Social and Emotional Learning and Teachers

Kimberly A. Schonert-Reichl

Summary

Teachers are the engine that drives social and emotional learning (SEL) programs and practices in schools and classrooms, and their own social-emotional competence and wellbeing strongly influence their students. Classrooms with warm teacher-child relationships support deep learning and positive social and emotional development among students, writes Kimberly Schonert-Reichl. But when teachers poorly manage the social and emotional demands of teaching, students' academic achievement and behavior both suffer. If we don't accurately understand teachers' own social-emotional wellbeing and how teachers influence students' SEL, says Schonert-Reichl, we can never fully know how to promote SEL in the classroom.

How can we boost teachers' social-emotional competence, and how can we help them create the kind of classroom environment that promotes students' SEL? Teachers are certainly at risk for poor social-emotional wellbeing. Research shows that teaching is one of the most stressful occupations; moreover, stress in the classroom is contagious—simply put, stressed-out teachers tend to have stressed-out students. In the past few years, several interventions have specifically sought to improve teachers' social-emotional competence and stress management in school, and Schonert-Reichly reviews the results, many of which are promising.

She also shows how teachers' beliefs—about their own teaching efficacy, or about whether they receive adequate support, for example—influence the fidelity with which they implement SEL programs in the classroom. When fidelity is low, SEL programs are less successful. Finally, she examines the extent to which US teacher education programs prepare teacher candidates to promote their own and their students' social-emotional competence, and she argues that we can and should do much more.

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As the articles in this issue attest, research in the field of social and emotional learning (SEL) has grown dramatically in recent years. We've learned that we can promote students' social and emotional competence, and that doing so increases not only their SEL skills but also their academic achievement.[1] In other words, for our children and youth to achieve their full potential as productive adult citizens, parents, and volunteers in a pluralistic society, educators must focus explicitly on promoting social and emotional competence.

Teachers are the engine that drives SEL programs and practices in schools and classrooms. Yet until recently, their role in promoting SEL and their own social and emotional competence and wellbeing have received scant attention. What do we know about teachers and SEL? Do they buy in to integrating SEL in their classrooms? What about their own social and emotional competence and wellbeing? How does teachers' social-emotional competence influence students' SEL, and how can we promote it? How do teachers' beliefs about SEL influence their implementation of SEL programs? And do prospective teachers receive any information about SEL and their own social and emotional competence in their teacher preparation programs?

The importance of these questions should not be underestimated. If we don't accurately understand teachers' own wellbeing and how teachers influence students' SEL, we can never fully know whether and how to promote SEL in the classroom. Such knowledge could not only guide theory, it could also give us practical information about how teachers can steer students toward becoming socially skilled and well-rounded individuals, ready to responsibly navigate their personal and professional paths to adulthood.

SEL and Teachers: A Framework

Extensive research evidence now confirms that SEL skills can be taught and measured, that they promote positive development and reduce problem behaviors, and that they improve students' academic performance, citizenship, and health-related behaviors.[2] Moreover, these skills predict such important life outcomes as completing high school on time, obtaining a college degree, and securing stable employment.[3] Recent empirical evidence showing that SEL promotes students' academic, life, and career success has led to federal, state, and local policies that support social, emotional, and academic growth in our nation's young people.

Several organizing frameworks for SEL have been proposed, each outlining various components that influence SEL, such as school culture and climate, or teachers' pedagogical skills. Each framework identifies similar student outcomes, such as greater academic achievement and improved social-emotional competence. Many of these frameworks share three distinct and interrelated dimensions—the learning context, students' SEL, and teachers' SEL—and any discussion of SEL should include all three. In figure 1, these three dimensions are portrayed in a circle to illustrate their interconnectedness: each dimension influences and is influenced by the others.

The Learning Context

To be effective, SEL skill development and interventions should occur in a safe, caring, supportive, participatory, and well-managed

environment—that is, an environment that supports students' development and lets them practice the skills they learn. The learning context encompasses such factors as communication styles, performance expectations, classroom structures and rules, school organizational climate, commitment to academic success for all students, district policies, and parental and community involvement.

Children who feel comfortable with their teachers and peers are more willing to grapple with challenging material and persist at difficult learning tasks.

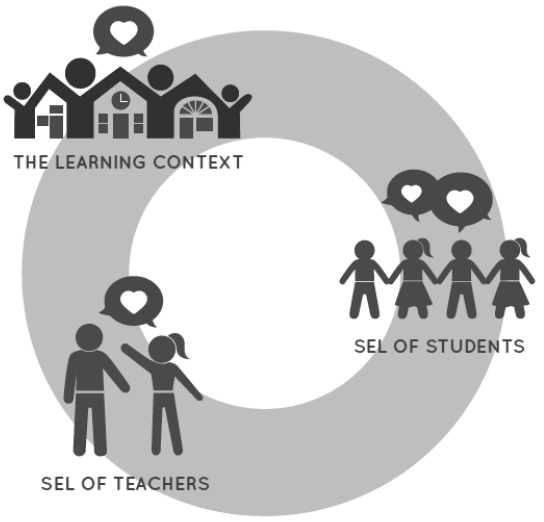
Students' SEL

SEL involves the processes by which people acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to understand and manage their emotions, to feel and show empathy for others, to establish and achieve positive goals, to develop and maintain positive relationships, and to make responsible decisions. Based on extensive research, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified five interrelated competencies that are central to SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.[4]

Teachers' SEL

Teachers' social-emotional competence and wellbeing strongly influence the learning context and the infusion of SEL into classrooms and schools.[5] Teachers' own competencies shape the nature of their relationships with students; according to researchers Patricia Jennings of the University of Virginia and Mark Greenberg of Pennsylvania State University, "the quality of teacher-student relationships, student and classroom management, and effective social and emotional learning program implementation all mediate classroom and student outcomes."[6] Classrooms with warm teacher-child relationships promote deep learning among students: children who feel comfortable with their teachers and peers are more willing to grapple with challenging material and persist at difficult learning tasks.[7] Conversely, when teachers poorly manage the social and emotional demands of teaching, students demonstrate lower performance and on-task behavior.[8] Clearly, we need to optimize teachers' classroom performance and their ability to promote SEL in their students by helping them build their own social-emotional competence.[9] I discuss this topic in more depth below.

Figure 1. Three-Component Framework for SEL



Do Teachers Buy In to SEL?

Any discussion of teachers and SEL should begin by asking whether they accept the notion that education should explicitly promote students' SEL. Simply put, do teachers agree that SEL should be a part of education? Recent research indicates that the answer is a resounding yes. Indeed, teachers are strong advocates for students' SEL. A nationally representative survey of more than 600 teachers found that large majorities of preschool to high school teachers believe that SEL skills are teachable, that promoting SEL will benefit students from both rich and poor backgrounds, and that SEL has many positive effects—on school attendance and graduation, standardized test scores and overall academic performance, college preparation, workforce readiness, and citizenship. However, the teachers also said that to effectively implement and promote SEL skills in classrooms and schools, they need strong support from district and school leaders.[10]

Teachers' Stressful Lives

If teachers support SEL, what might prevent them from implementing SEL strategies and programs in their classrooms? Decades' worth of research shows that teaching is one of the most stressful professions in the human service industry.[11] Work-related stress encompasses the detrimental physical and emotional responses that arise from a mismatch between a job's requirements and a worker's capabilities, resources, or needs.[12] In the context of education, teachers can experience stress when they appraise a situation as threatening but have limited ability to change or improve it. Take the case of teacher autonomy: among people in professional occupations, teachers rank lowest in believing that they have a say in what happens in the workplace.[13] The percentage of teachers who report low job autonomy increased from 18 percent in 2004 to 26 percent in 2012.[14]

The proportion of teachers who report significant levels of on-the-job stress is also rising. In a recent Gallup Poll on occupational stress, 46 percent of teachers reported high daily stress—on par with nurses and just above doctors (45 percent). Teachers and nurses had the highest levels of reported stress among all occupational groups.[15]

Why does teacher stress matter for our understanding of SEL? High levels of chronic stress can lead to occupational burnout—characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a low sense of accomplishment in one's work.[16] What's more, teacher stress has been linked to decreased job satisfaction, poor instructional practices, and poor student outcomes.[17]

High stress levels also harm teachers' physical health and wellbeing. For example, when people are highly stressed, the quantity and quality of their sleep is severely compromised. A study of high school teachers found that 46 percent suffered excessive daytime sleepiness and 51 percent had poor sleep quality.[18] Sleep disturbances, in turn, produce a cascade of negative effects, including increased risk for infectious disease and depression, and susceptibility to illnesses such as heart disease and cancer.[19]

Chronic work stress and exhaustion among teachers is also associated with negative changes in biological indicators of stress. Recent research has found that teachers who report chronic stress demonstrate atypical

patterns of physiological stress reactivity, as assessed via daytime levels of the stress hormone cortisol.[20]

Stress Contagion in the Classroom

How does teacher stress affect students' SEL? Research shows that stress is contagious—when teachers are stressed, students suffer collateral damage. A recent study of more than 10,000 first-grade students and their teachers examined the relationship between classroom environments and the students' mental health. The researchers found that teachers who reported higher levels of stress had more students in their classrooms with mental health problems.[21] Specifically, when teachers lacked key ingredients for teaching—ranging from basic resources such as paper and pencils and heat to child-friendly furnishings and computers—students exhibited higher levels of externalizing problems (arguing, fighting, impulsive behavior, and the like), interpersonal problems (for example, trouble expressing emotions and resolving conflicts), and internalizing problems (such as anxiety, sadness, and low self-esteem). Students also suffered when teachers weren't supported by their colleagues.

My own recent research corroborates the idea that classroom stress is contagious. My colleague Eva Oberle and I examined the link between teacher burnout and student stress in a sample of Canadian fourth- and seventh-graders.[22] The teachers completed a survey called the Maslach Burnout Inventory, modified for teachers.[23] To measure students' stress, we collected their salivary cortisol. After adjusting for differences in cortisol levels due to age, gender, and time of awakening, we found that higher levels of self-reported burnout in classroom teachers could significantly predict higher morning cortisol levels in students. Although our findings were correlational, our study was the first to show that teachers' occupational stress is linked to students' physiological stress regulation. But we don't yet know the direction of the stress contagion. That is, does teacher burnout boost stress levels in students? Or do students who enter the classroom with higher levels of stress lead to increased teacher burnout?

Warm classroom environments and positive teacher-student relationships promote both academic learning and SEL.

Teacher Attrition

In addition to burnout, attrition is a major obstacle to improving teacher quality. According to a 2007 report from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, teacher turnover costs the United States up to $7 billion a year, and the highest turnover occurs in low-performing, high-poverty schools with a high percentage of minority students.[24] Stress and poor emotion management are the primary reasons that teachers become dissatisfied and leave their positions.[25] Another contributing factor is student behavior. For instance, one study found that among the 50 percent of teachers who eventually leave the profession permanently, almost 35 percent report that their decision was related to problems with student discipline.[26] Problems with student discipline, classroom management, and student mental health emerge at the

beginning of teachers' careers—first-year teachers tend to feel unprepared to manage their classrooms effectively, and they can't recognize common mental health problems in their students, such as anxiety.[27] On a more positive note, data also suggest that when teachers are trained in the behavioral and emotional factors that influence teaching and learning in the classroom, they feel better equipped to propose and implement classroom management strategies that deter students' aggressive behaviors and promote a positive learning climate.[28]

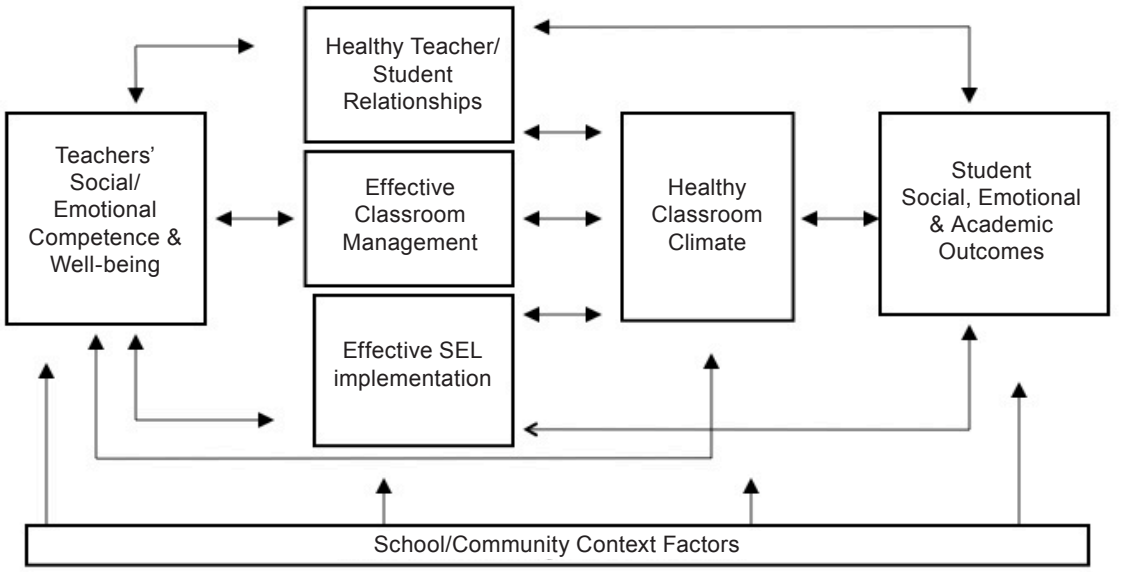
Teachers' Social and Emotional Competence and Students' SEL

As I said above, a safe, caring, participatory, and well-managed learning environment is a necessary but not sufficient condition for promoting social and emotional competence. Research shows that warm classroom environments and positive teacher-student relationships promote both academic learning and SEL.[29] Hence, teachers don't just need to know how to explicitly teach social and emotional skills; they also need the knowledge, dispositions, and skills for creating a safe, caring, supportive, and responsive school and classroom community.

Thus to successfully promote SEL, it's not enough to enhance teachers' knowledge of SEL alone. Teachers' own social and emotional competence and wellbeing appear to play a crucial role. To illustrate this, Stephanie Jones and Suzanne Bouffard of Harvard University created a conceptual model that highlights how teachers' background characteristics, social-emotional competence, and pedagogical skills influence school and classroom context as well as both short- and long-term child outcomes.[30] At the center of their model, Jones and Bouffard place core SEL skills in three conceptual domains: emotional processes, social/interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation.

Similarly, Jennings and Greenberg's Prosocial Classroom Model (see figure 2) suggests that teachers' social-emotional competence and wellbeing affect the classroom management

Figure 2. The Prosocial Classroom Model



strategies they use, the relationships they form with students, and their ability to implement SEL programs and practices.[31] These factors, in turn, can contribute to a healthy classroom climate that then leads to students' own academic and SEL success.

According to Jennings and Greenberg, teachers with high social and emotional competence are self-aware. They recognize their own emotions, they're able to use their emotions positively to motivate others to learn, and they understand their own capacities and emotional strengths and weaknesses particularly well.[32] They're also socially aware—they recognize and understand others' emotions, including those of their students and colleagues, and they work to build strong, supportive relationships. And they're culturally aware—their understanding that others' perspectives may differ from their own helps them negotiate positive solutions to conflicts.

Teachers with high social and emotional competence also demonstrate prosocial values—they have deep respect for their colleagues, students, and students' families, and they care about how their own decisions affect the wellbeing of others. Finally, such teachers possess strong self-management skills. Even in emotionally charged situations, they can regulate their emotions and their behaviors in healthy ways that promote a positive classroom environment for their students.

As figure 2 shows, teachers' social and emotional competence is associated with their psychological wellbeing. Teachers who master social and emotional challenges feel more efficacious, and teaching becomes more enjoyable and rewarding to them.[33] When teachers experience distress, it impairs their ability to provide emotional and instructional support to their students. Teachers' social and emotional competence and wellbeing are reflected in their classroom behavior and interactions with students—a primary mechanism for socialization. Teachers with higher social-emotional competence organize their classrooms and provide emotional and instructional support in ways that are associated with a high-quality classroom climate.[34] Jennings and Greenberg recommend that SEL interventions take into account teachers' own SEL competence and wellbeing to help them implement SEL effectively.

Interventions to Promote Teachers' SEL Competence

In the past few years, several interventions have specifically sought to improve teachers' social-emotional competence and stress management in school. Two of these programs are based on mindfulness: CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) and SMART-in-Education (Stress Management and Resiliency Training). *Mindfulness* means an attentive, nonjudgmental, and receptive awareness of present-moment experiences in terms of feelings, images, thoughts, sensations, and perceptions.[35] In boosting teachers' mindfulness, both programs aim to increase their job satisfaction, compassion and empathy for students, and efficacy in regulating emotions, while reducing stress and burnout. Initial research has shown both programs to be effective in promoting teachers' SEL competence and wellbeing.[36]

Recently, Patricia Jennings and Joshua Brown, a professor in the Department of Psychology at Fordham University, along with several colleagues, conducted

a large randomized trial involving 224 teachers in 36 urban elementary schools.[37] The researchers found that compared to a control group, teachers who received CARE training showed greater improvements in adaptive emotion regulation and mindfulness, and greater reductions in psychological distress and time urgency (a feeling of time pressure and needing to hurry through daily tasks). In classrooms of teachers who received CARE training, levels of emotional support were sustained across the school year; in control-group classrooms, emotional support fell as the year went on.

How Teachers' Beliefs Influence SEL Programs

Recent evidence suggests that teacher-related factors can affect the implementation of SEL programs in ways that may influence a program's quality and success.[38] For instance, teachers implement SEL programs more successfully when they have a positive attitude toward the program, are motivated to deliver it with fidelity, and are confident that they possess the skills and knowledge to do so well.[39] The fidelity with which teachers implement SEL programs has been associated with a number of teacher beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions: beliefs about whether the SEL program's activities are aligned with their teaching approach; beliefs about their own teaching efficacy; level of comfort with delivering an SEL curriculum; beliefs about behavior management practices; dedication to developing students' SEL skills; beliefs about whether they receive adequate support from school principals; and perceptions of the school culture's support for SEL instruction.[40]

During initial implementation of the SEL program RULER, which was developed at Yale University, one group of researchers examined whether students' SEL outcomes were affected by the amount of training teachers received, the quality of delivery of the SEL program, and the number of lessons students received (known as *dosage*).[41] The study, a large randomized controlled trial, involved 812 sixth-grade students and their teachers from 28 elementary schools in a large urban school district in the northeastern United States. Teachers were clustered into one of three groups: *low-quality implementers* (teachers who were initially resistant to the program and delivered it poorly, though they became more open to the program by the end of the school year), *moderate-quality implementers* (teachers who were middle-of-the-road in their attitudes toward and delivery of the program from beginning to end), and *high-quality implementers* (teachers who were open to the program and consistently delivered it well).

Analyses revealed that when teachers received more training and carried out more lessons, their students had more positive outcomes. Moreover, low-quality implementers were less confident than high-quality implementers about their ability to modify their teaching practices to influence students' engagement and learning (that is, their teaching efficacy), especially among difficult and unmotivated students. These findings show that alongside training and program fidelity, SEL interventions should take into account teachers' beliefs about their teaching efficacy when assessing how implementation affects students' SEL outcomes.

To date, only one study has examined whether implementing an SEL program for students can increase a teacher's own SEL competence. Celene Domitrovich, a senior research scientist at CASEL, along with several colleagues, looked at data from two school-based randomized controlled trials that tested the impact of two prevention programs in a sample of 350 K–5 teachers across 27 schools. They found that implementing a prevention program for students can yield positive benefits to teachers, particularly when the program includes a social-emotional component.[42]

Teacher Preparation in the United States

Preservice teacher preparation refers to the education and training received by teacher candidates before they enter the profession. It typically occurs at a college or university, and includes a set program of coursework and experiences that are delineated by state-level requirements for teacher certification. About 30 percent of teachers follow alternative routes to certification, though the percentage is rising.[43]

Most of the nation's teachers prepare at one of more than 1,400 institutions of higher education; according to the National Council on Teacher Quality, about 200,000 people graduate from teacher preparation programs each year.[44] Preservice teacher education programs vary considerably in duration (they include four-year bachelor's degree programs and one- or two-year graduate programs). They also vary in other ways: their emphasis on pedagogy across particular school levels (elementary, middle, or high school) and content area (teachers of older students typically identify a subject area, such as science, math, or social studies); length of practicums; and requirements for certification. To obtain a degree in teacher education, prospective teachers generally must have a minimum GPA; a bachelor's degree; knowledge of how social, institutional, and state policy affect the educational process; an understanding of how learning occurs and how to teach effectively; and successful supervised field experiences.[45] A certificate obtained in one country or state may not be recognized by another. Within the United States, state-to-state reciprocity is limited.

We're now at a critical juncture in the field of teacher preparation.

Researchers are only beginning to study the extent to which preservice teacher education includes information about and/or direct training in SEL. A few recent studies offer us a glimpse. In the next section, I examine the extent to which SEL is incorporated into coursework in US preservice teacher education programs.

SEL and Teacher Preparation

How can we best prepare teachers to effectively teach students from diverse backgrounds and create the conditions for optimal teaching and learning? That's an important question for policy makers, educational leaders, and researchers who want to ensure that students are fully prepared for engaged citizenship and productive and meaningful careers. Studies on what constitutes high-quality teacher preparation and professional development have sought to determine which courses and

experiences will give teachers the skills, dispositions, and knowledge they need to foster the success of all their students. More recently, researchers have also been asking what social and emotional skills and competencies teachers need to best promote students' SEL.

Recent reports suggest that we're now at a critical juncture in the field of teacher preparation.[46] Indeed, never before has teacher preparation and teacher quality been under such intense scrutiny. The past two decades have witnessed intense work to develop successful programs to improve the quality of teacher preparation and teacher professional development.[47] New policies have delineated professional standards, improved teacher preparation and certification requirements, and increased investments in programs that provide mentoring to new teachers and support teachers' professional development.[48]

Despite this work, student achievement in the United States still lags far behind that of other countries. Linda Darling-Hammond, an education expert and professor emeritus at Stanford University, states that "we have advanced little in achievement, especially in international comparisons, with no real reduction in the achievement gap after the large gains made in the 1960s and 1970s; we have lost ground on graduation rates and college-going, and we have expanded inequality in access to school resources. Meanwhile, many other nations like Finland, the Netherlands, Singapore, Korea, China (in particular, Hong Kong and Macao), New Zealand, and Australia have been pulling ahead, making intensive and sustained investments in teaching—the major policy strategy our nation has been unwilling to try."[49]

Knowledge about Child Development

One dimension that's central to effective, high-quality teaching and learning is teachers' knowledge and understanding of their students' social, emotional, and cognitive development.[50] Research tells us that teachers who understand child and adolescent development are better able to design and carry out learning experiences in ways that support social, emotional, and academic competence and enhance student outcomes.[51] Research has also shown how successful social relationships in schools (both between teachers and students and among students) are connected to positive social and academic outcomes.[52]

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and several federal agencies collaborated with a group of internationally renowned experts on two roundtable discussions about incorporating child and adolescent development research into preservice teacher preparation.[53] The reports that followed emphasized that preservice teachers should learn about many issues related to SEL, including children's social and emotional development, teacher-student relationships, and the learning environment. But do preservice teachers learn about child development? The NCATE explored this question in 2005, sending a 33-item online survey to unit heads at 595 NCATE-accredited institutions, both public and private. Forty-eight percent of the institutions responded, about two-thirds of them public and one-third private. Of the 283 responses, 90 percent indicated that their institution required teacher candidates to take at least one course in child or adolescent development (although several programs reported forgoing such courses altogether

because of state limitations on credit hours for teacher preparation programs).

Whether knowledge of development is applied to classroom practice is an open question, however. For one thing, in the NCATE survey, 20 percent of programs reported that they didn't teach their own development courses, relying instead on psychology departments, where connections to the classroom are less likely. Furthermore, many of the textbooks used by institutions in their courses contained virtually no application of child and adolescent development to actual classroom practice, leaving instructors to create their own examples. These survey responses underscore the potential benefits of course materials that make more explicit connections between developmental research and its application.

Knowledge about Students' SEL and Classroom Management

Research has shown that teachers can foster positive student-teacher relationships and create supportive and caring classroom environments, and that when they effectively integrate SEL programs into their practice, their students have better outcomes.[54] We know less about the teacher's role when it comes to mental illness and social, emotional, and behavioral problems among students. Teachers are uniquely situated to recognize significant adjustment problems or identify common disruptive behaviors. But most teachers feel poorly prepared to tackle such problems because they lack knowledge and skills in the areas of mental health and/or classroom management.[55] Indeed, one study found that neither experienced nor first-year teachers felt that their teacher-education programs had adequately trained them to identify and manage students' mental health problems.[56] Similarly, in a national study of 2,335 educators conducted by the Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education, teachers indicated that they hadn't received adequate preservice training for handling student behavior.[57] The majority, and especially first-year teachers, ranked classroom management as one of their top two professional development needs.

Another study examined the extent to which university graduate-level teacher education programs included content that covered four topics related to SEL—social development, emotional development, behavior management, and abuse and neglect.[58] The researchers analyzed course descriptions for all required classes in the top 50 graduate-level teacher education programs (according to *US News and World Report*'s 2012 rankings), documenting whether the inclusion of these topics varied as a function of program level (elementary vs. secondary training), type of university (public vs. private), or geographic location (Northeast, South, West, Midwest). The final sample of 78 elementary and secondary education programs from 43 universities across the United States included only those programs that made online course descriptions publicly available.

More than two-thirds of the 78 programs required at least one course on the topics of social development, emotional development, behavior management, or abuse and neglect (although only one course mentioned abuse and neglect). Behavior management was cited most frequently—a little more than half the graduate teacher education programs reviewed (52.6 percent) included a course whose title or description specifically mentioned behavior, behavior management, or classroom management. About one-fourth

of the programs (26.9 percent) required a course on social development, one-fifth (20.5 percent) required two courses, and one program (1.3 percent) even required three courses. Few programs required a course on emotional development (16.7 percent), although three programs (3.8 percent) required two classes on the topic.

Whether these topics were included didn't vary across elementary vs. secondary programs or public vs. private institutions. There were, however, significant regional differences. Fewer programs in the South included social development, and behavior management was more frequently covered in the West. The researchers speculated that these differences might result from variations in state legislation and policies related to school mental health services and teacher licensure requirements, as well as the value systems of schools, teachers, and school mental health service providers.[59]

A recent report from the National Council on Teacher Quality also found relatively little attention being paid to classroom management in preservice education.[60] Using course materials such as syllabi, textbooks, and student teaching observation and evaluation forms, the NCTQ study examined classroom management–related professional coursework in 119 teacher preparation programs in 79 institutions of higher education in 33 states. Almost all of these programs (97 percent) included some mention of classroom management, but instruction and practice in classroom management strategies were often scattered around the curriculum and didn't draw from the latest scientific research identifying the most effective strategies. Moreover, during their student-teaching experience, preservice teachers had relatively few opportunities to translate knowledge of effective classroom management into practice. Only about one-third of the programs required prospective teachers to practice classroom management skills as they learned them. Given the lack of attention to training and experience in classroom management for preservice teachers, it isn't surprising that a high proportion of teachers say that student behavior significantly impedes their success in the classroom.[61]

In summary, though only a few studies have examined the extent to which preservice teacher education programs cover subjects relevant to SEL and its practical application, those studies have consistently found that programs pay little attention to giving teachers the knowledge and skills they need to promote their students' social and emotional competence and to create positive classroom environments that enhance student success.[62] How can we influence preservice teacher education programs to expand their focus on SEL? In the next section, I present findings from a recent state-level scan (review and examination) for SEL content in courses in US colleges of education—a critical first step in ensuring that teachers are adequately prepared to integrate SEL into their educational practice.

A Review of SEL Content in US Teacher Preparation Courses

As I've shown, much recent research supports taking action to promote both teachers' and students' social and emotional competence.[63] But no research had examined the extent to which teacher preparation programs equip teacher candidates with the SEL knowledge and skills they need. To answer this question,

my colleagues and I conducted the first ever comprehensive scan of SEL content in preservice US teacher education programs.[64]

We analyzed 3,916 required courses in teacher preparation programs offered by 304 US colleges of education (representing 30 percent of all US colleges that offer teacher preparation coursework). We found that few teacher education programs covered the five SEL competencies outlined by CASEL. Specifically, only 13 percent had at least one course that included information on relationship skills. For responsible decision-making, self-management, social awareness, and self-awareness, the numbers were 7 percent, 6 percent, 2 percent, and 1 percent, respectively.

A strength of our scan is that we obtained a wide body of data that represented every US state and the District of Columbia. But while our data had breadth, it lacked depth of information about how SEL content is incorporated. For example, although the scan revealed the presence of SEL content in course descriptions on the colleges' websites, we don't know the specific content covered or the quality of that content. We need more research, using both quantitative and qualitative data, to get a more detailed picture of how SEL is incorporated in teacher preparation.

Embedding SEL in Teacher Preparation

A few teacher preparation programs have begun to incorporate theory, research, and practical application of SEL into teachers' preservice education. For example, San Jose State University's Center for Reaching and Teaching the Whole Child is committed to embedding the social-emotional dimension of teaching and learning into the university's teacher preparation program. Preservice courses, such as math and science methods or classroom management, have been revised to include SEL content. The faculty has also developed an observation protocol with an SEL orientation for mentor teachers and university supervisors to use when they observe student teaching.

At the University of British Columbia, where I work, the Faculty of Education has explicitly integrated SEL into a post-baccalaureate 12-month teacher preparation program. One of the nine options available to our approximately 400 elementary preservice teacher education students is an SEL cohort that comprises about 36 students each year. In this program, teacher candidates follow the general outline of the regular education program but with an added emphasis on SEL. They don't just learn about SEL research and theory in their coursework; during their student-teaching practicum, they also learn how to implement evidence-based SEL programs and SEL practices in the classroom. Teacher candidates can review a wide variety of SEL programs in our SEL program library and integrate the strategies they learn into their coursework and student teaching. All teacher candidates in the cohort are taught active learning approaches that help to create safe, caring, and participatory classroom and school environments.[65]

Explicitly promoting SEL in preservice teacher education is an important step. But challenges remain. For example, if we add a course on creating safe, caring, and supportive learning contexts to an already demanding and intensive one-year program, we have to cut required coursework in another area. Still, we must recognize and promote SEL as a necessary part of teacher training. Indeed, given the importance of

teachers' own social-emotional wellbeing for implementing SEL programs and practices, preservice teacher education shouldn't just give teacher candidates knowledge about students' SEL; it should also give them tools and strategies to build their own social and emotional competence. Such an approach would help integrate SEL into the fabric of K–12 education and create a generation of students who have acquired the social and emotional competencies they need for their adult roles as citizens, employees, parents, and volunteers.

ENDNOTES

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