as a result of the feelings experienced?
- What might/did cause each person to experience those feelings?
- How might/did each person manage these feelings?

Interns are asked to reflect on each question and then write a plan as to how the situation could have been dealt with more effectively.

Activities for student teachers to incorporate into their final internship emphasize the development of the four Emotional Intelligence skills of perception, use, understanding, and management of emotion. Practicing one skill will often lead to mastery in other areas of Emotional Intelligence. The simple exercises which can easily be implemented in student teaching seminars have the potential to foster essential skills that will ensure a lifetime of professional and personal success.

The first activity asks student teachers to recognize their own and others emotions. It is reasoned that self-reflection leads to better self-expression. For this task, interns are asked to write a brief description of an event that transpired to include the names and actions of the individuals who were involved. See the example in Figure 1. The intern is further asked to describe the personal feelings elicited from that situation to include the level of intensity of the feelings identified. He/she is also asked to infer how the situation impacted others' feelings based on the verbal and nonverbal clues demonstrated at the time. The ability to reflect upon perceived emotions should promote emotional self-awareness and support the intern in understanding the actions of others in endeavors with the cooperating teacher, university supervisor, colleagues, parent-teacher conferences, and meetings with administrators and other school leaders.

The second activity deals with the ability to effectively generate one's own emotional state as well as the emotional state of others. The purposes of this activity are to increase a person's awareness of how emotions impact the way people think and act and to develop tools for manipulating the emotions of oneself and others to affect thinking, behavior and performance. The activity begins with the student teachers writing about how certain elements of their environment affect their emotions, and thus, their enthusiasm, teaching effectiveness, and interactions with other people. Next, the interns write about strategies used to generate certain moods for themselves and others. Then they list different lessons, events, or activities they have planned in the near future for their students and the emotional mindset they hope for the students as well as themselves to experience during those experiences. Finally, they identify ways they can produce the emotions they want themselves and their students to experience in each situation. See the example in Figure 2.

The third activity recommended by Brackett and Katulak (2006) deals with the social emotional competency of self-management and skill of managing emotions. Emotional management or regulation has an impact on the quality of an individual's thinking. The intern's ability to manage emotions is vital for an enhanced quality of life and will lead to stress reduction, the development and maintenance of relationships, and the creation of stable classroom environments which lead to effective management. For this task interns are asked to describe in writing a negative emotional experience they were involved in during the internship. They are asked to describe the situation that led to the negative emotional reaction, what prompted the reaction, how they coped with the situation at the time, and to discern whether the strategy they used at the time was or was not successful. Afterwards, the interns will describe

alternative strategies they could have used to manage their emotional reaction to the incident in writing. This activity requires candidates to carefully examine the efficacy of their current demeanor and consider options they might not have considered before the training to improve their emotional reaction to negative circumstances. Interns can complete the task initially independently and then move into small groups where they can brainstorm with one another about other strategies they might implement to manage their negative emotions. See Figure 3 for an example of a template for this activity.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper ideas for incorporation SEL strategies and developing social emotional competence into the final internship were shared. Student teachers participating in the culminating final internship encounter a variety of situations which may be triggers for stress. Embedding Social Emotional Learning strategies into the final internship experience which focus on perceiving, using, comprehending, and managing emotions can help student teachers combat stress and provide interns with the capacity to thrive in the classroom. Teacher preparation programs are encouraged to offer student teachers emotional training exercises like those described during the final internship to encourage reflection and discussion about emotion recognition and management.

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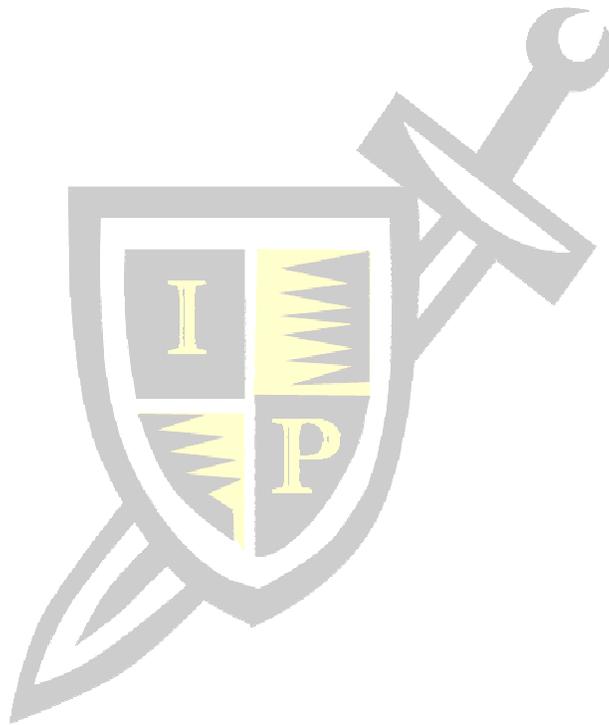


Figure1. Perceiving Social Emotional Feelings

Incident/Situation/Individuals Present	Self Emotion(s) experienced as a result of incident or situation/intensity of the emotion(s)	Others Emotions Demonstrated as a result of incident or situation based on verbal and non-verbal clues

Figure 2. Using Emotions

The Effect of the Environment on Me and Others		
How I Generate Moods for Myself and Others		
Incident/Situation	Desired State	How to Generate

Figure 3. Managing Emotions

What emotion was elicited?
How was the emotion triggered?
How intense was the emotion?
How long did the emotional reaction last?
How did I deal with the emotion (strategy)?
How effectively did I deal with the emotion?
How are there other ways I can deal with the emotion?