Integrating Social Emotional Learning into Secondary Curriculum

Marilyn Lindsay

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School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

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Abstract

When students are able to cope with, manage and maneuver the social and emotional landscapes of their lives, their ability to learn on all levels improves. Teaching Social / Emotional Learning (SEL), as a component of secondary education, not only increases academic performance, but prepares students to meet the challenges of lifelong learning in a changing global society.

Currently, students are so busy passing tests that measure their capacity for logical, analytical and objective reasoning, it leaves little time for developing self-awareness, social awareness, and the ability to cope with ambiguous situations, to adapt, to learn how to learn and to manage stress. The purpose of this study is to determine how best to integrate social emotional learning into secondary curriculum to improve the overall learning environment.

A literature review of established SEL programs consistently points to overall improvement in student behavior and learning. In addition, daily mindfulness sessions - a common component of SEL - incorporated into secondary education, consistently results in the decrease of violence and truancy rates while improving student relations, focus and academic performance. Based on these findings, the addition of SEL standards into secondary education and teacher credential programs is recommended.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Personal Anecdote

What is Social / Emotional Learning (SEL) and why does it warrant attention in secondary school curriculum?   Social and emotional learning is defined in simple terms as the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others (Zins & Elias, 2007). Anyone who has tried to teach academic content to a student who is stressed, depressed or emotionally preoccupied can tell you that the ability to first manage ones emotions is essential, a prerequisite for the learning process.

As a high school writing specialist, I worked one-on-one with students who struggled with academic writing. Often these students were dealing with more than weak writing skills. They were preoccupied and, at times, completely overwhelmed by anxiety that had hijacked their abilities to cope, to concentrate, to be present and to learn. I recognized a vacancy in their eyes that told me their thoughts were elsewhere and our session would be less than productive.

As I sat across from these students, it was obvious that their social and/or emotional needs were not being met. How could I expect them to focus on the assignment at hand? And, a bigger question loomed. How would these students acquire the social / emotional skills necessary to realize their full potential and become contributing members of society if they did not learn them at home or at school?

Statement of Problem

Secondary schooling is often a time when students' foundational needs; physical wellbeing, safety and social acceptance, are unstable. Along with the physical and emotional changes brought on by puberty, they face an onslaught of academic expectations based on the general assumption that all students are college bound. Some students thrive when faced with these challenges, while others simply learn to "survive" the maze. But, far too many fall behind, ill equipped to master rigorous academic content because they lack foundational social emotional supports. Once they fall behind, their schooling experience often reinforces self-doubt, negative self-perception and the belief that they lack what it takes to make it in this or future systems, which in turn, can lead to various behavioral, truancy and/or self-esteem problems.

Why not address the social and emotional issues that arise for most human beings, especially at this heightened stage of development, as part of standard curriculum? Practices in self-awareness, self-management, and social competency not only improve learning capacity, they serve students throughout their lifetime. Self-management techniques, such as stress reduction, emotional regulation and conflict resolution practices are valuable, lifelong tools for overall wellbeing and effectiveness, but they are often neglected areas of formal secondary instruction.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the benefits of teaching SEL as an integrated component of secondary curriculum. SEL curriculum exists that can be easily embedded into core classes such as English, social studies, art and science. There are talented and conscientious teachers

who naturally build aspects of SEL into their subject matter and/or their daily interactions with students. However, the acquisition of such skills should not be random, implemented only by progressive schools or consciously aware teachers. These skills are far too important to be left to chance. Social emotional intelligence is the foundation upon which all other learning benefits. Self knowledge, understanding one's learning style, stress reduction techniques, the ability to focus, to work in teams, to communicate effectively, to manage ones emotions, to manage conflict, to adapt, to reflect, to understand one's worldview and how it determines one's perception of the world - these skills are critical to overall wellbeing and are highly valued in the 21st century workplace.

Research Questions

What are the benefits of integrating SEL into secondary curriculum? What are the most effective methods of implementation?

Theoretical Rationale

The idea of addressing the social and emotional needs of students, as an integral part of public education in this country, is over 200 years old, though the term SEL is relatively new, appearing in 1995 after the first publication of Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman (2005). SEL is rooted in holistic theories of education that champion the development of the whole person – this includes the intellect, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic and spiritual (Meaker, 2006, para.1). Maria Montessori, John Dewey and Rudolph Steiner are among some of the leading 20th century pioneers whose life work and legacies centered on holistic approaches to educating children. More recent contributions regarding SEL's influence on the learning process include Abraham

Maslow's 1943 work on the hierarchy of human needs, Howard Gardner's theories of multiple intelligences in 1993 and Goleman's research on emotional intelligence in 1995.

Maslow's research sought to understand human motivation. Often represented as a pyramid with the most fundamental needs on the bottom, Maslow sought to explain the developmental stages that humans move through toward self- actualization. Maslow posited that if the most fundamental needs – physical, safety, belonging/love and self-esteem - are not met, an individual will feel anxious, tense, unable to focus on higher level capacities (Huitt, 2007).

Gardner (1993) defined a range of cognitive skills beyond those typically associated with learning. He argued that individuals learn in distinctive ways, using various dominant intelligences over other, less pronounced ones. Beyond linguistic and logical modes of instruction that dominate our education system, Gardner's multiple intelligences encourage a wider range of teaching practices that aim to improve learning for all students.

Goleman (2005) based his work on research by psychologists, John Mayer and Peter Salovey, to show that learning and performance capacity are influenced by emotional intelligence (EI), and not solely determined by one's IQ (Intelligence Quotient), a previously held measurement of intelligence. Goleman also argued that emotional intelligence was both innate, to greater or lesser degrees, and could be taught.

Most gratifying for me has been how ardently the concept has been embraced by educators, in the form of programs in "social and emotional learning or SEL. Back in 1995 I was able to find only a handful of such programs teaching emotional intelligence

skills to children. Now, a decade later, tens of thousands of schools worldwide offer

children SEL (Goleman, 2005 p.x).

Assumptions

Teaching SEL in secondary education provides long-term benefits both academically and in

terms of overall wellbeing. Research substantiates that effective strategies for educational

reform involve systematic social and emotional education, intentionally linked to academics as

an integral component of the school curriculum (Zins & Elias, 2007). While family systems may

be natural foundations of social emotional learning, their inherent variables and wide capacity

range, make them inconsistent and unreliable sources of SEL. In addition, adolescence is a time

marked by increased independence and natural tendencies to break away from the known, a time

of increased receptivity to influences beyond family norms and traditions. It follows that

secondary education is a critical stage for social and emotional skill building, not only to increase

learning capacity, but also to address heightened adolescent concerns regarding purpose and

place in society. As secondary students stand on the cusp of childhood and adulthood, SEL

offers critical tools for gaining self and social awareness and self-efficacy.

> When education ignores these issues, it produces a system that alienates and bores the
>
> learner. It also ignores young people's need for mentoring in questions of greatest
>
> significance in their lives: "What is my meaning and purpose? What are my greatest
>
> gifts? How can I maintain hope? (Palmer as cited in Zins, Weissberg, Wang &Walberg,
>
> 2004, p.25-26)

Background and Need

Distractions and uncertainty abound in today's world. Consider how rapidly our society has changed and continues to change on the technological front alone. Adolescents are more technically savvy than most of their parents and teachers who compete for their attention against a backdrop of texting, tweeting, social networking, instant messaging, music and video downloading, and hundreds of television channels broadcasting 24 hours a day. With such accessibility to information, young people sift through an assortment of images, concepts, advertisements and shock value content with little to no pedagogical guidance. What is all this information teaching? In addition to technology-based distractions, academic performance pressures have increased the homework load for secondary students, encroaching on family time and limiting opportunities for developing skills outside of school, such as working at a part-time job. Traditionally work outside of school fostered non-academic talents, increased multi-generational interactions and the development of positive interpersonal skills.

In a national sample of 148,189 sixth to twelfth graders, only 29% - 45% of surveyed students reported that they had social competencies such as empathy, decision making and conflict resolution skills and only 29% indicated that their school provided a caring and encouraging environment" (Benson as cited in Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011, p.1). "By high school, as many as 40% - 60% of students become chronically disengaged from school. (Klem & Connell as cited in Durlak et al., 2011, p.1)

In 2004, the state of Illinois was the first state to adopt K-12 standards in social and emotional learning. The Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership, and the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) drafted 10 SEL standards, along with goals, performance descriptors and benchmarks that describe what students should know and be able to do at five sequential developmental stages (Illinois State Board of Education, 2012). To date, Illinois is the only state to have comprehensive SEL standards at the K-12 level, but according to a University of Illinois State Scan report, more states are moving in this direction. (SEL Research Group, 2011).

Summary

In this fourth decade of the Information Age, there is a growing sense of overwhelm. This is understandable considering that the amount of new information produced between 1999 and 2002 nearly equaled the amount previously produced in the entire history of the world (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Yet, there are still only 24 hours in a day. When information continues to increase at a pace once unimaginable, it is easy to lose perspective on the purpose of education. We might mistakenly believe, for example, that increasing the distribution of academic content is the goal. But as I sat across from one emotionally and/or socially distracted student after another it became clear to me that unless I could address the heart, I had little chance of reaching the mind. By heart I mean appealing to the whole of a person, to help them learn how to be fully present, to learn how to learn and to know themselves as integral to the learning process - skills they will need to draw on for a lifetime. In Chapter 2, I review the literature on SEL in secondary education against a backdrop of political and social changes over the past 40 years that continue

to influence education policies and require that we take a closer look at the needs of today's

students.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

A literature review of current research on SEL programs was conducted. To establish historical

context, this review begins with research on political and social changes that have influenced

social emotional learning over the past 40 years, followed by advances in education theory and

cognitive science.   Lastly, SEL programs have been researched and assessed for multiple

outcomes including effects on academic performance, influence on pro-social and problem

behaviors, as well as, best practices for program design and implementation.

Historical Context

Political / Educational Policy Changes

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released a report titled "A

Nation at Risk." The commission was formed during President Ronald Reagan's administration

based on Secretary of Education, T.H. Bell's observation that the United States' educational

system was failing to produce a competitive workforce. The 18 person commission found that

SAT scores in the verbal and math sections had dropped over 50% and nearly 40%, respectively,

during 1963-1980 (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In 1990, however,

an analysis of the data behind these figures was conducted by Sandia Laboratories, which found

that by grouping students in subcategories such as ethnicity, and economic status, their SAT

scores had either improved or held steady between the late 1970s and 1990. The overall average

scores had indeed declined, but this was due to the fact that a broader population was actually

taking the SAT test, compared to 20 years prior, when only top tier students took the test (Ansary,

2007). Regardless of these later findings, A Nation at Risk was considered a landmark report on

the failing American education system and was the impetus for a series of education reforms.

The report made recommendations across five categories including an increase in core content

standards, number of school days per year and school hours per day (National Commission on

Excellence in Education, 1983). As states began to implement these recommendations, the

increase in high school graduation requirements reduced the number of electives students might

take while an increase in homework reduced the time students might spend outside of school in

non-academic pursuits such as developing a hobby or gaining skills through employment,

internships or volunteer work.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), proposed by President George W. Bush and

voted into law by Congress in 2001, was the next major reform of the American education

system. NCLB sought to increase the quality of education and close the achievement gap

between privileged and underprivileged students and school districts. All federally funded

schools were required to improve their performance as measured by yearly, state wide

standardized tests (Jones, 2009). Under NCLB, states were responsible for developing their own

standards and assessments and all students were required to take the same test under the same

conditions. School performance would be measured by student test scores and reported as a

school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Poor AYP scores would set in motion a series of

federal government interventions as outlined in the NCLB (Jones, 2009).

Proponents of NCLB argue that tests and standards "put fire under lazy school districts,

teachers and students" (Wiener as cited in Jones, 2009, p. 4), while opponents suggest that

"emphasis on tests leads to so much preparation that many important aspects of education

become a low priority, or they are ignored" (Bracey as cited in Jones, 2009, p. 3). While the

NCLB act has been hotly debated since its inception in 2001, one thing is certain - the past decade of high stakes testing has brought about significant change in both the content and amount of information that K – 12 students are required to learn and the time necessary to learn it.

Social Changes

The effects of education policy reform regarding K – 12 content standards and the time required for students to become competent in these standards cannot be considered in isolation from the changes in family structure where children still spend a majority of their waking hours. Here we find dramatic shifts in demographics over the past 40 years. In 1970, 40% of all households consisted of a married couple with at least one child living in the household. By 1998, this number had dropped to 26% (Teachman, Tedrow & Crowder, 2000).   Contributing factors include the decline of early marriages, an increased divorce rate and a growing tendency to never marry, all of which have increased the number of children who are being born outside of marriage and those spending at least part or all of their childhood in single-parent households (Teachman, et al., 2000). In 1989, it was reported that 50% of White children and two-thirds of African American children were likely to spend at least part of their childhood in a single-parent family (Bumpass & Sweet as cited in Teachman et al., 2000).

As changes in marriage, divorce and remarriage patterns imply that more children are experiencing more change in their childhood living arrangements, a growing body of literature indicates that change in living arrangements alone, beyond any effect associated with single-parenting, is detrimental to the well-being of children (An, Haveman, & Wolfe; Cherlin et al.; Seltzer; & Wu all cited in Teachman, et al., 2000). Such shifts in family structure may decrease the amount of parent interaction and/or resources available for young people to acquire social

emotional skills outside of school. Other factors that may influence the reduction in social

emotional development include two-career couples, lack of contact with extended family,

mobility and poverty (DeFriese, Crossland, Pearson, & Sullivan; National Mental Health

Association, all cited in Cohen, p. 44, 1999).

> These causes have made it more difficult for family members and other adults to act as
>
> positive role models for children, to monitor children's behavior, and to create nurturing
>
> environments. The combination of these and family/societal conditions and the
>
> prevalence of high-risk behaviors among our youth have prompted calls for effective
>
> school-based prevention programs to address children's social and health needs.
>
> (DeFriese, et al., as cited in Cohen, 1999)

Advances in Education Theory and Cognitive Science

In 1983, Howard Gardner (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004) proposed eight distinct categories of

intelligences and suggested that the majority of children are intelligent in one way or another and

that all students can successfully master subject matter when educators utilize instructional

methods that speak to each student's intellectual strength (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004). While

pursuing a secondary teaching credential at Dominican University in San Rafael, California from

2006 - 2007, I recall considerable emphasis on Gardner's multiple intelligences, in part, because

they offered some clues on how teachers might approach the challenge of differentiating

instruction in our increasingly multicultural classrooms. By the year 2000, the number of

foreign-born or first-generation U.S. residents had reached 56 million, the highest level in U.S.

history and triple the number in 1970 (Nieto, 2004). By 2011, White births in the U.S. had

become a minority, at 49.6 percent (Tavernise, 2012). Differentiation, as an educational theory

therefore, sought to address the growing diversity in U.S. schools by meeting students where

they were at academically, and scaffolding assignments based on individual need. In addition,

best practices included designing lessons that capitalized on multiple ways of learning - multiple

intelligences - in an effort to reach all children (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004).

In additional to Gardner's theories on intelligence, Goleman (2005) reported on

advancements in cognitive and behavioral research that demonstrated how emotional intelligence

contributes to learning potential. In 2005, Goleman referred to a meta-analysis of 668 evaluation

studies of SEL programs for preschoolers through high school as follows:

> In 1995, I outlined the preliminary evidence suggesting that SEL was the active
>
> ingredient in programs that enhance children's learning while preventing
>
> problems such as violence. Now the case can be made scientifically: helping
>
> children improve their self-awareness and confidence, manage their disturbing
>
> emotions and impulses and increase their empathy pays off not just in improved
>
> behavior but in measurable academic achievement. (Goleman, 2005, p.xi)

SEL Effects on Academic Performance and Social Behavior

The first large-scale analysis of school-based SEL programs was published in 2011 and titled:

The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-

Based Universal Interventions (Durlak et al., 2011). It involved 270,034 K–12 students and

demonstrated significant improvement in their social and emotional skills, attitudes and behavior.

A smaller subset of the reviewed SEL studies included measurements for SEL programming's

effect on academic outcomes.   The result was an 11 percentile-point gain in academic

achievement over a six-month period.   All 213 SEL studies included in this analysis met five

major criteria including those that (a) emphasized the development of one or more SEL skills (b)

targeted students between the ages of 5 and 18 without any identified adjustment or learning

problems and (c) included a control group. The overall findings of this analysis stated that SEL programs yielded significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others and school, enhanced student behavior and improved academic performance.

The SEL programs included in the meta-analysis above were both single and multicomponent programs, some involving school wide personnel, parent and community outreach. As for single or stand alone SEL components, there is growing evidence that suggests meditation, or mindfulness as it is commonly referred to, is a single SEL component, that when integrated into the regular school day, pays high dividends in pro-social behavior. A compelling example of this is the Quiet Time program at Visitacion Valley Middle School (VVMS) in San Francisco, CA. VVMS serves students from nearby housing projects challenged by drugs, violence, unemployment and high homicide rates. Prior to implementing the Quiet Time program, VVMS was known as the "fight school" because so many fights were breaking out between students. VVMS students were described as having post-traumatic stress syndrome due to environmental factors (Nobori, 2012).

The Center for Wellness and Achievement in Education (CWAE) was brought in to train the VVMS teaching and administrative staff in the practice of transcendental meditation. The teaching staff was also trained to facilitate 15 minutes of meditation, twice a day, for students in their classrooms. In the five years since Quiet Time was integrated into the school day, truancy rates dropped by 61 percent and suspension rates were cut in half. School wide grade point averages among the students went up half a point and students reported getting more sleep and fewer headaches and stomachaches. In a follow-up district survey, Visitacion Valley students reported some of the highest levels of satisfaction among San Francisco middle school students

and VVMS now has one of the highest teacher retention rates of any middle school in the San Francisco Unified School District (Norbori, 2012).

SEL Design and Implementation

Design and implementation were the two most significant factors regarding the effectiveness of SEL programs reported in the 2011 meta-analysis as follows:

A. Programs produced higher outcomes when they followed four recommended training procedures referred to as SAFE, which stands for (1) sequenced step-by-step training (2) active forms of learning (3) focus sufficient time on skill development and (4) explicit learning goals.

B. The most common SEL implementation strategy (53% of SEL studies) involved classroom-based interventions administered by regular classroom teachers, suggesting that SEL curriculum can be incorporated into routine educational practices and subject matter.

C. Implementation problems adversely affect program outcomes.

D. SEL programs are successful at all education levels (elementary, middle and high school) and in urban, suburban and rural schools.

While the role that schools play in the social and emotional development of students is far from settled, CASEL has spent the last ten years advancing SEL guidelines through research, practice and policy. As part of its focus to expand evidence-based SEL practices, CASEL released the 2013 CASEL Guide on Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs (Casel, 2012). This Guide identifies 23 pre-K and elementary school-based programs that successfully

promote students' self-control, relationship building, and problem solving, among other SEL

skills. For inclusion in this guide programs had to meet the following three requirements:

- Well-designed classroom-based programs that systematically promote SEL competence, provide opportunities for practice, and offer multi-year programming.

- High-quality training and other implementation supports, including initial and on-going training to ensure sound implementation.

- Evidence-based with at least one carefully conducted evaluation that documents positive impacts on student behavior and/or academic performance.

SEL programs designed for the primary grade levels are numerous, while secondary SEL

programs are less common. Of the 213 SEL programs reviewed in the 2011 meta-analysis, 56%

were designed for elementary school, 31% for middle school and only 13% for high school

(Durlak et al., 2011). While it is important to address the social emotional needs of children as

early as possible, SEL requirements during adolescence are vital both as preventative and in

response to high risks behaviors such as drug use, early and high-risk sexual activity and

violence, behaviors that frequently interfere with the capacity to learn and to become

constructive family members and citizens (Dryfoos as cited in Cohen, 1999). To this end,

CASEL is soliciting nominees for effective, replicable secondary SEL programs for inclusion in

a systematic review, to be published and broadly disseminated in 2013 to educators,

policymakers, and researchers across the United States (Casel, 2013). The programs must meet

the following requirements:

- Universal programs and educational models for use with all students during the regular
  school day.

- Codified in a set of written materials

- Provide professional development opportunities for new implementers

- Have been replicated in multiple sites

- Have at least one evaluation showing positive impact on student behavior and/or
  academic outcomes.

CASEL is working with the University of Illinois to identify states interested in collaborating to develop and implement SEL standards. "Our five year goal is to establish comprehensive developmental standards for social and emotional learning, from preschool through high school, in 20 states by 2015" (Dusenbury, Zadrazil, Mart, & Weissberg, 2011, p.8).

Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to ethical standards in the treatment of human subjects in research as articulated by the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally, the research proposal was reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved, and assigned number 9088.

Interview with an Expert

To better understand the need for integrating SEL into secondary curriculum, an interview was conducted with Katia Petersen, Ph.D., an author and recognized training expert in school climate

improvement, character education, social-emotional learning, violence prevention, and student and teacher support. Dr. Petersen gave permission to use her name in this interview. In summary, Dr. Petersen has delivered professional development in schools nationwide to help educators implement comprehensive prevention and promotion programming. To date, she has trained over 65,000 educators and thousands of parents to enhance school success. Dr. Petersen's formative experience began in clinical environments with children ages 3–18 as a child psychotherapist where she developed family and child treatment programming using expressive therapies. Afterward, she changed focus from intervention to prevention and education where she has worked for 28 years in school environments ranging from preschool to college level. In her current role as the Director of Education at the Institute of Noetic Science (IONS) in Petaluma, California, Dr. Petersen co-authored Worldview Explorations - SEL curriculum designed for integration within standard secondary content areas such as English, social studies, science and art.

I met with Dr. Petersen at IONS in Petaluma, CA on April 25, 2012. In preparation for this meeting, I emailed Dr. Petersen five interview questions for her consideration. The interview was informal in nature and began with Dr. Petersen describing the point in her career, as a child psychotherapist, when she realized that most children were sent to her after they were in trouble, to the point of no return. She wondered what was missing, what was not being done to prevent kids from getting to this point. This began a period of deep observation and inquiry by Petersen in which she visited different classrooms and conferred with teachers. "I started asking questions. What do we need to do to promote children's success in school and in life? I could not see any division between skills for life as well as academics. I felt they could not succeed one without the other."

Petersen went on to explore what healthy development meant, whether teachers were given time to develop in this way and taught these skills in professional development in order to model and teach them to their students.   The feedback she received from teachers was consistent. They agreed that social emotional skills were as important as academics, but they were not trained to teach them nor were they given the time in their day to teach such skills. Teachers reported to Petersen that they felt accountable to parents, principals and the Department of Education to teach to the test because their success was measured by how well their students performed on those tests. "Teachers told me that everyday they have a list so long that they barely make it through [the academic content they are required to teach]. Where does the human being come in?" In response to this alarming deficit, Petersen developed the Safe and Caring Schools (S&CS) program in 2004, which was designed to help educators easily incorporate social/emotional learning into daily academic instruction for grades Pre-K– 8th. The S&CS program has been sought out and implemented in schools across the country. Petersen's expertise on developing safe and caring school climates, school-wide and district-wide implementation steps and program sustainability continues to be in demand. "My ultimate goal is for SEL to be a stand-alone class within standard K-12 curriculum." In the meantime, Petersen continues to champion the need for SEL training in teacher credential programs, to train master teachers who are able to teach SEL to other teachers, to develop core teams to implement and oversee SEL curriculum in K – 12 environments, to create avenues for students to practice these skills in the real world and to provide training for parents and community members to create environments where we all want to live.

Chapter 3 Method

Introduction

This is a qualitative study based on a purposive sampling of high school students who participated in a social emotional learning program for secondary students offered at their high school. This section includes sample size, access and permission, instrument, data gathering strategies and data analysis approach.

Sample and Site

Thirteen sophomore and junior students at a Southern California high school participated in a social emotional learning program called Worldview Explorations (WE) between March 15 and May 31, 2012. The site is a comprehensive, coeducational public high school that serves approximately 1400 students in grades 9-12. Forty percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Student ethnicity is 76% White, 16% Hispanic or Latino, 3% Multiple and 2% Asian. The school API score for 2012 was 747.

Access and Permission

While volunteering at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, I received access to student and teacher feedback, after participation in the WE pilot program. Consent to Participate letters were sent to the parents of all participating students at the onset of the program.

Instrument

The WE project is based on the premise that thriving in the 21st century requires increased capacity to handle encounters with difference and complexity. To this aim, the WE curriculum cultivates social and emotional intelligence by exploring the role that our worldview plays in how we perceive the world around us and what we accept as true. Through experiential and project-based activities, students explore how worldviews influence their goals, desires, motivations, values, relationships, actions and reactions to everyday encounters. Through mindfulness, self- inquiry, self-reflection and group activities, the WE curriculum promotes self-awareness, self-management and social-awareness. Engaging with other worldviews cultivates compassion, empathy and understanding. The goal of the WE program is to recognize our essential inter-connectedness with the planet and those living on it, to inspire action and leadership for the greater good. To that end, the 22 lessons are divided into three main categories: Discover Yourself, Connect With Others, Engage the World.

Data Gathering Strategies

Teacher data were collected via (1) an in-person meeting with one participating teacher following his implementation of the WE curriculum (2) a telephone interview with this teacher to clarify researcher questions and (3) a written synopsis from this teacher outlining implementation timeline, and lesson details. Student data was collected via written essays submitted to the Institute of Noetic Sciences. In these essays, students self-reported their experiences in the WE program by responding to a series of questions given to them at the conclusion of their participation in the program.

Data Analysis Approach

Responses to questions were reviewed and characterized according to major and minor themes and analyzed for similarities and differences amongst participants. Emerging themes were interpreted in narrative form. Similarities and differences among participant responses were noted.

Chapter 4 Findings

Description of Site, Individuals, Data

Thirteen sophomore and junior students at a Southern California high school participated in a social emotional learning program called WE. The program was offered and facilitated by their English teacher between March 15 and May 31, 2012. The facilitating teacher sought principal approval to teach the WE program as part of his standard, English curriculum to a total of 200 students. While impressed with the concept of the WE project, the principal expressed the following limitations: 1.) The WE curriculum could not be taught in place of existing state approved curriculum. 2.) The WE curriculum could not be included within existing curriculum. 3.) The WE curriculum could only be taught during lunch period or as an after school extra curricular activity, provided there was no doctrinal aspect to the content. 4.) All participating students must have a parent permission agreement on file.

The teacher chose to teach WE during lunch, for approximately 20 – 25 minutes each Thursday. He invited 30 students to attend based on the following criteria: 1.) First Lunch – Since the high school has two, half-hour lunch periods per day, the teacher selected only those students who had the same lunch period as himself. 2.) Gender and Age Balance - In order to obtain a balance of gender and age, the teacher invited 30 students (15 boys and 15 girls of which 15 were sophomores and 15 juniors) to an orientation seminar to introduce them to WE and to the Institute of Noetic Sciences – authors of the WE curriculum. 3.) Ethnic and Economic Diversity – The high school is located in a resort town where, according to the teacher, some students live in million dollar homes on the lake while others live in trailer parks. An effort was made by the teacher to represent community diversity. 4.) Personality Style – The teacher

selected students from his class rosters who he knew to be "opinionated and vocal as well as those who were reticent in traditional classroom situations" in order to form as diverse a group as possible.

Based on these criteria, the teacher sent 30 students written invitations. "I explained nothing in detail except that they were chosen to participate in a world wide, revolutionary educational project where their input could not only tremendously affect them personally, but also their feedback could affect the education of countless others throughout the world."

All 30 invitees attended the orientation meeting. The next week, 22 students returned ready to participate in the first session. By the fourth session, thirteen students were in attendance and remained active participants until the course conclusion. Given that this group met only once a week, for 20 to 25 minutes during lunch, over a ten-week period, the teacher was unable to teach all 22 WE lessons in their entirety. Instead, he selected key activities from the three main units: Understanding Ourselves, Understanding Others, Interacting With and Contributing To The World. These unit titles were later changed in the final edition of the WE curriculum to Discover Yourself, Connect With Others, Engage the World. In spite of time constraints, the teacher reported a great deal of satisfaction and cooperation from the participating students. This was reflected in student feedback essays.

Overall Findings, Themes

Eight of the 13 students who participated in all ten sessions completed feedback essays at the end of the program. Four common themes emerged from a review of these student essays. Six out of eight students reported (1) a new understanding of their own worldview and (2) a new

understanding of the factors that influenced their worldview (3) an increased understanding of others – why people act, feel and believe as they do and (4) a heightened sense of efficacy to influence others and share what they had learned.

Three out of eight students reported the following subthemes: (1) the importance of acceptance (2) knowledge gained from the WE program will help to reduce / end conflicts and (3) everyone should be taught the WE curriculum. Two out of eight students felt the program expanded their awareness, promoted open-mindedness and respect for others and helped them to see all sides of a story.

Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

Summary of Major Findings

For ten weeks, thirteen high school students gave up their lunch hour to participate, voluntarily, in a condensed version of secondary SEL curriculum. They did not receive academic credit, grade advancement or official recognition, but self-reported a number of positive benefits based on their experience, as reflected in the following student comment.

> *I can use the knowledge I have acquired through the Worldview Project by not holding hate in my heart towards unruly people, but I can choose to understand and try to better myself and influence others in a positive way. I feel that if all students took at least one year of this project, they will understand others and end hate in this world. People could finally understand and finally get along.*

Increased awareness of the factors that influence their worldviews and the worldviews of others were repeated themes. There was also a common desire to share what they had learned with others and to receive additional knowledge, as the following comments reveal.

> *Having participated in this project thoroughly I have developed a new understanding of not only my own Worldview but that of any human being.*

I have discovered that while I may understand some of the key points in life, there is a subconscious that develops your personality by merely taking in your surroundings.

I plan on educating my peers as well as many adults on the benefits of a rounded worldview. Although, I cannot do it on my own, therefore, IONS, being the amazing institute it is, really must shovel this idea into the public school systems' brain. This is a huge step forward if it can be taken to the next step. We need at least an hour [per] week. Being allowed only 25 minutes is ridiculous. We learned things, yes, but I feel that I have barely dipped my toe in the vast pool that has been lavishly laid in front of me.

Although participation in the abbreviated WE program took place over a ten week period, it is important to note that the total classroom time students spent engaged with the material and each other, was just over three hours. The importance of their reported experience underscores an unmet need for guidance in the social and emotional arenas of their lives, as well as, recognition by the students themselves, of its value in navigating a complex, rapidly changing world.

Comparison of Findings to Previous Research

The research is clear that properly designed and implemented SEL programs not only improve the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills of participants, but also result in a host of beneficial outcomes that improve the learning environment for all students across all grade levels. The consistent message of these studies is that "dose" matters, that comprehensive, sequential,

integrated, multiyear, well-coordinated and well-implemented programs yield the best results (Elias, 2008a). Yet, even the ten, condensed WE sessions that served as the basis for this research study, produced results in keeping with these findings, particularly in the area of self and social awareness. What is most notable is the degree to which students expressed interest in and need for expanded self and social awareness, for themselves, for their peers and for the world they hope to live in.

According to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, four competencies necessary to problem solve in a complex, fast-changing, global society are: collaboration, creativity, communication and critical thinking. Key concepts reported by WE participants appear to lay the groundwork for these 21st century skills. Collaboration, for example, is defined as the ability to work effectively with diverse groups and exercise flexibility in making compromises to achieve common goals (Boss, 2012). Such abilities are developed first by understanding how a person's worldview determines the lens through which they view the world and discovering how different influences create different worldviews – two main concepts reported by students in this study. By integrating SEL concepts into secondary curriculum through experiential activities, project-based and service-based learning, 21st century skills are developed naturally and students are better prepared for the global workplace.

Limitations/Gaps in the Study

The primary limitations to this study include (1) a restricted timeframe for implementing the WE curriculum, (2) a reduced number of WE lessons covered in this timeframe and (3) a small sample size of students. Since student participation was voluntary, it is possible that only those students interested in social / emotional concepts, to begin with, attended all ten session, adding a

possible bias to the concluding feedback. Although students reported multiple benefits from their participation, not all of the students completed feedback essays, perhaps again because of the voluntary nature of the program.

The research is clear that SEL programs produce higher outcomes when systematically implemented throughout the school community and when sufficient time is allotted for skill development, elements that were missing from this study. Lastly, due to limited access, it was not possible for this researcher to follow up with the thirteen WE participants to determine long-term effects of their experience.

Implications for Future Research

There are many aspects of integrating SEL in secondary curriculum that require further research. Schools need support in selecting and funding SEL programs that are evidence-based and address the most pressing needs in their communities. Repeated themes in this study are that SEL programs be well designed and properly implemented to be successful. To that end, more research is needed to verify long terms benefits of programs that meet these two criteria. Areas of interest include: (1) correlation between teacher retention rates, improved classroom management techniques and student behavior (2) correlation between student engagement, pro-social behavior and graduation rates (3) Analysis of program costs and long term cost benefits due to increased teacher retention and graduation rates (4) Benefits of incorporating SEL training into teacher credential programs (5) Universal SEL standards and assessments linking SEL to Common Core standards for integration within all academic subject matter (6) Inclusion of SEL as a core, stand-alone subject for students in need of greater intervention (7) SEL community and parent education outreach to improve environmental factors that contribute to or detract from the social and emotional health of adolescents (6) Extending SEL concepts outside the classroom

through project-based, service learning to solidify skill development and improve community

relations and cohesiveness.

Overall Significance of the Study

When the adolescent sheds her protective and concrete shield of childhood, what does she see?

At first glance, it is an abstract and confusing world. There is great need for explanation.

Hypocrisies abound and mentors are sometime hard to find in a sea of adults who seem to have

acquiesced on issues as strange as they are tragic. Side by side she stands with her unpredictable

peers, excited and scared, knowing that they will inherit this world, together, yet unsure how

they will fare or the role they will play. She senses that they can make a difference, for unlike

any who have come before them, they have grown up connected to the entire world. Ah, but she

is young and it is enough, for now, to manage her online personas like a celebrity. How boring

her teachers must seem, collecting test scans and passing out worksheets when all the while she

holds in her pocket the world's knowledge, in its entirety.

Secondary students today are unique in their technical savvy, advanced in its uses, ahead

of their teachers. Schools are scurrying to adapt. Some are using technology in innovative ways

to create different kinds of learning environments. Flipping the classroom is one such concept in

which instruction is delivered online, outside the classroom, and classroom time is used for

homework. Teachers are freed up to roam the room, provide guidance, facilitate and oversee

collaborative group projects. This rethinking of how best to utilize classroom time holds

promise for integrating SEL because it encourages schools to examine what can be learned

individually and what must be learned in community, making more room for the latter. As

education evolves to meet the demands of a changing world, the question of what to add or

subtract from the school day returns, full circle, to the question of purpose. What is the purpose of education? In my research, I came across three questions that help to clarify this dilemma.

- Do you want your children to become knowledgeable?

- Do you want them to be responsible, nonviolent, drug free and caring?

- If I were to tell you that the curriculum is too crowded to teach them all those qualities, which ones would you give up? (Elias, 2008b).

Ask these questions of parents, school boards, or those at the highest level of curriculum selection and answers will not come easy. We know that both are necessary. Attending to the social / emotional needs of all children, at every age, is good sense and responsible parenting. But it is unrealistic to assume that every child will show up at school with the appropriate skills in place. There is no shortage of evidence showing that this is indeed, not happening. There is, however, ample data linking SEL to improved behavior and capacity to learn. Both are possible. Early acquisition of social and emotional skills is important to establish positive habits and a majority of SEL programs are aimed at the primary grades for this reason (Casel, 2013). This study has focused on the need for well-integrated, system wide SEL instruction at the secondary level because these programs are less common and equally necessary. These students will soon be entering a world of responsibility, where the lack of self management and stress reduction techniques can easily lead to addictions, ill health, violence or the criminal justice system, where the amount of money spent per inmate far exceeds per pupil spending in our American schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

The financial crisis of the past five years was in large part caused by highly educated individuals who used their intelligence for self-gain at the expense of those with far lesser means.

This is an unprecedented reminder that knowledge, without moral conviction is dangerous. Technology alone will not save us from the darker side of our human nature, but its unparalleled capacity to store and retrieve information can help to make room, in our coming together, for the teaching of wisdom.

About the Author

Marilyn Lindsay began her career in business technology. For 15 years she trained computer engineers throughout the United States on connectivity technologies. When her children entered school, she was struck by a multitude of challenges facing public education. Based on her desire to make a positive contribution, Marilyn shifted her career path and began her studies in secondary education. She received a secondary teaching credential and taught at the high school level for five years before pursuing a graduate degree in curriculum design and instruction. Marilyn is now focused on helping secondary schools evaluate, plan, implement and assess social and emotional programming.

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