

The Importance of Supporting Social and Emotional Learning in Schools

Christina Rinaldi, Ph.D., R.Psych.
Professor & Director of Training
School & Clinical Child Psychology
Department of Educational Psychology
Faculty of Education

Overview

- ☑ Review of arguments in favour of supporting Social and Emotional Learning in schools
- ☑ What we know about Social and Emotional Learning across developmental stages and grade levels?
- ☑ Summary of research findings on SEL programming and relationships to academic, social and emotional, and other life outcomes

Hopes and Dreams

- What families, educators, and community members want for their children and adolescents
- Realization that schools must offer more than academic instruction to help students prepare for “life”



Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Core Competencies

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision making



- SEL is student centred approach that teaches students skills about how to satisfy “self” and “others” needs (Osher et al, 2010; Rose-Krasnor, 1997)

What is the Social and Emotional Learning Appeal?

- SEL framework is based on a strengths-based approach and it is grounded in developmental theory (Weissberg et al, 2015)

Social and Emotional Learning Competencies & Student Outcomes

- Social and emotional competencies and connections to early learning success and school readiness (Denham et al., 2012, 2014; Jennings & DiPrete, 2010; Romano et al., 2010)
- Greater social and emotional competence can also increase the likelihood of HS graduation, readiness for post-secondary, career success, positive family and work relationships, better mental health, and engaged citizenship (Hawkins et al., 2008)
- Conversely, the absence of competencies have been found to be related to interpersonal problems (Cook et al., 2009), high school dropout rates (Archambault et al., 2009), and adult unemployment (Nielsen et al., 2011)



Early Learning



What do I really need to learn in kindergarten? (and grades 1 to 6?)

What do we really need to teach?

- Social and emotional learning components are predictive of later classroom adjustment and academic success (Denham et al., 2014).
- Self-regulation, inhibitory control, emotional knowledge, social problem solving, and relationship skills are all indicative of early academic success (Bierman et al., 2008; Liew et al., 2008; Garner & Waajid, 2008; Bascoe et al., 2009; Welsh et al., 2010)

Later Elementary & Junior High



Unique developmental stage

Social and Emotional Milestones (Bronson, 2000; Crowther, 2006)

- Capable of conscious self-control
- Can reliably abide by rules
- Capable of using language to regulate behaviour and influence others
- High peer interest and involvement
- Capable of cooperative interactions with others
- Can use problem-focused rather than emotion-focused strategies
- Can learn from discussions
- Can play games with rules

Later Elementary & Junior High



SEL competencies in JH students significantly predict present and future grade and achievement scores (Fleming et al., 2005; Wentzel et al., 1993).

- In their review of classroom-based SEL programs (Jagers, Harris & Skoog, 2015) found only 2 SEL programs that fit the criteria for evidenced based - the Life Skills Training Program and Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways
- They also found several promising programs although few programs have been through multiple evaluations or RCTs

High School

Grades 10-12 and later adolescence



- More reward seeking behaviours a may lead to decreased self-regulation (Steinberg, 2008), yet increased social cognition and perspective-taking (Steinberg, 2011)

Faced with more (high stakes) decision making

- Driving
- Working
- Dating
- Peer choices
- Increased responsibilities
- Increased time demands

High School

Equally important to foster SEL competencies that are matched for developmental stage and learning needs

Interventions for self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making all apply to in helping build assets and resiliency



High School – Promising Programs



Few evidence based programs with later grades however in a review Williamson, Modecki & Guerra (2015) found several promising programs

Findings across programs:

- ✓ Increased achievement
- ✓ Decreased detention
- ✓ Decrease in intent to use substances
- ✓ Increased emotional competence
- ✓ Increase positive teacher-rated behaviour ,
- ✓ Increased school engagement,
- ✓ Decreased dropout,
- ✓ Increased positive identity
- ✓ Increased sense of self and decision making

SEL and Effective School-based Interventions

Overall Findings

- SEL programming promotes students' academic success (Zins et al., 2004; Durlack et al., 2011; Farrington et al., 2012; Sklad et al., 2012)
- Correlational and longitudinal research demonstrating SEL competencies are positively correlated to good adjustment outcomes and negatively to problems (Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Moffit et al., 2011)

SEL and Effective School-based Interventions

Overall Findings continued

- A large scale meta-analysis of 213 studies involving 270,000 students from kindergarten to high school was conducted by Durlak and colleagues (2011) and revealed compared to controls SEL students showed gains in:
 - Academic performance
 - SEL skills
 - Prosocial behaviours
 - Attitudes towards self and others

Looking Ahead – the role of schools and districts

- Environmental context (Classroom, school climate, teacher practices, home-school partnerships)
- Research and gathering evidence for specific student competencies at different grade levels
- Partnering with the community (research and training institutions)

