

Social Emotional Learning: Teacher Hope and Engagement

by

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Bachelor of Education, University of Alberta, 1991

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Abstract

This project is written from a school administrator's perspective and is intended to be a guideline for Instructional Leaders to build capacity among staff members to address the current Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Challenges of youth in schools. Although the project is aimed at increasing teacher hope and engagement, the benefits for overall school improvement and student achievement are probed. The project answers three essential questions: (1) What is SEL? (2) Why should a school invest in SEL? (3) What is the role of the Instructional Leader in leading an SEL initiative within a school? The project confirms that the Instructional Leader has a significant role in school improvement. The most meaningful finding is that school improvement is achieved when there are positive relationships within the building and SEL provides an opportunity to strengthen those relationships.

Dedication

To my Grandmother, Isola Durocher, for showing me how to build relationships.

To my parents, Real and Dorine Durocher, for encouraging me to continue my studies in education when I wanted to give up.

To my husband, Tracy Roulston, for his unwavering support whenever I take on a new challenge in my career.

To my children, Chelsea and Brianne Roulston, for bringing me joy everyday.

To the numerous students over the years, for allowing me to be part of their lives, the greatest gift is seeing them as happy adults!

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Chapter One

Early Relationships

Relationships have always been a huge part of my life. My earliest memory of a significant relationship would be the one I shared with my Grandmother. I lived across the yard from her until I was five. Being the youngest of three children who were born within three years of each other, I often sat on the periphery watching my two siblings in a house where there was rarely a quiet moment. I treasured the times when my brother and sister went off to school and I could cross the yard to spend some alone time with my “Mémère”. I still recall the way she made me feel when I walked through her door and I announced, “Mémère, I am here!” We spent many hours passing the time talking, crafting or baking. Mémère had a way of accepting me for who I was and making me feel special. I cannot ever recall being scolded by her, however I remember her gentleness and guidance as she taught me many of the skills I still have today. It was during one of my visits that Mémère told me she always dreamed of becoming a teacher. Instead, she married a farmer and raised seven children. Perhaps this is where my passion to teach first started, I wanted to honour her dream by becoming a teacher myself.

I learned about people and relationships by watching my grandmother. With seven children, the farmhouse was always bustling with people. Mémère opened her heart and home not only to family, she extended her welcome to people from all walks of life - an Aboriginal farm hand, a foreign worker from France, the parish priest, the neighbour down the road...the list could go on forever. The diversity of people she welcomed into her home was admirable. No matter what work awaited for her on the farm, she would stop what she was doing and took the time to be fully present in the conversation on hand. She captured the hearts of people by being genuinely interested and kind, and these relationships lasted for years. When my grandparents celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary, the foreign French worker they once hired as a

farmhand traveled with his family from France to celebrate with them, here in Canada. Mémère exemplified who I wanted to become and I am fortunate to have had such an impressionable role model as a child.

Another symbolic influence on me came from one of my first teachers. I attended a small rural school where the schoolteachers were predominantly nuns. My grade one and two teacher was a soft-spoken little lady named Sister Simard. Again, I was blessed with goodness from someone, who in my mind was one of the kindest people in the world. I learned from Sister Simard how to treat people through a lesson I will never forget.

I was in a combined grade one and two classroom. One day, Sister Simard announced that the older grade two students could be the teacher to any of the grade one students if our work was done. I looked down and my work was not finished. The temptation to be a teacher was too strong and I just could not resist. I made a conscious choice and off I went to help others. I brought my exercise book with me, held it close to my chest, and proceeded to sit by a younger classmate. As I was helping, my book slipped and one of the students hastily told Sister Simard. I was terrified and embarrassed; all I wanted to do was bury my head in my arms on my desk and sob. Sister Simard gently took me into the hallway, calmed me down and explained that I had made a mistake and all I had to do was go back in the classroom and complete my work. Although this lesson happened over thirty-eight years ago, I still remember it like it was yesterday. It has stayed in my mind all these years because of the emotion I experienced that day. I fully expected to be punished; instead I was overwhelmed by her kindness. I can honestly say that had Sister Simard chose to punish me, I probably would not be a teacher today. Instead she demonstrated how to problem-solve when a mistake was made, fix it, and move on. In my role as an administrator, I often think of Sister Simard, especially when I have to deal with children who may have also made a mistake. After being with Sister Simard for two years, I was convinced I

wanted to be teacher, and a nun as well. The dream to be a nun lasted until about grade six when I discovered I liked boys.

Relationships Growing Up

Relationships continued to be important to me growing up. At home, I spent many years playing school. I would dream up student names, make class lists, and take attendance. I would imagine the personalities of my students and would think of ways to make the students feel special. Even in these early years when playing, I had a strong sense of building relationships with those around me. At school, I served as a Playground Pal during recesses. My job was to include as many students as possible in some sort of play. I would organize games and problem solve when little arguments came up. At the time, I did not realize that my strong connection to people was associated with how the people in my life made me feel, what a gift! This gift has guided me to make choices along the way, leading me to my current position as a school administrator.

In junior high and high school, relationships were still a large part of my life. I spent a lot of time with people and took my roles seriously. I enjoyed coaching, tutoring, babysitting, volunteering and having gatherings with my friends. I met my best girlfriend when I was six and I still see her and many of my other childhood friends on a regular basis. The connections and bonds with them continue to be important to me.

I almost did not become a teacher. In my senior year, I knew I wanted to do something with children so I applied to university in the faculty of education and to college in the early childhood program. I struggled with my English mark. My entry into university was dependent on what I scored on my departmental exam and I did not do very well. By the end of summer I still had not heard from the university. A week before I was to go to college to pursue early

childhood my acceptance letter from university arrived. I was overjoyed and I see this as proof that events in our lives happen for a reason; God had a plan for me.

My first year was brutally difficult. Leaving a small town where I knew everyone, moving into a big city, and attending a university where I was just a number did not go very well for me. By Christmas, I wanted to quit. I considered taking the next semester off and spoke with my parents. They encouraged me to continue on with my studies, insisting that if I left, I would not return. They counseled well and I am so grateful for their advice. As I look back, I probably would not have continued my studies at university and I certainly would not be in the position I am today.

When I reflect on that first semester, I know why I had such difficulty. I longed for the intimacy of a small rural school and knowing the people around me. I missed my friends and family. I could not wait until the weekend to go home and see everyone. I relied on my weekend visits to recharge and face the work at university during the weeks ahead of me. Eventually, I met some fellow students from similar rural towns who became my university friends and I was able to push through the four years working toward my education degree.

Teaching At Last

Early in my teaching career, I shared a grade six position with another teacher who was about ten years older than me. Although we shared the same students, we had very different approaches to teaching. One of the boys in my classroom had a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder (ADD). One day, with only a few minutes left before leaving for home, my class took a break from learning. We casually talked and the day ended with lots of laughter. At the bell, this boy shoved his desk and left. I found him in the hallway getting ready to go home. As I approached him, he glared at me, slammed the door to his locker and was out before I could talk to him. I was concerned and phoned his mother. I told her about the incident and asked her to talk

to him. The next day the child would not acknowledge me. It was apparent he was still really angry with me. I found out from his mother that I had embarrassed him the day before. I recalled our class discussion and sure enough I knew what had set him off. I commented that I thought he liked one of the girls in the class. I was devastated, what I thought was relationship building had actually deeply hurt this child.

I took the boy aside and sincerely apologized for what I did to him. I assured him that had I known the effect of my words, I would have never said it. It was a turning point in our relationship. He respected that I attempted to make our relationship right again. Being a new teacher in a time when ADD was not fully understood, this boy was often seen as the trouble-maker in the classroom because of the extra time and attention he needed to focus on the task at hand. This experience made me realize that although he had needs, he also had feelings like any other child and I needed to have a positive relationship with him. From that day forth, I vowed to choose my words carefully when talking with students and to pay close attention to my students' emotions, a critical understanding for me in my teaching career.

Interestingly, the other teacher continued to report challenges in the classroom with this child and wondered why I was not having the same issues. She was harsh in her words and impatient with him. He could easily sense that he annoyed her by the way she treated him. He may have had ADD, but emotionally he was very aware that she did not like him. This is when I learned that all students, no matter who they are or what their story is, deserve to be treated with respect.

In hindsight, I wonder about the teacher in this situation. Now that I have some knowledge on social emotional competencies, was this teacher struggling because the child made her feel inadequate with her skills as a teacher? It seemed as though she entered a "fight or flight" position whenever the child was unable to comply with her requests. Had she understood her own

emotions were contributing to the escalation between them, perhaps she could have had a better relationship with this child. I sensed she did not feel good about the situation and she was reluctant to ask for advice, especially from a younger teacher. Although I saw it as a simple solution ~ change how you interact with him, she did not. In her mind, she probably thought the child got his own way with me, when in fact my approach made the world of a difference in his learning. In this project, I want to help teachers who feel inadequate, perhaps like this teacher, to find hope in their work with all students.

In my early years of teaching, jobs were not so easy to come by and I ended up teaching various grade levels, including kindergarten. I truly believe all educators should teach kindergarten. Kindergarten is a place where social interaction is a large part of the program. For some of the children, this is a difficult first year especially if they are the oldest in the family or it is their first time in a setting with so many children. Kindergarten is not only a humbling experience for the teacher, it is a place where the teacher has to teach and model skills on how to interact with one another in a respectful way. It was here that I learned about teaching children to use clear and effective language to communicate with each other.

In preparing for my lessons one day, I found a resource book on how to teach children to problem solve. I wish I had jotted down the name of this book so I could credit the author who provided me with the language to teach the children how to respectfully work things out. What I found interesting was the process involved the children talking to one another. I have seen so many situations where the authority figure, whether it is the teacher/administrator/parent, is the one who does most of the talking when disciplining children, when really those involved need to be part of the process if any significant change in behaviour is to occur. Children need to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes to talk effectively to one another. This life-long skill is essential for the relationships they will encounter at home and at work. I may have adapted the steps a bit

over the years, but the language originates from the resource I used in kindergarten. Here are the steps I use to work with children to problem-solve difficulties in social situations:

1. Bring the children involved in the situation together. Set the ground rules. Everyone will have a chance to talk. Take turns and listen to each other. Emphasize if it is not the child's turn to talk, the child's job is to listen without a word. This ensures that everyone's perspectives are considered.
2. Start the conversation with asking who would like to go first. This helps the children feel that the adult facilitating the conversation has taken no sides and the children are more willing to participate.
3. Have the child state their problem using the phrasing, "I did not like it when you ... This made me feel ...". This tells the listeners how the person was affected by the actions of those involved and usually leads to more conversation about the situation. Those listening often follow, by saying "Well, I didn't like when you..." This brings more clarity to the situation.
4. Listen and prompt only when needed, encouraging all parties to get involved in the conversation. Questions may have to be asked by the facilitator to get more clarity on the situation. Listen to all of the perspectives and provide a summary that everyone can agree upon.
5. Ask the group, what do you need from each other? Take turns to express what is needed, again they must listen first and then they are allowed to comment. This provides the children the opportunity to come up with their own solutions.
6. Come to a consensus to what needs to be done to move forward. End the conversation by asking each individual if they are alright, a promise to check how things are in a

few days, and end by thanking everyone involved. This validates their efforts in the process and provides the children with hope that things will be different next time.

7. If necessary, keep the child(ren) who may need extra assistance with the situation and dismiss the rest. This is a time when the adult can express care and the desire to really help the child. It may be that a consequence is negotiated, that rules and expectations are reviewed or that a parent or guardian may need to be informed. Perhaps a conversation about how things are going in general for the student(s) is necessary and may lead to learning more about the child outside the school.

Sometimes, the situation does escalate during any one of the steps. If this happens, I stop the process so that a private conversation can happen with the child who is being disrespectful. Once the child has been prompted to carry on, he/she may be able to rejoin the community conversation. If the child is not ready, I tell the group we will reconvene at a later date and I work with the child. This is when I tell the child that we will be calling home. In my experience, the child is usually very cooperative, especially if he/she knows that mom or dad will now be part of the process. For those situations when a call is made, usually there is more going on with the child at home as well. This child becomes a “radar kid”, one who needs extra care and encouragement. I make the team (vice-principal, learning support facilitator, counselor, and teacher) aware so they can check in with the child. Ultimately, all of the children we work with need to feel like there is an adult who cares and we are willing to help through the difficult situations that arise.

I find this structure works for all ages of children; I even used it with junior high students. It is clear, effective, and the children involved walk away feeling they were heard. In many cases, the problems usually stem from a lack of communication. Children often choose to yell, push, kick, or punch when they are frustrated. The process models how to speak with each other when

there is tension and provides language that children can use in their everyday lives. It also shifts the onus of finding solutions from the administrator/teacher/facilitator/parent to the students. Students are very capable to come up with plans on their own when prompted and often what they express is surprising. Children have enormous capacity to contribute if provided an opportunity to do so. The SEL project will provide teachers with the tools to build capacity in their students to identify what they are feeling and provide ways to react to these feelings. Ultimately, the SEL framework should increase the positive experiences teachers have with their students.

Whether you are a student or a teacher, if behaviours escalate, those involved become increasingly vulnerable and potentially, personal safety is at risk. I have seen children lose their ability to think straight and respond by spitting, hitting, screaming and thrashing. The teacher becomes more agitated, feels pressured to intervene, and wants to regain control of the situation. When all is said and done, both the student and the teacher feel badly about their actions in the heat of the moment. Regaining control in a safe and caring way requires skill and patience. In this day and age when so many external pressures affect the lives of our youth, teachers have to be prepared for the unpredictability of our youth. As an administrator, I believe the SEL framework can support teachers to face the demands in their classrooms and respond to situations with care and attention for the student.

My Project

I have been working in the same Catholic School District for twenty-three years now, the last nine years as a school administrator. In August of 2014, I moved to a new school. I am practical in my work and purposefully wanted a project I can use in my work as an administrator. Originally, I planned to develop a project in the area of the new competencies in the Alberta Education Redesign. When I arrived at my new school, I decided to switch the topic of my

project to helping teachers find hope in their work. It is important to understand the context for my decision.

History of My New School

Two years ago, Alberta Education directed our school district to turn over one of our four catholic schools to the public school district in a town where historically secular education did not exist. At the end of June in 2012, the staff and students vacated an elementary school and moved across town to join the school where I am presently the administrator. To make the space, six portables were added on site. For the first year and a half, the students in these new portables left one building and entered another for physical education classes, to visit the library, or to go to the main office. Six months ago this changed when the breezeway was finally complete to connect the new portables to the existing building. The school has been “under construction” since the amalgamation. This fall, a seventh portable was attached and currently the school is at a 106% utilization rate. The previous administrators worked hard to unite staff members, students, and families who unjustly felt they were forced to come together in one building. Compounding things, there was a very demanding group of grade threes, who continued to be a challenge in grade four which was last year. These students are no longer with us, they moved to the middle school last fall. Emotionally, it was a grueling and trying time for all those involved. Last June, I learned I was moving to this school and I would have an entire new administrative team; along with me, there is a new vice principal, a new learning support facilitator, and a new counselor.

It was not long before I noticed the school is still on a journey of healing. I learned about little things that were still contributing to the hurt, like the set up of the lunch room tables which allowed staff members to sit in camps that resembled the previous two schools or that the wooden plaque made by one of the staff members and signed by all to commemorate the closing of the school was still not mounted on wall. Furthermore, some staff members associated the problems

with the difficult group of students as a result of having too many children in one building. We continue to make changes to bring the staff together. In August of this school year, I did a “gaining perspectives” exercise with the faculty members at our first staff meeting. It was apparent from their feedback that they were tired and frustrated by the last two years and were looking forward to new beginnings. I saw an opportunity to connect this project to the work I need to do. I want to give the teachers and support staff members the hope they so long for.

I contacted Andrea, a colleague of mine who had recently resigned from our district as our behaviour consultant. Andrea and I worked together in my first year as a vice principal and she was the learning support facilitator at the time. Over the years, she became the district behaviour consultant and she is now working at Alberta Education. In her district role, she visited my school on many occasions to assist teachers in setting up behaviour programs for children. Because my new staff members had such a difficult time with the children in the two previous years, I felt this was where I needed to start. I described my desire to work on universal behaviour supports for all children. Although the most difficult students had moved on to another school, my vision is to give the teachers success with our current students so they can collectively feel better about their work. Andrea introduced the term Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and suggested I should read about the research in this area.

As we discussed my project, Andrea made a connection for me that contributed to my passion for this project. In her work as behaviour consultant, she has assisted many teachers in the district over the years. Her visits always included a classroom observation. She recorded the number of times the teacher provided positive and negative feedback. She found that the negative feedback was significantly higher among a majority of teachers who were experiencing difficulty with a student or a group of students. She would then coach the teacher to increase the frequency of positive feedback and to be specific with praising the desired behaviors in the classroom.

Really, much of her work was assisting the teacher to change his/her behaviour so the child would respond positively and learn in the classroom. Andrea has come to the realization that the teachers who have difficulty with students are often lacking in some social emotional competencies themselves. Although I knew that some teachers were more successful with students who had behaviour problems than others, I never looked at it in this light before. Now that I have had an opportunity to research SEL, this totally makes sense to me and I am passionate about helping teachers build positive relationships with their students. I am looking forward to seeing if, through my work as an administrator, I can increase the teachers' social emotional competencies. It is my hope, even if my work only results in greater SEL awareness, that teachers will feel they are more capable to face the challenges in the classroom. This will be measured through their sense of hope and engagement.

Teacher Hope and Engagement

My interest in teacher hope and engagement is closely connected to my current position as an administrator in my district. For several years now, my district has made engagement a priority in our district. This work is centered on increasing the staff members' emotional attachment to their positions within the district, in turn, that student achievement will increase. The district is now expanding this work to include students and parents. My district consults with Gallup research, a management and consulting company (<http://www.gallup.com>). Each year all employees fill out Gallup's Q12 survey. We review and analyze results with the intention of increasing employee engagement.

The Gallup Corporation has determined the following 12 variables that consistently predict strong levels of engagement. The survey asks employees to rate each variable using a 5-point satisfaction scale, 5 is extremely satisfied, 1 is extremely dissatisfied:

1. I know what is expected of me at work.

2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
7. At work, my opinions seem to count.
8. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
9. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
10. I have a best friend at work.
11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

The intention of my project is to see if a focus on SEL does increase the hope and engagement of employees. In particular, the variables of “I know what is expected of me at work”, “At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day” and “This last year, I have opportunities at work to learn and grow” will be measured.

Conclusion

In this reflection, I have come to realize how fortunate I am to do the work I do. I am equally grateful to the people who have helped to shape me throughout the years. Moreover, I am excited about the ability to make a difference in the lives of teachers and children and the SEL work ahead of me.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

“Today’s teachers face ever-increasing demands. Growing numbers of children are coming to school unprepared and many have serious behavior problems as early as preschool” (Gilliam, 2005 as cited in Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 496). The challenges of school-aged children stem from the “increased economic and social pressures on families; weakening of community institutions that nurture children’s social, emotional, and moral development; and easier access by children to media that encourage health damaging behavior” (Greenberg, Weissberg, O’Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, Elias, 2003, p. 467). Compounding these pressures are the increasing number of students coming from culturally diverse backgrounds and varying economic situations (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003). Jacqueline Norris, a school principal explains the reality of educating in the 21st century, “What we did not understand was that we also needed to focus on planning and preparing for the new population of students, for the diversity among them, and, in many cases, the cultural gap between them and ourselves” (2003, p. 313).

For years now, educators respond to these demands by altering their academic teaching practices to meet the needs of the children in their classrooms using what is commonly known as differentiated instruction. What is becoming increasingly apparent is that although differentiated instruction can be tailored to fit the varying academic levels and interests of students in the classroom, it is not enough. “Society’s expectation that teachers manage the emotional lives of their students as well as teach subject matter may leave many teachers exhausted and burned out” (Hargreaves, 1998 as cited in Jennings et al., 2009, p. 497). Teachers are society’s greatest assets in schools and as an administrator, I believe helping my colleagues to increase hope and engagement in their practice to avoid burnout is essential for student achievement. “Burnout

results from a breakdown in coping ability over time and is viewed as having three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of a lack of personal accomplishment” (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997 as cited in Jennings et al., 2009, p. 497).

Although the demands on 21st century teachers are many, the abundance of worldwide educational research is promising. The purpose of this literature review is to define social emotional learning (SEL), discover the history behind SEL, examine SEL work in Canada and Alberta and consider the impact it has on both the student and the teacher. This will lead to the question, does SEL increase teacher hope and engagement and what role does the school principal as an instructional leader have in supporting it?

What is Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?

SEL is defined on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning CASEL website as, “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (2013, What is SEL?, para. 1). Specifically, “(t)hese critical social-emotional competencies involve skills that enable children to calm themselves when angry, initiate friendships and resolve conflicts respectfully, make ethical and safe choices, and contribute constructively to their community” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2005; Elias et al., 1997; Zins & Elias, 2006 as cited in Payton et al., 2008, p. 6).

In defining SEL, it is commonly understood and research confirms that learning is enhanced when the participants perceive the environment is safe, supportive, respectful and caring (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Dweck, 2006; Elias, 1997; Glasser, 1998; Jennings et al., 2009; Noddings, 2005; Norris, 2003). CASEL and many other researchers recognize and emphasize the

relationship of educators to the development of SEL in children. SEL is considered more complex than curriculum; rather it is a framework in which the processes contribute as much as the content to SEL of the child. The SEL classroom is a place where “students can cope with frustration and anger, listen to others, and get along with classmates” and in turn, “teachers are better able to teach, and students are better able to learn” (Bouffard, 2014, p.14). Norris (2003) reiterates this concept, a “fundamental SEL skill is the ability to recognize emotions as they are being experienced and to know appropriate ways of dealing with them” (p. 316). It is crucial to point out that SEL knowledge combined with practice develops the skills and attitudes in acquiring social emotional competencies; this is accomplished through the relationships that exist between the child and the teacher.

Five essential competencies are identified in SEL: self awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management, and relationship management (Bridgeland, et al., 2013; CASEL, 2014; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004 as cited in Jennings et al., 2009). The competencies “are designed to create attitudes, behaviors, and cognitions that promote healthy social relationships, personal wellbeing, and academic achievement” (Norris, 2003, p. 314). These five competencies are considered to be critical in forming good students, contributing citizens, and successful workers (Bridgeland, et al., 2013). The five competencies defined on the CASEL website (2014) are:

- Self-awareness: The ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.
- Self-management: The ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses,

motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.

- Social awareness: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.
- Relationship skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.
- Responsible decision making: The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.

In summary, “SEL is a systematic approach that teaches individuals skills to successfully manage and navigate life tasks by making moral and ethical decisions” (Payton et al., 2000 as cited in Yoder, 2014, p. 2).

History

It is fascinating that SEL can be traced to the early works of philosophers, educators and scientists who lived well over twenty-one centuries ago. According to the Edutopia Website, *Social and Emotional Learning: A Short History*, Plato’s definition of education consisted of knowledge of the subject areas and character and moral education (2011). Aristotle’s famous quote, “Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all,” emphasizes that knowledge is as equally important as emotional learning. In identifying curriculum ideologies that have evolved over time, Eisner (1995) recognizes that not all worldviews would perceive a

need for SEL in schools. Although differences in ideologies exist, progressivism, critical theory, reconceptualism, and cognitive pluralism value the learner as a social, emotional, cognitive vessel who is able to acquire knowledge (Eisner, 1995). Modern educators continue to recognize the need for developing both the academic and character makings of our youth today.

The history of SEL in United States includes the early work of researcher James Comer in the 1960's, called the Comer School Development Program. He developed a program "intended to improve the educational experience of poor minority youth. Improvement (was) attained by building supportive bonds among children, parents, and school staff to promote a positive school climate" (Coulter, 1993, p. 1). SEL in the United States continued to gain momentum in schools that had substandard achievement, extremely poor attendance, and culturally diverse populations. Early work is credited to elementary schools in New Haven, Connecticut where educators created a program centered on a collaborative approach of "teachers, parents, the principal, and a mental health worker. The team made decisions on issues ranging from the schools' academic and social programs to how to change school procedures that seemed to be engendering behavior problems" (Edutopia, 2011, para. 8). In summary, "much of the SEL work evolving around this time came from research on prevention and resilience" (Cooper, 2013, p. 1).

During the 1980's there was extensive research in the United States to identify the characteristics of schools that exceeded the national performance measures and had significantly less than average truancy and behaviour issues. Upon looking at successful schools, the term SEL emerged as "a conceptual framework to address both the needs of young people and the fragmentation that typically characterizes the response of schools to those needs" (Elias et al., 1997, as cited by Greenberg et al., 2003, p. 467). The SEL framework was promising for schools as it is based on the premise that, "unlike the many "categorical" prevention programs that targeted specific problems, SEL programming could address underlying causes of problem

behavior while supporting academic achievement” (Greenberg et al., 2003, p. 467). Key SEL research figures during the 1980’s include Roger P. Weissberg, Timothy Shriver, Maurice Elias, and Daniel Goleman.

In 1994, the CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) organization was launched in the United States and still exists today. CASEL’s “mission is to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool through high school. Through research, practice and policy, CASEL collaborates to ensure all students become knowledgeable, responsible, caring and contributing members of society.” (CASEL, 2014). Globally, the CASEL organization is seen as a leading organization in SEL.

Daniel Goleman’s 1995 publication, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, connected the dots of brain research, Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligence, and emotions. “The publication of Goleman’s (1995) worldwide best-selling book, emotional intelligence, was the catalyst that created the emergent field of social emotional learning (SEL)” (Elias et al. 2012, p. 423). Goleman’s research “reenergized the character education movement. Goleman suggested that cognition alone is not enough for success in the classroom or, even more importantly, in life” (Norris, 2003, p. 314). The momentum of SEL increased with many schools in the last twenty years across North America implementing programs to nurture the development of social emotional competencies.

SEL in Canada

With the abundance of SEL research throughout the United States, it is surprising to discover that very few Canadian studies exist. In 2013, Issue Brief: Social Emotional Learning in Canada was published after interviewing 23 prominent Canadians with extensive expertise in SEL practices in Canada. They believe there is value to pursuing SEL for the following reasons:

- a) The importance of mental health is increasingly recognized. Although SEL is not a cure for mental illness, it can be a universal mental health promotion strategy that builds protective factors for all children.
- b) The increase in school violence indicates that many young people need to be taught social and emotional skills.
- c) The research has evolved over the last 30 years. We can now convincingly demonstrate that some SEL programs are effective and can improve academic performance. (Cooper, 2013, p.5)

Furthermore, Canadian statistics are showing that large numbers of students are experiencing increasing social, emotional and behavioural challenges that can interfere with both teaching and learning:

“Among grade 6 students in Canada in 2010, 35% of girls and 27% of boys, and 44% of girls and 28% of boys in grade 10 reported high levels of emotional problems, such as depression, sadness, anxiety, and sleeping problems. In fact, by grade 10, 38% of girls and 24% of boys reported feeling depressed or low at least once a week.” (Freeman et al. as cited in Cooper, 2013, p. 2)

Despite the alarming statistics among the youth in Canada and the compelling research that the SEL framework has a positive impact on youth, the term SEL is fairly new in Canada.

Because Education is a provincial mandate, SEL initiatives vary across the country. In 2000, the Ministry of Education in British Columbia identified social responsibility “as one of four “foundational skills”, as important as reading, writing, and numeracy” (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007, p. 22). In Canada, British Columbia seems to be the leading province in SEL. In 2007, the Ontario government “announced a \$2 million initiative to support character education in schools, to inspire students to become caring, contributing, and compassionate citizens”

(Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007, p. 22). In 2009, the Alberta Education published the Framework For Kindergarten to Grade Twelve Wellness Education. Wellness is defined as “a balanced state of emotional, intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual well-being that enables students to reach their full potential in the school community. Personal wellness occurs with commitment to lifestyle choices based on healthy attitudes and actions” (Alberta Education, 2009, p. 3). The framework identifies five dimensions of wellness: emotional wellness, intellectual wellness, physical wellness, social wellness, and spiritual wellness.

What is promising for Canadian educators is that SEL offers a framework for schools to respond to the increasing demands in Canadian classrooms. What is challenging is that SEL is still in its’ infancy in Canada, particularly in Alberta. Although the Alberta Government has identified the framework for wellness in 2009 with a commitment to examine “its current programs of study, which include Kindergarten to Grade 9 Health and Life Skills, Kindergarten to Grade 12 Physical Education (PE), Career and Life Management (CALM) and wellness associated supports”, the programs of study have yet to be revised (2009, p.1). The Alberta framework (2009) does suggest that a “comprehensive school health” approach is essential to impact student health behaviours and lists emotional and social wellness as two of the five dimensions of wellness, however there little reference to the SEL of children (p. 9). It is interesting to note that there is a heavy emphasis on the physical wellbeing of students, essentially being active and eating healthy.

The Alberta Education Framework For Kindergarten to Grade Twelve Wellness Education document is a good example of the barriers and gaps that exist in Canada as identified in Issue Brief: Social and Emotional Learning in Canada (2013, p. 6). The Alberta Government can close two of the gaps, “lack of awareness of SEL as an approach” and “lack of alignment with education ministry outcomes” by explicitly using the SEL framework to develop emotional

and social awareness among Alberta school aged children and embedding SEL outcomes into the revisions of the programs of studies. Increasing an awareness of SEL would affirm the work that many Alberta educators are already delivering as part of their “educational mandate” (Cooper, 2013, p.6). It is time for Canadian educators to “get the term SEL out there” and “help people to understand the benefits associated with the SEL approach and the evidence behind it” (Cooper, 2013, p.7). In doing so, there will be many benefits for all Canadians involved, particularly in this project it is anticipated that teacher hope and engagement will increase.

Who Benefits from SEL?

Much of the SEL research in the last few decades has centered on the children involved in the process of developing social emotional competencies. Because the topic of interest is focused around the question, does SEL increase teacher hope and engagement, it is essential to research the influence of SEL on both the student and the teacher. This section of the literature review will include the effects of SEL on the children and will then examine what the research is revealing about the teacher who is involved in SEL. One could suggest that SEL would also impact family life and the effects would be worthwhile researching, but for the purpose of my project, this area will not be reviewed.

There is an abundance of research to support the claim that SEL can produce positive benefits for those involved. It is important to note particular attention was made to be selective in researching SEL in educational settings where it was a universal support in the interest that my project will involve all learners and educators in my school community. Durlak et al. (2011) cite that, “universal school-based efforts to promote students’ social and emotional learning (SEL) represent a promising approach to enhance children’s success in school and life” (p. 406). This leads to the question, how does a universal approach to SEL enhance student success?

Benefits of SEL for the Student

From an educator's point of view, the most impressive research findings are those that show significant gains in student achievement. Payton et al. (2008) conducted a quantitative meta-analysis of SEL program delivery in three different settings: classroom (universal), small group (targeted) and after-school (targeted). They found, "SEL programming yielded an average gain on achievement test scores of 11 to 17 percentile points" (p. 7). In 2011, Durlak et al. found similar results. This research consisted of a meta-analysis of "213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students. Compared to controls, SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour, and academic performance that reflected an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement" (p. 406). Far too often classroom time is taken up by many initiatives that seem so disconnected from learning; the 11-percentile gain in achievement provides incentive for educators to invest in SEL.

Along with achievement, SEL is reported to have significant impact on the learning environment in schools. Students feel like they have "opportunities to contribute to their class, school, and community and experience the satisfaction, sense of belonging, and enhanced motivation" (Hawkins et al. as cited in Durlak et al., 2011, p. 406-407). Norris (2003) found "students are not afraid of taking risks, asking questions, or making mistakes because they know that any criticism they receive will be given in a respectful and constructive manner" (p. 316). Furthermore, when students develop social-emotional competencies, they increase their ability to manage their own emotions and problem-solve in difficult situations, resulting in seeking help only when needed (Romasz et al., 2004, as cited in Yoder, 2014, p. 5). In a classroom of diverse learners, knowing when to seek help from the teacher decreases the time spent on non-academic problems and ultimately increases the "students' capacity to learn" (Durlak et al., 2011, as cited

in Yoder, 2014, p. 5). The 2013 CASEL Report: the Missing Piece, reveals that, “Students in SEL programs enjoy, on average, a 9–10 percentage point improvement in positive attitude, addressing conduct problems and reducing emotional distress, compared to students not participating in SEL programs” (Bridgeland, et al., p.6). Part of SEL involves active listening; in turn students gain the perspectives of others, which develops empathy, an important emotion needed to create a caring classroom (Norris, 2013, p. 316). When SEL is prominent, the classroom is a place where students are provided the tools to reach beyond their potential both emotionally and academically.

Benefits of SEL for the Teacher

The increasing number of teachers leaving the teaching profession has heightened the awareness of supporting and fostering the social emotional wellbeing of the teacher. “Emotional stress and poor emotion management consistently rank as the primary reasons teachers become dissatisfied and leave teaching” (Jennings et al., 2009, p. 497). Teachers are crucial to our schools and society should be concerned as Darling-Hammond (1999) states, “the ability of teachers is one of the most powerful determinants of student achievement – more influential, in fact, than poverty, race, or the educational attainment of parents” (as cited in School Leadership for 21st Century Initiative, 2001, p. 6). Another study by Leana (2011) found that “teacher social capital was a significant predictor of student achievement gains above and beyond teacher experience or ability in the classroom. When relationships among teachers in a school are characterized by high trust and frequent interaction – that is, when social capital is strong – student achievement scores improve” (p. 3). This clearly confirms that students need teachers and teachers need support. The research in this section will focus on the benefits of SEL for the teacher and how it contributes to his/her social and emotional well-being.

Ultimately, the primary reason any framework would be deemed valuable in education is if it proved to academically advance the child. It is interesting to note that both the student and the teacher become increasingly competent in their abilities when SEL is prominent in the academic experience. Durlak et al. (2011) found that “interpersonal, instructional, and environmental supports produce better school performance” (p. 418). This is achieved because there is healthy teacher peer pressure that fosters high expectations among the staff. As the faculty works through the structure of SEL, the teacher’s own competencies in SEL increases. This is significant because “(s)ocially and emotionally competent teachers have high self-awareness. They recognize their emotions, emotional patterns, and tendencies and know how to generate and use emotions such as joy and enthusiasm to motivate learning in themselves and others. They have a realistic understanding of their capabilities and recognize their emotional strengths and weaknesses” (Jennings et al., 2009, p. 495). Having socially and emotionally competent staff members increases the likelihood that students will achieve.

When the teacher has an understanding of SEL, situations with students that often resulted in punitive actions are decreased, leaving the teacher with a greater sense of self-worth. Jennings et al. (2009) explain, “if a teacher understands that a student’s challenging behavior and difficulty with self-regulation results from problems faced at home, he or she may show greater concern and empathy and be better able to help the student learn to self-regulate” (p. 493). This study also points out that teachers who are socially aware are better equipped to recognize the underlying issues in problem-solving when behaviour situations arise:

Students with self-regulation problems often become classroom scapegoats and may be intentionally provoked by their peers in ways that can be very subtle. Because of their more obvious aggressive response to this subtle yet effective provocation, teachers often reinforce these students’ scapegoat status by punishing them without noticing and

addressing the behavior of the provocateur. A more socially and emotionally aware teacher may notice this dynamic and handle this situation in a way that responds to both behaviors more effectively. (Jennings et al., 2009 p. 493)

In *The Missing Piece: A Report for CASEL* (2013), researchers found that, “SEL helps teachers become more effective by fostering their own social and emotional development and supporting a caring and challenging classroom climate” (Bridgeland, et al., 2013, p.8). When the stress level in the classroom is reduced, the teacher is more capable of seeing a clearer picture of the students in the classroom. This decreases “the frequent negative emotions such as frustration, anger, guilt, and sadness” experienced by the teacher. (Kavanaugh & Bower, 1985 as cited in Jennings et al., 2009, p. 497).

When one considers the emerging research on SEL, specifically the benefits for the students and the teachers, learning in the classroom seems achievable despite the challenges our children face. Likewise, the SEL framework can contribute to the social and emotional wellbeing of teachers, our most precious resources in education.

The Role of the School Leader in SEL

The role of the administrator in recent years is more clearly defined as a result of the research on school reform. The 21st century administrator is recognized as an Instructional Leader who “know(s) the value of taking time to process and facilitate the development of mission, vision, purpose, or value statements” (McKewan, 2003, p.96). “An Instructional Leader is someone who first and foremost realizes that the strategies and instructional practices teachers use are the primary mover of student achievement” (Mendels, 2012, p. 58). In their research, Leithwood et al. (2008) make seven claims about successful school leadership. One of the claims is of particular interest and aligns well with the philosophy behind SEL. “Claim 4: School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff

motivation, commitment and working conditions” (p. 32). In this section, the primary aim of instructional leadership is described as simply not only to increase the knowledge and skills of teachers, but to focus equally on developing the personal character of the faculty members in the areas of commitment, capacity and resilience so they are able to continue to develop their knowledge and skills (Leithwood et al., 2008). The school leader who understands, values and supports SEL has the ability to influence and empower teachers to do their best work in the classroom with the students.

The successful school administrator has an understanding of the significance of his/her role in school reform. Dr. Warren Bennis (1994), an American scholar in Leadership studies claims, “be very clear about what strategic goals, the strategic vision of the institution, and to make that simple and clear and compelling, and that’s got to be communicated ceaselessly, indefatigably, and endlessly, in all sorts of ways” (p.4). A caution for leaders, “if positive learning environments and SEL are not treated as important initiatives, teachers push them to the side because their jobs are contingent on moving students forward on standardized tests” (Bridgeland, et al. 2013 as cited in Yoder, 2014, p. 9). Specific to SEL, Payton et al., (2008) identify “four recommended practices for skill training” which school leaders should insist upon and support within the school. These recommendations are commonly known as SAFE programs.

- Sequenced: Does the program apply a planned set of activities to develop skills sequentially in a step-by-step fashion?
- Active: Does the program use active forms of learning such as role-plays and behavioral rehearsal with feedback?
- Focused: Does the program devote sufficient time exclusively to developing social and emotional skills?
- Explicit: Does the program target specific social and emotional skills? (p. 7 & 8)

Fullan (2011) concurs and additionally emphasizes that for change to occur, people need time to build on new experiences in a nonthreatening environment. In this work, “knowledgeable change leaders strive for small early successes, acknowledge real problems, admit mistakes, protect their people, and celebrate success along the way” (p.77). Furthermore, Yoder (2014) states both administrators and teachers need “professional learning opportunities on how to develop and sustain positive learning environments” and “an evaluation system that allows teachers and administrators to demonstrate their impact on the learning environments for students” (p. 9). Hallinger (2009) points out that, “when teachers perceive principals’ instructional leadership behaviors to be appropriate, they grow in commitment, professional involvement, and willingness to innovate” (p. 14). This compelling research confirms that school leader has an important role in promoting SEL within the school.

Conclusion - SEL, Teacher Hope and Engagement

The teacher is the most influential and most powerful determinant in student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1999, as cited in as cited in School Leadership for 21st Century Initiative, 2001, p. 6). However, “(w)ith ever-greater emotional demands placed on teachers with little if any support, it is not surprising that the rate of teacher burnout is increasing and that teachers are leaving the profession at an increasing rate” (Ingersoll, 2001; Metlife, 2004; Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005; as cited in Jennings et al., 2009, p. 497). “Emotional stress and poor emotion management consistently rank as the primary reasons teachers become dissatisfied and leave teaching” (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; as cited in Jennings et al., 2009, p. 497). “Experiencing frequent negative emotions such as frustration, anger, guilt, and sadness may reduce teachers’ intrinsic motivation and feelings of self-efficacy and lead to burnout” (Kavanaugh & Bower, 1985; as cited in Jennings et al., 2009, p. 497). SEL can provide

teachers with the support they need to move from dissatisfaction and frustration to hope and engagement.

Hope is defined as “an ability to conceptualize goals, find pathways to these goals despite obstacles and have the motivation to use those pathways” (Gerstein, 2014, p. 2). Lopez (2013) uses a metaphor to describe hope, “hope is like oxygen...we can’t live without hope” (p. 10). Birmingham (2009) identified that “hope for the future is a foundational motivation for education” (p. 27). Hope provides us with the fuel to keep us moving forward, helps us see challenges as opportunities, and provides energy to deal with setbacks.

Hope and engagement are related. Without hope, rarely will an employee feel passion or a profound connection to their work. In the book, *First Break All the Rules*, Coffman (1999), points out that employee engagement is critical in moving the organization forward. From Gallup’s website:

A highly engaged workforce means the difference between a company that thrives and one that struggles. When employees are engaged, they are passionate, creative, and entrepreneurial, and their enthusiasm fuels growth. These employees are emotionally connected to the mission and purpose of their work. When employees are not engaged, they are indifferent toward their jobs -- or worse, outright hate their work, supervisor, and organization -- and they will destroy a work unit and a business. (2014, para. 6)

A school-wide SEL initiative is a means to provide teachers with increased hope and engagement in their work, ultimately increasing the academic performance of students and school improvement for all.

Chapter 3: Social Emotional Learning: A Sample Framework

Rationale

Walk into any elementary school and immediately there are unspoken cultural characteristics that emerge. The building speaks to you by what is seen on the walls, the way you are greeted, how the children and adults interact with each other, and the how the children are valued. A school can have many attributes; the most significant cultural whispers for school improvement are ones of trust, safety, and learning. According to Sebring & Bryk (2000), “In schools that are improving, where trust and cooperative adult efforts are strong, students report that they feel safe, sense that teachers care about them, and experience greater academic challenge (as cited in Brewster & Railsback, 2003, p. 2). Furthermore, Brewster & Railsback (2003) report, “(r)elationships among teachers and principals, in particular, are being held out as important indicators of a school’s or district’s readiness for reform and ability to sustain it” (p. 2).

The school administrator significantly contributes to the culture of the school by his/her relationships and support in leading teachers to improve. I am an elementary school principal, in a new assignment since the fall of 2014. As the research confirms, it is crucial that I develop and maintain relationships of trust, provide opportunities for collaborative processes, and establish a safe learning environment (Brewster & Railsback, 2003, p. 2). This is not an easy task considering the challenges of diversity that teachers face in educating our youth. Diversity among the students is caused by the “increased economic and social pressures on families; weakening of community institutions that nurture children’s social, emotional, and moral development; and easier access by children to media that encourage health damaging behavior” (Greenberg, Weissberg, O’Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, Elias, 2003, p. 467). Compounding these pressures are the increasing number of students coming from culturally diverse backgrounds and varying economic situations (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003).

My project is a sample framework for implementing a universal support of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in an elementary school. Some school administrators may deal with the challenges of diversity by increasing the number of adults in the building, having strict policies on bullying, disciplining, suspending, or expelling children. While these measures address the symptoms of underlying problems, SEL is a positive proactive approach to teach lifelong social and emotional strategies and skills to our youth. SEL is “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL Website, 2013, What is SEL?, para. 1). I chose this project specifically to support my teachers in addressing the diversity of students in my school. It is my intention that through this project, my school can:

- Build layers of trust:
 - among myself and faculty members
 - among myself and parents
 - among myself and students
 - among faculty members and faculty members
 - among faculty members and parents
 - among faculty members and students
 - among students and students
- provide opportunities for collaborative process
 - among myself and faculty members
 - among myself and parents
 - among myself and students

- among faculty members and faculty members
 - among faculty members and parents
 - among faculty members and students
 - among students and students
- learn as a school community

The Project

My project is a sample framework to implement a universal support of SEL in an elementary school. This project originated in École Notre Dame School, where currently I am the school principal. After an analysis of school data and learning the history of the school from the staff members, students, and parents at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, it was evident that École Notre Dame School would benefit from a school wide collaborative approach to SEL. Two significant factors that occurred in the last two years and contributed to selecting SEL as a focus for school improvement for my school include:

- The amalgamation of two schools (staff members, students and families) into one
- Having a diverse group of students who challenged the administration, the staff members, and the educational program within the school

The premise for this project is that the faculty's work on SEL will provide students with opportunities to grow and learn academically, socially, and emotionally (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 406). Furthermore, the SEL initiative is to support the needs of students, to increase the sense of hope and engagement of faculty members, and to build trust within the school community.

The next section will outline the project in detail, providing the reader with a framework for implementing a universal support of SEL in an elementary school. It is important to note that the school principal in this project is viewed as an instructional leader. "An Instructional Leader is

someone who first and foremost realizes that the strategies and instructional practices teachers use are the primary mover of student achievement” (Mendels, 2012, p. 58).

Establish the Context

The first step is recognizing that implementing a universal support of SEL is yet another change for school staff members. An administrator has to be cautious whenever change is proposed. The school is a busy place and many initiatives already exist. When introducing the concept of SEL, it is important to establish the context for the initiative with the intention of creating buy in from the staff members. There are many sources to draw from to develop the context for SEL. According to Collay (2013), when Instructional Leaders start by asking the right questions about how students learn, they enter a process that results in better teaching (p. 75).

The local context should be looked at first. As a group, I will have my staff members look at our Accountability Pillar Survey from the Alberta Government. This survey is conducted annually in the province of Alberta. Alberta school authorities and their schools gather information on the quality of education from teachers, students and parents. In particular, we will analyze the results for Safe and Caring Schools. This measures the percentage of teachers, parents, and students who agree that students are safe at school and are learning the importance of caring for others, are learning respect for others and are treated fairly in school. It is important to compare the results of the various stakeholders (teachers, parents, and students) and if differences exist, to discuss the reasons. Furthermore, comparisons of my district’s expected results and the provincial average results to the school results are also worthwhile to analyze (see Figure 1). If gaps exist, there is opportunity to use these results to start a conversation with teachers about improvement. Portin et al. point out, “effective principals... know how to make the best use of data, learning to ask useful questions of it and taking advantage of it for collaborative inquiry among teachers” (as cited in Mendel, 2012, p. 56).

1. Do our stakeholders perceive us as a safe and caring school?
2. Do discrepancies of results exist among the various stakeholders?
3. What is the greatest factor contributing to our results?
4. What educational practices address our results for safe and caring schools?

Figure 1. Creating Local Context ~ Sample Questions to Ask.

I would venture to say this discussion would lead to staff members identifying some of the most challenging students in our building and the frustrations in teaching them.

Another source of information for establishing the context for change is examining how often students are disciplined in the school. Strong achievement gains are seen when schools “use assessment data precisely to improve learning” (Fullan, 2009, p. 46). We use a tracking system to record any incidents: who was involved, where, and when it took place. The information is entered into a data base which can then reveal a variety of statistics such as: the most at risk students, the time when students have the most difficulty, the day of the week when most incidents occur, the response to the incident, and which faculty members struggle the most with students (see appendix A). School data on discipline provides an opportunity to discuss the benefits of a school focus on SEL.

Data collection on job satisfaction is another important source to draw from when trying to bring about change. Job satisfaction is directly related to the success of the organization and can provide context for a school wide initiative of SEL. All employees in my school district take the Gallup Q12 Engagement Survey (<http://www.gallup.com>). This survey measures the satisfaction and engagement of employees in their workplace. Figure 2 is a sample report that Gallup provides after employees participate in the survey. The data is compared to the results from the previous year and

it identifies the strengths and opportunities of the organization. In particular, the following variables will be analyzed:

- I know what is expected of me at work
- At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
- This last year, I have opportunities at work to learn and grow.

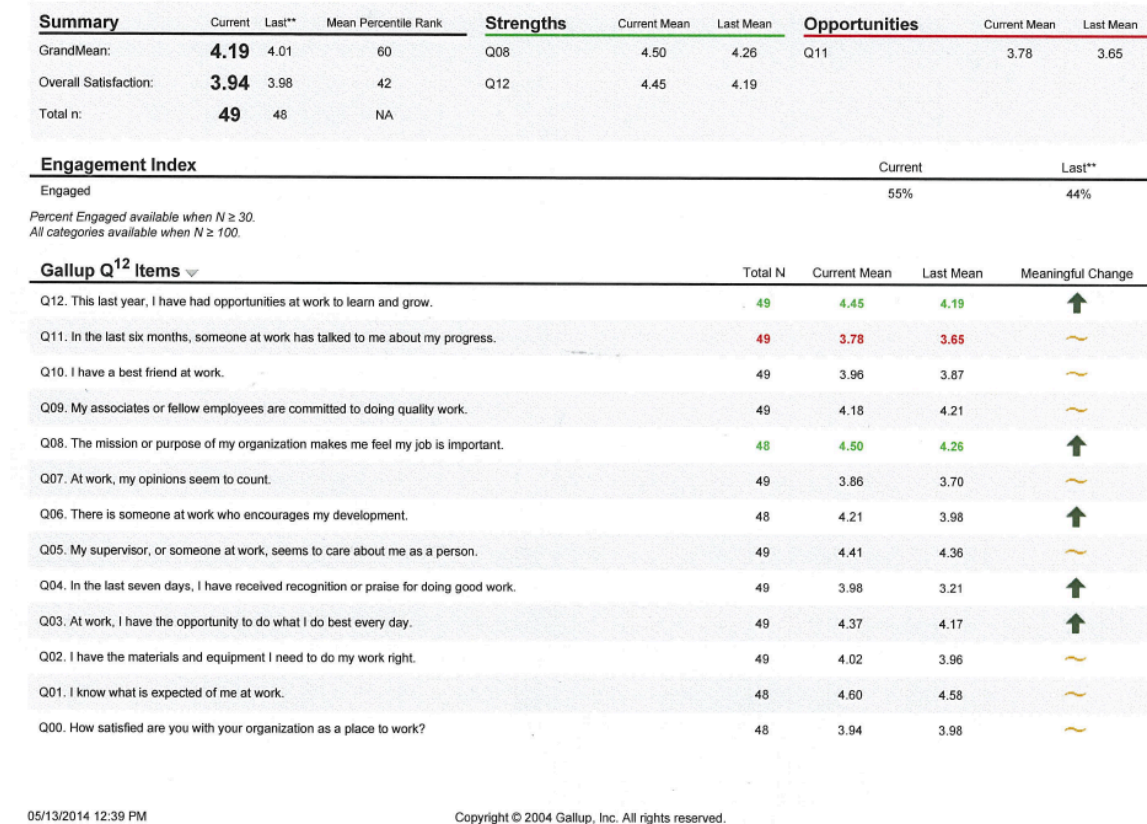


Figure 2. A Sample Report from the Q12 Gallup Survey.

Leithwood et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of the school administrator in developing the personal character of the faculty members in the areas of commitment, capacity and resilience so they are able to continue to develop their knowledge and skills. The Gallup organization provides manuals to analyze and unpack each of the statements with the group who took the survey. The process is intended to reveal the burning issues behind each of the measures. I predict faculty members will identify the difficulties in meeting the social and emotional needs of the children in

their classrooms as a contributing factor to the survey measure. This can provide another context to discuss with the faculty the need for a universal focus on SEL.

In addition to analyzing the local results to emphasize the need for change, studies conducted nationally and internationally are worthwhile to bring to the attention of staff members. Providing current literature on national trends of our youth, combined with the local trends, provides another context for staff members to invest in learning about SEL. For example, administrators may provide faculty members with the August 2013 Issue Brief: Social and Emotional Learning in Canada (Cooper, 2013), which is a report on social emotional learning in the Canadian education system (see appendix B). This report identifies the need for SEL, the benefits of SEL and the recommendations for SEL from a Canadian perspective. Canadian statistics are showing that large numbers of students are experiencing increasing social, emotional and behavioural challenges that can interfere with teaching and learning:

Among grade 6 students in Canada in 2010, 35% of girls and 27% of boys, and 44% of girls and 28% of boys in grade 10 reported high levels of emotional problems, such as depression, sadness, anxiety, and sleeping problems. In fact, by grade 10, 38% of girls and 24% of boys reported feeling depressed or low at least once a week. (Freeman et al. as cited in Cooper, 2013, p. 2)

Another important source to introduce is the CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) website (<http://www.casel.org/>) where staff members can further their knowledge on the need for SEL. “Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is the nation’s leading organization advancing the development of academic, social and emotional competence for all students” (CASEL Website, 2013, About CASEL, para. 1). Although this is an American Website, it provides useful information and tools that Canadian educators can learn and benefit from, and use in their teaching practice.

To introduce SEL, I will meet with faculty members in a collaborative setting, reveal the context for the SEL, as outlined in the previous paragraphs, and propose the idea of working on SEL as a universal support in our school. “In collaborative cultures, teachers exercise creative leadership together and take responsibility for helping all students learn” (Kohm & Nance, 2009, p. 67). In this setting, the faculty will have an opportunity to voice their concerns, ask questions, and offer solutions. With the teachers, I will establish a realistic commitment to SEL and go over a draft plan of action. For example, in a two-week period, one health block will be devoted to SEL and the SEL language will be integrated into all aspects of school life. It is valuable at this stage that the school administrator listens and considers the initial reaction of the staff to the initiative so strategic planning can be done in response to the faculty’s needs.

Aligning SEL to the Vision & Mission of the School, School District and the Goals of the Provincial Government

As was stated earlier, schools are busy buildings with multiple initiatives occurring simultaneously. It is important for school leaders to align SEL with the vision and mission of the school, school district and province. This is necessary for faculty members to understand that SEL will contribute to the direction of education. Bennis (1994) proposes, “be very clear about what strategic goals, the strategic vision of the institution, and to make that simple and clear and compelling, and that’s got to be communicated ceaselessly, indefatigably, and endlessly, in all sorts of ways” (p.4). Figure 3 provides an example of how this initiative aligned with my school’s 2014 - 2015 School Education Plan:

<p>Mission of École Notre Dame School</p>	<p>Together, students, families, staff and community are responsible for educating each individual and nurturing their growth within a Catholic/Christian atmosphere. This positive partnership fosters the</p>
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	development of lifelong learners and responsible, caring citizens.
Mission of Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools	Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools is a welcoming learning community that awakens the hearts and minds of students while educating and nurturing each to learn, live fully, and serve others.
Alberta Provincial Goal Priority	Quality Teaching and School Leadership
Provincial Outcome	<p>Teacher preparation and professional growth focus on the competencies needed to help students learn. Effective learning and teaching achieved through collaborative leadership.</p> <p>SEL will contribute to meeting the following competencies as outlined by Alberta Education:</p> <p>Know how to learn</p> <p>Think critically</p> <p>Identify and solve complex problems</p> <p>Create opportunities with an entrepreneurial spirit</p> <p>Demonstrate good communication skills and the ability to work cooperatively with others</p> <p>Demonstrate global and cultural understanding</p> <p>Identify and apply career and life skills</p>
Question Guiding the Team Inquiry	How can École Notre Dame School support students to increase their Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?
Specific Goal	Students and staff members will learn and apply the five core

Statement	competencies of social emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills & responsible decision-making within the next three years.
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Figure 3. École Notre Dame's 2014-2015 Eduplan Goals.

The school administrator should also assist the staff members to connect SEL to the mandated curriculum. In Alberta, the Health and Life Skills (K-9) general outcome of “relationship choices: students will develop effective interpersonal skills that demonstrate responsibility, respect and caring in order to establish and maintain healthy interactions” aligns with SEL (2002, p. 3). Within this general outcome, there are specific outcomes for each grade level that build upon previous learned outcomes. For example, beginning in Kindergarten, students “demonstrate knowledge of different kinds of feelings and a vocabulary of feeling words”, whereas in grade six students “recognize that individuals can choose their own emotional reactions to events and thoughts” (2002, p. 17-18). Whenever an initiative meets the curricular requirements, faculty members are more readily to accept the changes being proposed.

Timeline

Another component a school leader must establish is a realistic and achievable timeline. The timeline will be different in each school, as it is dependent upon other initiatives that are occurring in the school and the district. Figure 4 represents a sample of the timeline for École Notre Dame School. The administrator has the ability to monitor and adapt the implementation plan as it is rolling out. It is important to be flexible in the plan, however at the same time ensure that SEL is an active, living initiative within the school.

<p>Overall Goal: In the next three years, École Notre Dame is focusing on using the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) to further the academic success of students.</p>

Year	Focus	Specific Goals
1	<i>Self awareness, self management, and social awareness</i>	École Notre Dame Staff members will teach students self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness skills. The SEL language and strategies will be incorporated into all aspects of school life.
2	<i>Relationship skills and responsible decision-making</i>	École Notre Dame Staff members will review self-awareness, self-management skills, and social awareness skills and teach relationship skills and responsible decision-making skills. The SEL language and strategies will be incorporated into all aspects of school life.
3	<i>Universal Support of SEL</i>	École Notre Dame Staff members will establish a school wide plan to sustain SEL in all aspects of the school culture. Specific SEL learning outcomes for each grade level will be identified as a school plan for the years to come. The SEL language and strategies will be incorporated into all aspects of school life.

Figure 4. Sample Timeline.

Measures

Once the groundwork has been set and the SEL program is being implemented, the next question becomes, how will an administrator know if SEL is having the impact it was intended to? Strong achievement gains are seen when schools “use assessment data precisely to improve learning” (Fullan, 2009, p. 46). Early in the planning stage, it is critical to identify which measures will be used to indicate that SEL is impacting student learning and the hope and engagement of faculty members. Figure 5 represents the quantitative and qualitative data that will be analyzed throughout the implementation of SEL as a universal support at École Notre Dame School.

From Faculty Members:	
Data to Analyze	Expected Results
Q12 results for the variables of “I know what is expected of me at work”, “At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day” and “This last year, I have opportunities at work to learn and grow”.	There should be an increase in satisfaction in these three areas.
Informal check ins with faculty members, asking about specific students who typically have difficulties with expressing and managing emotions, getting along with others, and making responsible decisions. What are the attitudes towards these students? Are teachers discouraged/encouraged by the students’ progress?	If SEL is making a difference, faculty members should report more success with their students.

Monitoring of staff attendance at work.	There should be consistent attendance at work if faculty members are experiencing increased success with the students in their care.
From students:	
Data to Analyze	Expected Results
Monthly comparisons of the behavior tracking sheets will be monitored.	With the implementation of SEL, the number of entries should decrease and the teachers who previously had difficulty with students should decrease.
Student achievement can be analyzed annually with formal results such as the Provincial Achievement Tests or by administering standardized testing such as the Canadian Achievement Tests. Another source will be on-going assessments done by the classroom teacher.	If SEL is having a positive impact, student achievement should increase.
Observations of the students in their interactions with adults and peers.	Students should be able to articulate how they are feeling, expected behavior should increase, and students should demonstrate care for each other. Evidence of self-regulation and problem solving skills should be evident among students.
Student attendance is another great source of information.	If students are happy, satisfied, and taken care of, overall student attrition should decrease. This includes attendance at school and transfers to

	neighboring schools.
From Parents:	
Data to Analyze	Expected Results
Intentionally seek feedback from parents. School Council is a forum where parents can be asked for their opinions and experiences. Create a parent survey and administer it when parents are in the school, for example during student-parent-teacher conferences.	Parents should have knowledge of SEL and be able to articulate how it is helping their children.
Analyze the number of parents volunteering at the school and offering to help out.	If the school is a positive place to be, parents are more likely to be engaged in the school and school related activities.
From Students, Parents and Teachers:	
Data to Analyze	Expected Results
Consider the annual Accountability Pillar Report from the Alberta Government.	The overall results for Safe and Caring Schools should be comparable to or above the current provincial average and when compared to the annual school results, it should be maintained or higher than previous years.

Figure 5. Sample Data to Analyze.

Measures should come from a variety of sources and compiled to determine if SEL is making a positive impact on the hope and engagement of staff members. If SEL is not making a difference, the school leader should examine what Payton et al., (2008) identify as the “four

recommended practices for skill training” for SEL, which school leaders should insist upon and support within the school. These recommendations are commonly known as SAFE programs.

- **Sequenced:** Does the program apply a planned set of activities to develop skills sequentially in a step-by-step fashion?
- **Active:** Does the program use active forms of learning such as role-plays and behavioral rehearsal with feedback?
- **Focused:** Does the program devote sufficient time exclusively to developing social and emotional skills?
- **Explicit:** Does the program target specific social and emotional skills? (p. 6)

The school leader may identify a need to reinvest in one or a combination of these areas to ensure that SEL is making a difference. For example, if there is an increase in the number of behaviour tracking sheets being submitted to the office, the administrator could devote some time to collaborate with staff members and analyze the above questions to identify what aspects of the SEL initiative are going well and which practices are needing more attention.

Resources and Professional Development

There is an abundance of literature to support the implementation of SEL. Figure 6 lists the various resources École Notre School will be using.

Resource Name	Why the resource was chosen?	How the resource will be used?
The Zones of Regulation (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduced by my school district as a district wide positive behaviour support • Laid out as a series of 18 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the beginning of implementation, year 1 and beyond • All grade 1-4 teachers will

	<p>lessons, building on skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaches students to identify emotions with colors, learn strategies to stay in or move to another zone • Includes ready made materials masters and a CD with electronic material that can be used • Moves from identifying emotions, to regulation of emotions, and expands to problem-solving skills • Can be used with children as young as preschool age up to adulthood 	<p>receive this book</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is expected that the resource will be used in classroom lessons by the homeroom teacher • Visuals from the book will be found in classrooms and around the school
Strong Start (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specifically for children in kindergarten to grade two • builds emotional resiliency and competence among young students • 10 sequential lessons • Provides visuals, sample 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the beginning of implementation, year 1 and beyond • Preschool and Kindergarten teachers will receive this resource • It is expected that the

	<p>script, and a literature list</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be completed within one school year 	<p>Preschool and Kindergarten teachers will use this resource to plan lessons for their classroom</p>
<p>Thinking About YOU Thinking about ME (2007)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduces perspective taking • Provides problem solving strategies for successful interpersonal interactions • Provides visuals and lessons • Although this book is written for children with disabilities, the lessons can be used with all students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In year 2 of implementation, when our SEL initiative moves from self-awareness to others • Will purchase books for grade level collaborative teams
<p>CASEL (http://www.casel.org/),</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free online resource that can be accessed by anyone • Provides up to date research and resources, such as literature lists and videos on SEL • CASEL has existed for over 20 years, a seminal resource for SEL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In year 1 and beyond, will provide the link to teachers and parents and encourage them to visit the website • Will use this resource in collaborative sessions with teachers • Will publish this link in the school newsletter
<p>Social Thinking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free online resource that can 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In year 2 of

(http://www.socialthinking.com)	be accessed by anyone <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lists products to teach social thinking skills • Provides research based articles on SEL • Can contact the Social Thinking Team with questions 	implementation and beyond, when our SEL initiative moves from self to others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will use this resource in collaborative sessions with teachers • Teachers and parents can use this resource at their own leisure, will publish this link in the school newsletter
Pinterest (https://www.pinterest.com/)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested by teachers themselves • Ready made Zones ideas and resources for teachers to use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the beginning of implementation, year 1 and beyond • Teachers can use this resource at their own leisure

Figure 6. Resources for SEL.

Often, when resources are considered, it is limited to the research and literature that supports and outlines what to do. It is equally important for an administrator to identify the people who can champion and reinforce SEL as a universal support as part of the collaborative culture needed to support an SEL initiative. The following people resources have capacity to assist with the initiative and are worth consideration:

- Faculty Members – Once the school faculty is introduced to SEL, you can establish a school SEL Team comprised of teachers and support staff. This group can meet monthly.

They can function as, but not limited to, being touch points for critical feedback, act as SEL leads, or contribute to creating a culture where SEL is alive and well within the school.

- Students – Often we underestimate the power and wisdom of our students. With the guidance of a faculty member, a student SEL Team can be established. Student perspectives are critical and having opportunities for student voice will create relevancy and trust in the SEL initiative.

- Administrative Team Members – The assistant principal, the school counselor, and the learning support facilitator can share in the leadership required to support SEL. Having all leadership team members contribute to a common SEL vision will strengthen its impact within the school.

- Parents - Parents have a wealth of information and can significantly contribute to the SEL program. When parents see positive results in the school, they can be the school's greatest advertisement within the community. They may bring ideas from the parent's perspective, which are worth considering.

- Community and District Resources – The school administrator should consider the community resources that can contribute to SEL. For example, in Alberta, the Regional Collaborative Service Delivery Model (RCSD) is a partnership between school boards, Alberta Health Services, Child and Family Services Authorities and other stakeholders. Workers from these organizations can assist with SEL training of staff members, working with students on SEL, and providing SEL parent information nights.

- District level supports can be tapped into as well. Often there are consultants who can assist with professional development, research or support.

On-going support and professional development of SEL are necessary for the SEL initiative to gain momentum and grow to the point that it is a seamless component of our professional practice.

This will be dependent upon the strengths of the staff in the area of SEL. Dedicating a portion of the monthly staff meeting to SEL or providing teacher collaboration during the school day is a way to check with staff members about what is going well and what is needed. It is through this feedback that administrators can support staff members with the necessary encouragement, professional development, healthy pressure and resources to ensure the SEL initiative is gaining momentum and becoming part of the school culture.

Celebration

As the SEL plan rolls out, the school leader should offer encouragement and celebrate the small achievements of students and staff members along the way. This acknowledgment will assist with the implementation as it demonstrates that SEL is highly valued within the school. Although this may seem like a small consideration within the SEL initiative, being valued provides energy and fuel to students and teachers along the journey. It also can be highly rewarding for the school administrator when success is seen within the school. For example, *The Zones of Regulation* book (2011) dedicates a lesson to “Celebrating My Use of Tools” (p. 161-162). In this section, students can earn a “Tool Award!” each time they use a Zone strategy or tool. These awards lead up to earning a “Zones License”. For teachers, school data that shows improvement in student behaviour, student achievement, and improved peer and adult relationships and interactions should be shared and celebrated with faculty members throughout the implementation.

Conclusion

The school leader has a significant role to play in the implementation of SEL as a universal support within a school. My project was two-fold; SEL was seen as a needed support for my school, and subsequently this sample framework was written to assist my administrative colleagues to develop an SEL initiative within their schools. It is not expected that that my plan will work in all elementary schools, rather the purpose of framework is to outline what I considered for the

implementation of SEL as a universal support at my school. It is my hope that my journey will inspire and assist other school administrators to consider and implement a similar SEL initiative.

Chapter 4

Introduction

I consider myself fairly reflective in my practice, I am often more critical of my work than others are, and I spend countless hours wrestling with ideas in my head. In my opinion, this quality has pushed me beyond where I thought I would go, including pursuing my masters in education. I have to admit, I entered this journey with a fairly limited understanding of the relationship between teaching, research, and professional learning. As a principal, this revelation was humbling. Over the last two years, I experienced many emotions, some not so welcome as others such as uncertainty and doubt. Nevertheless, I entered this journey to expand my knowledge, to challenge my beliefs, and to grow professionally so I can be part of the exciting, changing future of education. Feeling overwhelmed at times was just part of the process. Never could I have imagined where I am now in terms of the professional growth I experienced over the last two years. It truly has been a worthwhile and rewarding journey.

A Shift in Professional Thinking

The most significant shift for me in my professional thinking is that I gained an understanding that the tension I experienced, and I continue to experience, is healthy. I used to view tension as unnecessary and would try to avoid it as much as possible. I now understand the concern one of my administrative colleagues expressed after a difficult conversation with faculty members, “no one said a thing; this worries me”. The session left him wondering if what he presented had created enough tension to drive the staff members into action.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle define tension as a multifaceted concept that reforms education (2009, p. 135). It is worthwhile to understand tension in the simplest form. Tension is something strained; therefore one may feel stressed or filled with anxiety. In education, tension is the catalyst for inquiry and should exist in every segment of it (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In

this view, tension is regarded as being healthy and necessary, a natural component of the inquiry process in educational reform. Tension causes “clashes with many prevailing ideas about teaching, learning, learners, diversity, knowledge, practice, expertise, evidence, school organization, and educational purposes” (p.124). It is through the intricate working of these tensions that we begin to see transformative education. Traditionally, there is a natural avoidance of tension, what Cochran-Smith and Lytle bring to life is the notion that “generative tensions” create genuine change for students (2009, p. 135).

Understanding the significance of tension is not enough. Meaningful gains for students are achieved when tension leads to action. My masters program has empowered me to take action. This journey has increased my capacity to be confident and knowledgeable. My ability to question has increased. I have gained more courage to analyze and question the practices of colleagues, the goals of the district, and provincial mandates. Overall, my interactions with students are more focused, the professional conversations I engage in are richer, the professional development sessions I prepare are founded on research, and I feel I am prepared to take on new and diverse challenges. Tension has always been present in my teaching career, however I underestimated the significance of it prior to my masters’ coursework. As I reflect, I now view tension as the motivation to expand my professional understanding, to research the best known practices, and to provide quality educational experiences to those I serve: students, families, communities, and colleagues. Tension is the fuel for my professional growth and practice.

My project, Social Emotional Learning: Teacher Hope and Engagement, was prompted by the tension within my school in meeting the needs of the diverse population of students and the effect on teacher hope and engagement. The concept of Social Emotional Learning is intended to challenge teachers and faculty members to examine their beliefs about student behaviour, building relationships, and learning. It is hoped the project will empower faculty

members to realize they have the ability to make significant changes in their levels of hope and engagement in the workplace and in student achievement. Although this is where the tension currently exists in my school, down the road, there will be new tensions that emerge which should also lead to research in action.

Curriculum and Ideologies

The first two graduate courses on curriculum and ideologies were by far the most significant for me in terms of the amount of learning I experienced. It was a combination of not knowing what to expect at the graduate level and of the realization that my definition of curriculum, something I thought I really understood, was grossly underdeveloped. I soon found out there were many aspects of curriculum that I had never considered, such as implicit or explicit curriculum. Furthermore, I had no idea that curriculum ideologies existed and that they aligned to worldviews and belief systems. Learning about curriculum and ideologies challenged me to identify my beliefs about education and curriculum, and identify who I am as a practitioner. Knowing what I value and believe has provided clarity for my work, specifically how I go about tackling the tensions that exist in my practice. While there are many ways to go about teaching and learning, the way I deliver curriculum is connected to what I believe.

Eisner defines curriculum ideologies as the multiple “beliefs about what schools should teach, for what ends, and for what reasons” (1995, p. 47). The ideologies represent the value systems and the curriculum provides the means to address these values. My beliefs are represented by a combination of ideologies. I follow a Religious Orthodoxy ideology because I work in a Catholic school district that has a prescribed curricula based on biblical beliefs. My SEL project reflects two other ideologies I value, Progressivism and Reconceptualism. For example, within Progressivism ideology, “emotion could not be disregarded in dealing with matters intellectual, because how children felt about what they studied influenced how they

thought about what they studied” (Eisner, 1995, p. 69). Similarly, Eisner provides this description for Reconceptualism, “what is needed, especially in a culture already characterized by high levels of alienation and personal indifference, is an approach to teaching that does not exacerbate one of our culture’s major problems, indifference, but, on the contrary, compensates and helps students overcome it” (Eisner, 1995, p. 78). Both of these ideologies recognize the learner as a social, emotional, and cognitive being, who acquires knowledge in an environment filled with problem-solving and inquiry opportunities. There is a relational element between the teacher and the student that contributes to learning. These ideologies are similar to Social Emotional Learning, which is considered more complex than curriculum; rather it is a framework in which the processes of interaction between the student and the teacher contribute as much as the content to SEL of the child (Bouffard, 2014 and Norris, 2003).

During this coursework, I learned that the worldviews represented in the ideologies seem to have connections to historical times. For example, Religious Orthodoxy reflects biblical times, with a central theme that truths are based on God’s work. Rational Humanist is a reflection of the class system that existed for many years and was identified around the sixteen hundreds, in which elitists were considered more privileged, and only a select few could be educated. Contrary to these early ideologies, other ideologies emerged which challenged the early views of learners, teaching and curriculum to be more inclusive of the diversity of people. Today, these ideologies still exist in some form within our society. We see it in the choice of education that is available across our nation and all over the world, with public, separate, and private schools. Some schools represent multiple ideologies, while others can be based on one significant ideology. In my work as an administrator, I see these multiple ideologies being represented locally by parents and colleagues, provincially within the ministry of education, and globally in the trends in education that emerge. I was fascinated when I learned about the ideologies and it led me to a question. As

the world continues to change, will other ideologies emerge? For example, what values would describe the digital world and will these be identified or named in an ideology that represents the 21st century learner?

Change Leader

There is one assignment that I am ever grateful to have completed, as it provided an opportunity for me to think and learn about myself as a school principal. For the course on Instructional Leadership & Change, we had to complete a self-evaluation of Michael Fullan's nine characteristics of a change leader and create an action plan. At the time, I had just completed my fourth year as a principal at a kindergarten to grade nine rural school, that had one hundred and eighty three students. I was, and still am, a fairly new administrator. Prior to accepting this position, I was an assistant principal at two other schools and had experience teaching in four culturally diverse schools. I taught for twenty-one years.

Although I had some administrative experience as a vice-principal and I experienced many years of teaching, this did not prepare me for my first principal placement. The school was experiencing great difficulty. Out of the ten measures on the Alberta Accountability Pillar, six of the measures were either an issue or concern. The identified problems were Education Quality, Provincial Achievement Test Results in the Acceptable and Excellence range, Work Preparation, Parental Involvement, and overall School Improvement. I did not apply for the position, rather the district asked me to consider it because I was probably the best fit for it at the time. I previously attended and taught at this school, I lived in the community, and my children were still attending the school. The district and community were desperate for improvement and I was offered any support I needed if I took the position. After weighing the pros and cons, I felt I had nothing to lose. I entered the position with "a growth mindset, combined with nonjudgmentalism wrapped in transparency and open sharing," which allowed me to grow and learn (Fullan, 2011, p.

80). I rarely had a moment to reflect on my practice and the work seemed endless. My work was similar peeling an onion, as one layer came off, there was another one waiting... I even shed a few tears along the way!

The most difficult work for me in those first four years was dealing with the staff members who were negatively contributing to the culture of the school. I spent many sleepless nights replaying conversations and worrying about the tension I was causing by questioning their teaching practices. The work was grueling. I started by trying to empower faculty members to realize they had the ability to change the situation of the school. We focused on our values and beliefs and worked on our vision and mission. I took the stance that all decisions would be made in the best interest of the students, I mandated positive communication with parents, and I worked with staff to change the culture of the school. It was difficult and unpleasant at times. Some staff members embraced the challenge, while others dragged their feet, and some were stuck. After trying to help, it was apparent some drastic measures were needed. I evaluated a teacher and recommended dismissal (the teacher chose to retire instead), I wrote over a half a dozen letters of reprimand, two staff members retired, and three staff members transferred; this was fairly significant for a staff of eighteen people. Colleagues, who I previously considered friends, were no longer part of the school. Many times, I felt alone, I doubted my actions, and I was frustrated.

The Change Leader assignment provided an opportunity for me to reflect on what went well, what did not go so well, and to consider changes in my practice that were based on research. The assignment also helped me to heal as I discovered I was still full of emotion that accompanied the work I did. I came away from this assignment with renewed faith in my work, knowing what I did had to be done, and the affirmation that, although I made mistakes along the way, the work made a significant difference in the school and the lives of the students. After five

years working in the school, I am proud to say that all ten of the measures on the Accountability Pillar were either in the good or excellent range. Reflecting using the Leadership Rating Form affirmed the hard work I encountered in the past and I continue to encounter every day (Fullan, 2011, p. 63). My goal as an administrator continues to be improvement; I learned the key to having high standards of education in a school is creating a mindset among faculty that is always seeking to improve. This means my work is never done, I must continue to lead as Fullan (2011) outlines in *Change Leader* and my school must continue to make “positive movement” so we are seen as a viable school option for the students in the community (p. 60).

Professional Research

Another aspect in my professional thinking that has evolved over the last two years has been the respect and high regard I have for the researchers who publish their work. Previously, I rarely had time for professional reading, now I make time because I know the research will help me lead my school in continuous improvement. I gained knowledge in understanding how to evaluate professional articles and journals, something that I never knew prior to my graduate courses. Knowing that many researchers have experienced peer reviews before being published tells me that the information is worthy of consideration and is on the cutting edge in education. I also have some knowledge of seminal researchers, which I can refer to, and know if they are cited in other works, the research is probably credible. The beauty of reading professional articles is I can analyze what has been done and use what fits in within the local context of my school. Research often drives what we do in schools and more specifically what happens in the classroom. Our students are positively impacted when change in schools is rooted by research and I am grateful to have increased my knowledge of it.

Life After Masters

I have at least ten years left in my career. Part of my motivation to complete my masters degree was to open doors so I can work beyond the school level. I honestly believe I do not have the energy to spend the next ten years as a school principal. Although the work is highly rewarding, the pace is crazy. For me, the second best aspect of education after the students, is working with the curriculum. This is one of the reasons why I chose to do my masters in Curriculum Instruction rather than Leadership. I can easily see myself embracing a new challenge that has some component of working with curriculum.

Last fall, I moved to a new school so I am anticipating I will be a principal for another couple of years. I do not think it is fair to my school community to leave after one year; I believe I need at least three to five years to make any significant improvements. My school is in year one of the implementation of my Social Emotional Learning Project and I want to see this through to year three. We are already experiencing improvements in student behaviour and faculty satisfaction, which is highly rewarding. As this project emerges, I will have no problem sharing our experiences and results with other schools in my district. Furthermore, if our results are favorable, I will be prepared to share our work with other schools in the province.

I also have aspirations to join our district's learning services team, either as the district principal or a curriculum coordinator. I believe that my increased knowledge in curriculum instruction will contribute immensely to these roles. Specifically, this masters has enhanced my skills to facilitate the process of change. I have an increased understanding how to empower people to consider evidence-based studies and conduct action research to test and evaluate best practices. Furthermore, there will be many opportunities to mentor colleagues in a district level position and I will share my masters experience with others and encourage them to also advance their education.

Although I am not actively seeking employment at the Provincial level, I do keep an eye on the postings with Alberta Education. I check the eligibility, the qualifications and competencies they are looking for, and familiarize myself with the positions that are being advertised. If I ever see a position that involves working on Social Emotional Learning, I would probably apply for it. My passion for Social Emotional Learning reflects my values and ideologies and having an opportunity to work on a SEL initiative at the provincial level would be highly gratifying.

Wherever my educational journey leads me, I know that I will continue to learn. I am not afraid to explore new challenges or change positions. As I mentioned earlier, I am motivated by the tensions that exist and the opportunity to learn from the work that is required for improvement. Micheal Fullan's main theme in his book, *Change Leader* provides a fairly good summary for what this masters has taught me:

“You learn through practice... You look for and seek growth in yourself and others...

You expect to learn from mistakes... You believe that there is room for improvement in yourself and others” (2011, p. 47).

No matter the challenges that are ahead, having this mindset places me in a better position to face the future of education, which is forever changing.

Conclusion

I hope that other administrators and teachers will view my project, *Social Emotional Learning: Teacher Hope and Engagement*, as an exemplar for school improvement. Three key recommendations for other educators who may be interested in engaging in Social Emotional Learning include:

1. Strategically plan with your people in mind. Surround yourself with people who will support what you believe and what you want to accomplish. Get to know the strengths of

your faculty members and students. Use these strengths to empower the school community to be part of the school improvement. Experiment by engaging them to use their abilities to accomplish SEL goals. Push for more when they positively contribute to school improvement. For example, our physical education specialist, is also the school representative for our Healthy Schools Initiative. We spoke about our school's SEL early in the year. From the district meetings, she was on board with our SEL from the onset. Throughout this school year, she planned a school-wide session for students on the Zones of Regulation during one of our collaborative sessions with teachers. The students were pumped and came away with knowing more about expressing their emotions and how these emotions affect others. Since the first session, she has organized a second session and is willing to coordinate SEL student sessions throughout the year when we have collaboration with teachers.

2. Closely analyze your school data and monitor feedback from your staff members. Identify what it is telling you and what it is not telling you. Develop an improvement approach that will work for your school. Watch simple data along the way so you can provide quick and easy feedback. Be flexible in the plan if needed, however be cautious that the integrity of SEL is not lost in the changes. Be weary of the implementation dip and abandoning goals too soon in the process. When faculty members experience positive change, it motivates them to do more, so make a big deal about the success along the way. For example, we scheduled a common block time for all students in the building to be working on the Zones of Regulation lessons. We soon found out that this was not effective for the homeroom teacher. They felt we needed to be flexible with the time so that it did not impact other subject areas. We changed the schedule, but not the expectation. Every week, all students will receive a lesson on Zones of Regulation.

3. Make Social Emotional Learning a priority in your building. Start by learning as much as you can about SEL, including familiarizing yourself with Canadian research. Second, actively participate in the SEL initiative as a learner. Be persistent about your belief in SEL, but open enough to have discussions that may challenge your beliefs. Use this as an opportunity to educate, not to lecture. Third, drop into classrooms when the SEL curriculum is being delivered and use SEL in all aspects of school life, especially when dealing with discipline issues. For example, I have the Zones of Regulation poster in my office. The same poster is in every classroom and it is posted in the school hallways. I use it to help students identify how they are feeling and to facilitate problem-solving. I also have extra copies to give to parents so they can use the same language with their child at home.

Whether a project topic is motivated by personal interest, by school improvement, or by a requirement for a course, the author has to be passionate about the work that is being done. My passion for my project is driven for my deep desire to help colleagues feel better about their work. SEL is a win-win situation. I know that when students are regulated and making achievement gains, teachers experience higher levels of satisfaction from their work. The research is there; it is worthwhile to invest in Social Emotional Learning as a universal support for supporting positive behaviour.

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Appendix A.

Behaviour Tracking Sheet

Notre Dame School

Revised August / 11

Student Conduct Report (To be completed by the referring staff member)

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

Grade: **K** **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** Week: 1 or 2

Staff member's name: _____

BS	E1	1	MR	E2	2	L	LR	E3	3	D	AS
Before	Entry AM	8:50- 11:00	Morning Recess	Entry AM	Recess 11:20 - 12:20	Lunch	Lunch Recess	Entry PM	1:20 - 3:20	Dismissal	After School

Day: **Mon.** **Tues.** **Wed.** **Thurs.** **Fri.**

Issue of Concern: (1 only)

- 1. Pushing
- 2. Hitting
- 3. Teasing/Name Calling
- 4. Kicking
- 5. Fighting
- 6. Swearing/Inappropriate Language
- 7. Argumentative
- 8. Dishonesty/Lying
- 9. Non-compliance
- 10. Disrespect
- 11. Major Disruption of Student Learning
- 12. Throwing Something
- 13. Theft
- 14. Vandalism
- 15. Leaving class without permission
- 16. Late(Chronic)
- 17. Absent(Chronic)
- 18. Bullying
- 19. Bus
- 20. Other _____

Location: (1 only)

- 1. Classroom
- 2. Play Structure Outside
- 3. Gym
- 4. Washroom - Main
- 5. Washroom - Front
- 6. Hallway - Front
- 7. Hallway - Main
- 8. Library
- 9. Computer Lab
- 10. Office
- 10. Field Trip
- 11. Bus
- 12. Facilitator Room
- 13. Soccer Field
- 14. Boot Room
- 15. Classroom Lunch

Teacher Response:

- 1. Verbal warning reprimand
- 2. Note in agenda
- 3. One block time out
- 5. Am Break time out
- 6. Lunch hour time out
- 7. After school time out

Admin Response:

- 1. Verbal warning reprimand
- 2. Note in agenda
- 3. One block time out
- 4. Two block time out
- 5. Am Recess time out
- 6. Lunch hour time out
- 7. After school time out (length of time _____)
- 8. In school suspension (length of time _____)
- 9. Out of school suspension (length of time _____)
- 10. Behavioral Plan Implementation
- 11. Other _____

Have parents been contacted? Yes No Name of Contact: _____

Teacher Name

Admin Signature

Appendix B.

Issue Brief: Social and Emotional Learning in Canada

Issue Brief: Social and Emotional Learning in Canada

Prepared by:
Guyn Cooper Research Associates
Commissioned by: Carthy Foundation
and Max Bell Foundation

August 2013

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a framework for developing social and emotional competencies that is gaining interest in Canada and the United States. The purpose of this issue brief is to provide an overview of the field of social and emotional learning in Canada, particularly within the education system. It presents a concise synopsis of recent research on the need for and the benefits of SEL initiatives, along with the findings from consultations with a cross-section of leaders and others working in the fields of SEL and mental health promotion.

WHAT IS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING?

Social and emotional learning, as described by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), is the process of acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions; developing caring and concern for others; making responsible decisions; establishing positive relationships; and handling challenging situations capably. The field of SEL evolved from research on prevention and resilience.¹

The definitions of the five competency clusters for students are:

Social & Emotional Learning Core Competencies



- **Self-awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.
- **Self-management:** The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.
- **Social awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.
- **Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.

- **Responsible decision-making:** The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.

The authors and foundations would like to express their thanks to the many individuals who graciously contributed their time and expertise to this project.

THE PROBLEM: MANY CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE DEALING WITH SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIOURAL CHALLENGES THAT HINDER THEIR SUCCESS IN SCHOOL AND IN LIFE

Many students are experiencing serious social, emotional, and behavioural challenges that can interfere with both teaching and learning and are also associated with teen and adult physical violence and criminality,² substance abuse and addictions,³ and a host of other serious problems in adolescence and adulthood.⁴

- Among grade 6 students in Canada in 2010, 35% of girls and 27% of boys, and 44% of girls and 28% of boys in grade 10 reported high levels of emotional problems, such as depression, sadness, anxiety, and sleeping problems. In fact, by grade 10, 38% of girls and 24% of boys reported feeling depressed or low at least once a week.⁵ Children who are emotionally distressed (e.g., sad, anxious, upset) are pre-occupied and have trouble paying attention and remembering what is taught in the classroom.⁶ Children who can regulate their emotions often have higher literacy and math scores than those who cannot.⁷
- Among grade 6 students in Canada in 2010, 27% of girls and 30% of boys, as well as 45% of girls and 48% of boys in grade 10 reported high levels of behavioural problems, such as cutting classes, getting into fights, talking back to teachers, and making other people do what they want.⁸ Controlling for other factors, behavioural problems at ages 6 and 11 have been shown to predict lower math and reading test scores at age 17, probably because bad behaviour impedes the acquisition of cognitive skills that are the foundation for learning.⁹
- Bullying among children is common and frequent: In 2010, 22% of Canadian students reported being victimized by bullies, 12% reported that they bullied others, and 41% reported that they were both victims and bullies. Among children in grade 6, 7% of girls and 8% of boys reported that they had been bullied at least once a week or more in the last few months. Children who bully others often exhibit other behavioural problems, those who are bullied often experience emotional problems, and those who are both bullies and victims are at high risk of both behavioural and emotional problems.¹⁰ In addition, students' negative perceptions about bullying at school can reduce their level of engagement in school.¹¹
- Research has identified students' problem behaviours as one of the key factors leading to teacher stress and burnout¹² and teachers are spending a considerable amount of time on behaviour management issues.¹³
- Children who are unable to manage their emotions and exhibit good social skills are less likely to complete high school. In 2009/10, 23% of Canadian youth aged 18 to 19 years had not completed high school.¹⁴ Completing high school is a necessary precondition for the pursuit of higher learning and, in today's economy, for stable, well-paid employment.¹⁵ In addition, there is a strong and positive association between level of education and health status and life expectancy,¹⁶ community and civic engagement (voting, charitable giving, volunteering, membership in community organizations, non-voting political activity),¹⁷ positive family functioning,¹⁸ and compliance with the law.¹⁹
- High school dropout is expensive for the individual and for society as a whole. Each year, high school dropouts cost Canada's social assistance programs and criminal justice system \$1.3 billion and the health care system \$23.8 billion, and result in tax losses of \$378 million, among other expenses.²⁰

The most common response in Canada to children's burgeoning social, emotional, and behavioural problems has been the introduction of in-school or after-school programs targeting one specific type of problem behaviour, such as bullying or drug use, or one particular skill, such as conflict resolution. These programs are usually short term and rarely integrated into the regular curriculum. Many of these programs have been developed in response to a local need, are not evidence-based, and have not been empirically evaluated,²¹ and many do not include fundamental features for effectiveness. Finally, even when evidence-based programs are offered, it is not always clear that they are implemented with fidelity. "Fidelity" means that the program model is closely followed, with no changes to the content, instruction, or length of the program. Alterations to the program model mean that the program may not be effective any more.

HOW SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AFFECT EDUCATIONAL AND LIFE COURSE OUTCOMES

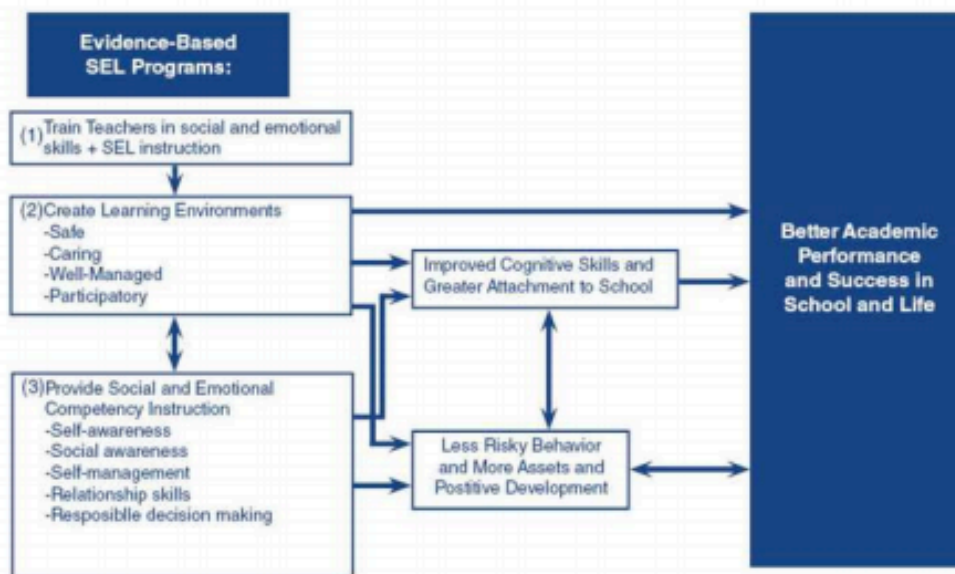
Recent research shows that lacking emotional self-regulation in childhood can predict a wide range of consequential life outcomes, including income and financial security, occupational prestige, physical and mental health, criminality,²² and gambling problems,²³ even when family background and other factors are controlled for. Studies following children longitudinally from childhood to early adulthood (age 23) and mid-adulthood (age 42) have linked early behavioural and emotional problems to lower earnings in adulthood.²⁴ Other research has linked specific personality traits with job performance and wages across a broad range of occupational categories.²⁵ Social and emotional competencies may be more crucial than ever before in today's labour market,

which places less emphasis on the ability to complete routine tasks and more importance on flexibility and problem solving and communication skills.²⁶ For instance, the Conference Board of Canada identifies inter-personal skills and personal management skills, such as positive attitudes, responsibility, and adaptability, among the fundamental skills for employability in the 21st century.²⁷

Advances in neuroscience are clarifying the complex relationships between emotional self-regulation and the brain's executive functions (e.g., reasoning and memory), which are crucial to learning. Research also tells us that social and emotional skills can be learned, and provides direction about the most effective ways of teaching these skills with a view to preventing school failure. A mounting body of research indicates that social and emotional skills are as important as cognitive skills to success in school²⁸ and beyond,²⁹ and that they may be more malleable than cognitive skills, especially in early and middle childhood.³⁰ It has long been recognized by teachers that students who can pay attention, persevere with tasks, solve problems, and work well with others generally do better in school than those who don't have these abilities or whose abilities are compromised by stress, anxiety, depression, or anger. In a nutshell, promoting social and emotional competence can facilitate cognitive skills and the development of self-regulation and, ultimately, learning.³¹

SEL interventions can also improve the classroom environment and student behaviour,³² reducing teachers' stress and allowing them to focus on teaching. Instructional and social and emotional competence programming for teachers, included as part of the post-secondary curriculum and through in-service training, can further improve teacher-student relationships, effective classroom management, and effective implementation of SEL programs.³³

How Evidence-Based SEL Programs Work to Produce Greater Student Success in School and Life *



*Modified from a diagram presented in Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). 2003. *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs*. (Chicago, IL: CASEL), p. 7.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

SEL programs are designed to help young people from early childhood to adulthood to master age-appropriate social and/or emotional skills.

SEL programs tend to fall into three categories, violence prevention, mental health promotion, and character education, with each type of programming targeting one or more of the five core social and emotional competencies described earlier. They can also be:

- "universal" (provided to all children through school wide implementation to promote mental health and prevent emotional or behavioural problems);

- “selective” (provided to groups of children with similar risk factors to prevent emotional or behavioural problems); or
- “indicated” (provided to individual children or groups of children experiencing emotional or behavioural problems).

SEL programs can be delivered at home, in the community, or in schools, although most of the universal, evidence-based programs are delivered in schools by trained teachers. This is because effective SEL programs follow a specific curriculum, usually over a period of months, with each lesson building upon the learnings of the last.

Effective SEL programs are informed by both developmental psychology and research-identified best practices in program content, structure and delivery. While social and emotional learning can occur in stand-alone programs if those programs are evidence-based, the most effective approaches are school-based and comprehensive, and include two components which, together, increase children’s attachment to school, reduce risky behaviours, and improve social and emotional development:

- Programs must be delivered in “safe, caring, participatory, and well-managed learning environments,”³⁴ which generally involve intentional, systematic changes to classroom and school climate, SEL training for teachers, and community and parental involvement; and
- Programs must provide “sequenced, developmentally-appropriate, classroom-based instruction in five major areas of social and emotional competence,”³⁵ where SEL is infused into the regular school curriculum and continues over several years, with the instructional content in each grade building upon that in the last.

In addition, rigorous evaluations that include control or comparison groups have shown that, to be effective, whether they are embedded in a school curriculum or offered as a stand-alone initiative, SEL programs must include certain features and be structured in particular ways. Programs must:

- be carefully and thoughtfully planned and executed, and free of major implementation problems, and
- explicitly target specific social and emotional skills; reflect a curriculum with sequenced activities that teach the skills, with each module or lesson building upon the learnings of the last; and include active learning strategies that include opportunities to practice new social and emotional skills, such as role playing.³⁶ These features are often summarized under the acronym SAFE (sequenced, active, focused, and explicit). Only those programs which include *all four* of the SAFE features are likely to be effective.³⁷

Some school-based SEL programs have been demonstrated to improve students’ social skills, emotional well-being, and academic outcomes. Two large meta-analyses of SEL programs in the U.S. reported the following:

- Analysis of 180 studies of school-based, “universal” SEL programs involving 277,977 students found that programs improved participants’ outcomes in six areas: social-emotional skills in test situations, attitudes toward self and others, social behaviours, conduct, emotional well-being, and academic performance.³⁸
- Analysis of 80 studies of “indicated” SEL programs for 11,337 children with signs of emotional, social, or behavioural problems found (i) no change with respect to drug use; (ii) significant and sustained improvements in SEL skills, attitudes, social behaviours, conduct, and emotional well-being; and (iii) significant improvements in academic performance, but these gains were not sustained over time.³⁹
- The findings from the analysis of 57 studies of “universal” after-school programs for 34,989 students were mixed, partly due to the variety of programs offered and, also, to differences in the quality and types of studies reviewed. Considering all programs together, the analysis found improvements in self-perceptions, school bonding, social behaviours, conduct, and achievement tests but these changes were either not sustained over time or the participants were not followed longitudinally so longer-term impacts could not be identified. The programs did not influence school achievement, with the exception of those programs that used evidence-based practices.⁴⁰

What does “evidence-based” mean?

In this document, an evidence-based program is defined as one that:

- has been identified as a “model” or “best practice” program, meaning that it has been repeatedly demonstrated to be effective through studies using good methods, a reasonable sample size, and an experimental, “gold standard” design (includes a control group with random assignment of subjects to the experimental and control groups) or a quasi-experimental design (includes a control group but not random assignment), with the results published in a peer-reviewed journal, or
- may be considered a “promising” program, meaning that it has been demonstrated to be effective in at least one study meeting the above criteria.

FROM THE FIELD: OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To complement this overview, 23 individuals with expertise or an interest in the field were interviewed to obtain their opinions about advancing the SEL field and community of practice in Canada, particularly within the school system. The interviews were conducted from January to March 2013. The interviewees (Appendix 1) were selected from across Canada and represent a variety of groups including academics, program providers, and funders. Four key themes were explored in the interviews: receptivity and awareness, environmental factors and trends, barriers and gaps, and investment opportunities.

Theme 1. Receptivity to and awareness of SEL

All of the individuals interviewed agreed that there is merit in efforts to advance the SEL field in Canada, albeit with some caveats and cautions. Three reasons for advancing the SEL field were offered:

- (i) The importance of mental health is increasingly recognized. Although SEL is not a cure for mental illness, it can be a universal mental health promotion strategy that builds protective factors for all children.
- (ii) The increase in school violence indicates that many young people need to be taught social and emotional skills.
- (iii) The research has evolved over the last 30 years. We can now convincingly demonstrate that some SEL programs are effective and can improve academic performance.

On the other hand, the challenges to moving forward described by the thought leaders include the absence of a “common language” about SEL, competing frameworks for understanding and positioning SEL, and insufficient research about which programs are effective. In Canada there exists a dizzying array of programs and frameworks to address empathy, bullying prevention, mental health promotion, suicide prevention, mindfulness, anxiety prevention, self-regulation, safe schools, character development, healthy relationships, learning skills, and social emotional responsibility. However, the vast majority of these programs have not been evaluated. This is true, not only for small, locally-developed programs, but also for many of the SEL programs that are well-known and have been widely implemented. Although they may be effective, this has yet to be proven through rigorous evaluation, meaning that they cannot be described—at least not yet—as evidence-based programs. In fact, there are a handful of high profile programs that have been evaluated and, under scrutiny, have failed to deliver on their promises.

“Schools are open to SEL but do not know what the evidence says, cannot distinguish between good programs and bad ones, and often invent it themselves. This is problematic as there is no fidelity; they do not know if they are doing any harm, and waste a lot of time and energy building something untested.”

Knowledge about SEL also varies across the country. Most respondents believed that the approach had gained the most traction in British Columbia, Ontario and Nova Scotia. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning has helped increase awareness about SEL in Canada, and educators are generally receptive to the concepts, particularly at the elementary school level, but they don’t always fully understand the SEL approach. This also depends on whether the target of the information is teachers, principals, school districts, decision-makers, or ministries. While some teacher education and training is now incorporating SEL, this is not common. Moreover, teachers sometimes view SEL as just one more burden, yet another factor to integrate and implement, especially in a climate of fiscal restraint and teacher overload.

A number of respondents were not sure if interest in SEL is growing. While there are pockets of SEL activity, there is not a national focus or agenda. Interviewees did, however, indicate that there are a number of examples of universal, school-based SEL programs currently being implemented in various jurisdictions. They were also aware of researchers and existing networks that are working to advance social and emotional skills, suggesting interest in the field.

Theme 2. Environmental factors and trends

The interviewees identified a number of key environmental factors and trends that influence the ways in which and the extent to which SEL may evolve in Canada in the next few years.

1. **Recognition of SEL by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC):** MHCC supported a comprehensive research project and scan in 2012 related to the current state of mental health and substance use programs and practices in Canadian schools. The review found there are benefits to mental health promotion for all students through class-wide instruction that includes social emotional learnings/social skills building, and compelling evidence for the use of behavioural and cognitive behavioural approaches in school mental health programs that focus on skill development and on identifying and challenging thoughts and beliefs that can lead to negative feelings and behaviour.⁴¹
2. **Provinces focusing on variations of SEL:** Many provinces are recognizing the importance of SEL competencies, beginning to work across sectors, and willing to invest in evidence-based programs.
3. **Evidence-based research:** The trend toward evidence-informed practice is important. Brain development research and awareness is growing and there is recognition that there is a science to emotional and social development.

4. **Need for a holistic approach:** SEL cannot just be in schools as families and parents play a significant role in teaching social emotional competencies. The early years are a crucial formative period of development. Existing and potential roles for the non-profit sector in moving the agenda forward were also highlighted.
5. **Whole school approach:** The trend in the education system is to break down barriers with schools becoming community partners. This makes it even more important to develop common tools across sectors, a common language, and role clarity.
6. **Cross-sectoral collaboration:** Cross-sectoral collaboration is a significant trend, as all sectors are realizing they cannot solve complex problems on their own.
7. **Environment of restraint:** SEL is being promoted in a time of fiscal restraint. Funding for programs has been cut back, as has professional development for teachers. Conflicts between education ministries and teacher unions create a politicized climate. At the same time, teachers are committed and signing up in droves for workshops on SEL-related issues.
8. **Inter- and intra-personal skills in the labour force:** Social and emotional skills are receiving greater recognition as important skills for employability and workplace success.

Theme 3. Barriers and gaps

The following gaps in SEL knowledge and programs, along with barriers to advancing the SEL field, were identified by one or more of the interviewees.

- **Lack of awareness of SEL as an approach**

On the ground, a number of educators are delivering some aspects of social or emotional training but they are not aware that it is “SEL.” Increasing awareness and acceptance could be very validating for them. The caution is to help teachers see SEL as part of their educational mandate, not just one more responsibility in their jobs.

- **A proliferation of programs**

Child and youth mental health is a hot topic. It is becoming an industry with web-enabled products and programs inundating the education sector. Educators do not know which ones to choose and it is hard to differentiate among them. Programs cost money and individual schools and school boards often make their decision based on the charisma of the person selling the program.

- **Fragmentation across the country**

There is fragmentation across the country regarding SEL and insufficient knowledge exchange. Discussion about evaluation, outcomes to measure against, (academic performance, long term functioning, absenteeism), and metrics for success is needed. There are pockets of money but no sustainable funding, access to funding varies among jurisdictions, and champions come and go.

- **Lack of alignment with education ministry outcomes**

It is almost impossible to incorporate SEL into the curriculum unless a particular province is adopting a new curriculum and SEL outcomes are embedded. For some provinces and jurisdictions, there is still not a connection between SEL and student achievement.

- **Limited community of practice**

Many educators and other community partners do not know how to teach and implement SEL competencies. There is not enough hands-on material on how to do it.

- **Competing views about evidence-based programs: The need for evidence supporting Canadian programs versus too much emphasis on evidence-based programs**

Many Canadian programs and programs developed elsewhere but used in Canada have not been rigorously evaluated. We need to know which programs work—and how big their effect really is—in order to make decisions about which programs to adopt or support financially. On the other hand, manualized, evidence-based programs can be expensive, particularly if teacher turnover is high.

- **Lack of pre-service or professional development for teachers**

Teachers recognize that children need social and emotional support but feel ill-equipped to deal with these issues. Very few post-secondary education programs include SEL in the curriculum. (The University of British Columbia has recently introduced a Social-Emotional Learning and Development concentration in the Human Development Learning and Culture Master’s program.)

“If teachers don’t like it, they won’t use it.”

“We need to have someone supporting SEL for the long term.”

“You can have the best program in world but if you can’t show how it aligns with education outcomes it won’t fly.”

“The most important people to talk to are elected school board members. If they can be convinced that SEL will improve classroom climates and student learning, they will implement it.”

“We need evidence on what works. Otherwise SEL will just be a fad.”

“SEL is where reading was at the turn of the century.”

Theme 4. Investment opportunities

The following investment opportunities to advance the SEL field were identified by one or more interviewees.

1. Disseminate knowledge through social marketing

- "Get the term SEL out there."
- "Help people to understand the benefits associated with the SEL approach and the evidence behind it."
- "Promote the universality of SEL and its multiple benefits."
- "Help people come to understand that SEL is 'a way of interacting'."

2. Identify best programs

Gather program information so that schools can make informed choices. This would be a very powerful and simple intervention point. Provide a suite of programs as needed to respect provincial and jurisdictional differences. There are a number of evidence-based programs that link to curriculum outcomes that can be "scaffolded" for each grade. Include cost of programs.

3. Establish a national network (CASEL equivalent in Canada) or embed an SEL network into an existing network

While there are existing research networks for specific issues, none are focused specifically on SEL. For example, PrevNet is specific to bullying. The Mental Health Commission has only four years left in its mandate.

An SEL network could:

- Convene individuals and organizations working across the mental health promotion / SEL field.
- Create a foundational document and a plan.
- Establish a working group that includes practitioners, researchers and community groups.
- Develop a common language, conduct gap analysis, and identify what is needed to move forward?
- Determine what to tackle first - policy, programs, teacher training?
- Work with ministries of education when curricula are being revised.
- Be prepared to take advantage of high profile incidents to change policy.

4. Create a partnership with CASEL

CASEL is well regarded and their information is widely utilized in Canada. There are a number of opportunities that could be explored to build a relationship:

- Have a Canadian school district become part of the Collaborating Districts Initiative. CASEL is now focused on building district-level support for social and emotional learning. The Collaborating Districts Initiative supports eight large school districts in building capacity for high-quality, evidence-based programming to promote social and emotional learning in preschool through 12th grade.
- Host a visiting Canadian scholar at CASEL for three months every year.
- Send delegates to the 2013 CASEL National Forum. The Forum is CASEL's major meeting where thought leaders who want to improve education and the lives of children meet. During the Forum participants share and discuss the latest advances in SEL research, practice and policy. They also establish strategic action agendas to build on momentum to implement, sustain and scale programming to enhance children's social, emotional and academic learning.

5. Align with provincial departmental/ministerial outcomes

There is a huge window of opportunity right now across Canada. As education ministries are revising curriculum, some have already embedded SEL competencies and others are considering how to help students be more successful socially and emotionally. This is significant and sophisticated work with ministries, school boards, and teachers and the right people have to be engaged early in the process. Government bodies could be informed that problems can be prevented and costs reduced by improving students' social and emotional skills.

6. Align with federal government bodies

There may also be opportunities to align with Federal government initiatives. For example, the Public Health Agency of Canada Innovation Strategy is funding widespread implementation of the Fourth R (a program to build relationship skills) across Canada and financing demonstrations to alert educators and governments that this sort of programming is not competing with core educational outcomes, it is facilitating and improving those outcomes.

7. Raise awareness within the business sector

Improved links could also be made to the business sector as SEL competencies make young people much better employees.

8. Create a one-stop SEL website

Such a website could include:

- What SEL is and why should we do it.
- The best Canadian programs available
- Best practices in SEL program delivery, such as lesson plans, innovative activities, and other accessible practices.
- Teachers' contributions to dynamic, evolving, and developing practices and approaches.
- Ways in which students can contribute to changing the climate at their schools.
- Identification of ways to adjust American programs and approaches for implementation in Canada.

9a. Invest in gold standard program evaluations and then support what works

Fund rigorous, experimental evaluations of programs in Canada to identify what does—and what does not—work in this country so that funding is not wasted on ineffective programs and is directed to the most effective programs.

or

9b. Adopt a core element approach

Identify essential components and practices for success in SEL programs and interventions and disseminate them widely. Package them to appeal to teachers and demonstrate how they align with the curriculum.

(Some people commented that these approaches are not mutually exclusive; in fact, the core element approach would require a rigorous research base.)

10. Engage and support parents

Raise awareness that high-quality pre-school programs can help to shape structural brain development in positive ways that improve young children's social and emotional competence and, by extension, school readiness. Support the development and testing of SEL programs that engage parents.

11. Teacher training

Lay the groundwork with principals, superintendents, principals, and teachers and cascade learning throughout the system.

Introduce SEL training in universities, reinforce it through professional development and summer institutes, and create e-publications and other learning opportunities for teachers.

12. Support SEL Programs

Continue to support the testing, delivery, evaluation and scaling of evidence-based in-school SEL programs (either whole-school initiatives or evidence-based programs).

13. Coordinate an annual forum

Convene researchers, policy-makers, funders, practitioners and other SEL stakeholders to develop strategic priorities and encourage collaboration.

IN CLOSING

Social and emotional learning has much to offer as a framework for helping to address some of the important challenges facing children and youth in Canada. When young people acquire social and emotional skills, they tend to have better outcomes relating to mental health, academic achievement and life. In other words, they are more likely to flourish. While this review by no means captures the full range of the social and emotional learning field in Canada, it offers insights and suggestions for those working in this important and emerging field.

APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEWEES

Barbara Burggraf, CEO EducationMatters

Kim Campbell, Alberta Education Coordinator, Fourth R

Caroline Claussen, C3 Inc.

Connie Coniglio, Director of Health Literacy at BC Mental Health and Addiction Services (BCMHAS), an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

Wendy Craig, Professor, Department of Psychology, Queen's University, Scientific Co-Director PREVNet

Doug Crossman, Senior Policy Advisor, Public Health Agency of Canada

Gail Gardiner, Executive Director, Canadian Mental Health Association, Nova Scotia Division

Lynn Green, President and CEO, Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education

Kathleen Hagen, Program Director, Family and Education Services, Hull Services

James Hughes, President, Graham Boeckh Foundation

Ray Hughes, National Education Coordinator for the Fourth R Project with the CAMH Centre for Prevention Science

Shelley Hymel, Chair, Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education, University of British Columbia

Stan Kutcher, Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health

Ian Manion, Executive Director, Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario

Heather MacDonald, Vice President and COO, United Way of Calgary and Area

Joanne McQuiggan, Executive Director, Lion's Quest Canada

Lisa Pedrini, Manager, Social Responsibility and Diversity, Vancouver School Board

Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education, University of British Columbia

Kathy Short, Director, School Mental Health ASSIST

Paula Tyler, President Norlien Foundation

Shelley Uytterhagen, President, Carthy Foundation

Roger Weissberg, President and CEO, Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, Chicago

Lana Wells, Brenda Strafford Chair in the Prevention of Domestic Violence, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary

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