

**Social-Emotional Learning and Cultural Competence: a Research of Current Teaching
Practices in the US Compared the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional
Learning (CASEL)**

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to study in-depth how current teaching practices impact the social and emotional development of the student, as well as the teacher's preparation to create learning environments that embrace cultural differences and low-income students. It will focus on instructional strategies that, when implemented, will establish and enhance a respectful and supportive environment for diverse students, families, or the community. “Early social-emotional competencies, such as behavioral regulation, attentional skills, and the ability to problem-solve, are critical to children’s academic outcomes” (Blair, 2002; Diamond & Lee, 2011).

Social-Emotional Learning and Cultural Competence: a Research of Current Teaching Practices in the US Compared to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

The CASEL framework is an “integrated framework that highlights five SEL competencies promoted through multiple contexts. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (Frameworks Brief, 2019).

The framework has had a great influence across the nation and has been implemented in many school districts. Ross and Tolan (2018) conducted an investigation on the implication of the framework on young people. “We first tested and validated the five (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making) SEL factor models using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in a normative sample of 1,717 U.S. fifth grade youth. The model was then subjected to longitudinal measurement invariance testing using CFA models that included the sixth- and seventh-grade samples to confirm SEL as a robust model across these grades” (Ross & Tolan, 2018).

The five core competencies of the CASEL model are reflected in the RWRCOEL Professional Dispositions, NBPTS Core Propositions, Technology Proficiencies, and more professional standards nationwide. CASEL has “identified five core social and emotional competence clusters to use in interventions: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness,

relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Below, we identify and define the competencies as they are presented in the framework” (Ross & Tolan, 2018).

CASEL Vision and Mission

The purpose of the CASEL Framework is to guide professionals, stakeholders, students, and their families in the development of social, emotional, and academic learning. “The framework was derived from practice and aimed toward practice. CASEL is partnering with more than 20 school districts nationwide to support their efforts to systematically implement high-quality SEL districtwide and share those learnings broadly” (Frameworks Brief, 2019).

CASEL contributors consistently and continually work with researchers, educators, and policymakers to “foster SEL as an integral part of every student’s education. Setting the Framework for Systemic SEL has widespread applications” (Frameworks Brief, 2019). The model is implemented at all grade levels focusing on areas of systemic implementation, coordinating strategies across school districts and communities while providing free, targeted resources for each setting.

SEL and Cultural Competence in Palm Beach County School District

Vision and Mission

Palm Beach County District Schools have partnered and adopted the CASEL Framework to bring social change to our practice. “Social and emotional skills go beyond the classroom. They’re needed on playgrounds, in lunchrooms, hallways, and out-of-school settings. Out-of-school time activities also provide opportunities to practice skills like sharing, leadership, entering social situations and social inclusion. Children need support to ensure the entire learning environment is safe and positive” (Bisram, 2020). The Initiative is a comprehensive project that

explores how children can benefit from intentional collaborations between schools and out-of-school time programs. The main focus is helping children develop social-emotional skills, manage emotions, feel empathy for others, set and achieve positive goals, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Classroom Implication and Current Practices

For the school year 2019/2020, students and educators were deeply affected due to a growing pandemic. Educators and families did not have other choices but to deliver effective instruction through technology and children were forced to stay in front of an electronic device for many hours. The level of stress was unbearable and many teachers quit the profession. However more schools nationwide rushed to implement the CASEL Framework having a positive result. School districts in Florida were pioneers in using SEL strategies. During this time a study was conducted in 38 schools to “found that those competencies promote success in school, career, and life. The study works across the system and site-level in six communities (Boston, Dallas, Denver, Palm Beach County, Fla., Tacoma, Wash., and Tulsa, Okla.). It offers important insights from the first two years of the initiative, at a time when interest in SEL is growing” (Study offers insight, 2019).

The most common activities for Social and emotional learning implemented in Palm Beach District are Morning Meetings, Ice-Breaks, Story Time, Mindfulness, Stress Toss, and a Growing Mindset. “SEL helps students get to know themselves as individuals during this pivotal time in their lives. This self-awareness leads to a deeper understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as of their likes and dislikes. It also creates a healthy foundation from which they are able to set and meet goals, foster and navigate positive relationships, and make

responsible choices. Social-emotional programs increase students' resilience and grit. Social-emotional skills have been proven to help students more effectively cope with stress, solve problems, and avoid peer pressure" (A guide to social-emotional learning: Naviance, 2021).

SEL and Cultural Competence in Parker Unified School District

Parker Unified School District has yet to officially adopt a set of SEL standards; however, after the COVID-19 pandemic shut down schools, the expectations for teachers drastically changed. In an article written by the National Education Association, a second-grade teacher says "...we have to work on relationship skills and how to talk to each other the right way. It's more important now than ever" (Walker, 2020). The community surrounding PUSD was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is critical that teachers in the district begin to incorporate SEL competencies in their classrooms to make up for time lost during the school closure. Even though Parker Unified School district does not officially hold any SEL standards, the Arizona Department of Education has adopted the CASEL competencies. "Use of this framework is completely voluntary and not required. School districts are encouraged to research and select SEL curriculum that works best in their community" (Arizona Department of Education, 2020, p.5).

It is encouraged by the administration to incorporate the SEL curriculum, despite not being required by the state. It would benefit the Parker Unified School District to officially adopt the CASEL framework because students in the community desperately need SEL skills. In the state of Arizona, Parker Unified Schools have a high number of students who have been afflicted by some sort of trauma in their lives. Using a trauma-sensitive SEL curriculum can help students

to cope with their difficult situations, as well as aid in the creation of a school environment that is conducive to creating a safe and respectful learning environment (Arizona Department of Education, 2020, p. 7).

Current Practices

Social-Emotional health is something I focus on in my classroom. Checking in with my students constantly and helping them to develop strategies to identify, express, and manage their emotions will help them to be successful in all aspects of their adult lives (Arizona Department of Education, 2020, p. 8). The conversations I have with my students focus on *self-awareness* and *self-management*. Even though my students are high schoolers, they still seem to have struggles identifying their feelings and how to deal with them. Every week, we do a check-in so students can tell me how they are feeling, and I can do my best to help them identify and cope with their feelings. This establishes rapport in my classroom and helps create a positive educational climate.

SEL and Cultural Competence in Ware County School District

District-wide Plan

Like many school districts throughout the country, Ware County School District, located in southeastern Georgia, needed to reflect and regroup before reopening in August 2020. In response, Ware County School District formed a Reopening Committee consisting of principals, Board of Education members, and select additional staff. The Reopening Plan for the 2020-2021 school year that was created included a Social-Emotional Learning section.

The Social-Emotional Learning section included five action items. Ware County School District hired additional mental health staff. They also provided information to access resources

for teachers, staff, students, and their families. Ware County School District also provided targeted assistance for “at-risk” or identified staff and students that would benefit from mental health counseling support. They were also implementing digital student surveys in order to gauge the students’ social-emotional well-being from grades K through 12. And lastly, Ware County School District was adding more professional development focusing on social-emotional learning for staff (Ware County, 2020).

Inside the classroom, many of the social-emotional learning activities fall under the Positive behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework. For example, a house system licensed and modeled after the Ron Clark Academy House System was rolled out in various schools to create a feeling of belonging and camaraderie among students and staff. Houses have staff mentors as well as older, more senior students taking on leadership roles. Four-year-old kindergarten uses the Second Step program in the classroom. The digital Kelvin Survey was given to the students periodically in the form of a brown dog who pops up on their screen after log in who would then ask social-emotional questions and check-in with the students. The results are basically anonymous. Feedback is categorized and returned to mental health staff. However, any alarming responses were noted, and then the company would provide that user’s information so the School District could reach out to offer assistance.

SEL and Cultural Competence in Connecticut (CT)

Connecticut defines social, emotional, learning as “The process through which children and adults achieve emotional intelligence through the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making” (Public Act 19-166). (CT State Dept of Educ, 2021). In 2008, CT implemented the SRBI structure

which stands for Scientific Research-Based Interventions. The structure is based on a 3-Tiered approach to provide assistance and interventions through increased degrees if needed. “Tier 1 refers to the general education core curriculum and instruction, the overall school climate, and the system of schoolwide social-emotional learning and behavioral and physical health supports for all students” (CT State Dept of Educ, 2021). Teachers monitor the students' advancement in each tier. Tier 2 includes additional support to Tier 1 instruction. These support strategies implemented may be small groups, large groups, or outside of the classroom. If progression is not made, other strategies are implemented and if the child requires even more support, individual instruction is provided in tier 3. “The basic principles of a Response to Intervention (RTI) model hold considerable promise for helping Connecticut schools improve education for all students and address the large disparities within the state” (CT State Dept of Educ, 2021).

In 2018, Connecticut also implemented a K-3 Components of Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Habits. These habits represent skills that should be included in learning experiences for students throughout the day. They include developing a positive self-concept, developing a positive attitude toward learning, identifying, and understanding emotions, developing positive interpersonal skills, developing executive functioning skills, developing logic, and reasoning and using modes of symbolic representation (CT State Dept of Educ, 2018). These components build on the CT Early Learning and Development Standards, so there is a continuum of social, emotional, learning throughout the elementary years.

Some of the teachers' responsibilities in supporting these components are to create a positive classroom environment that promotes social/emotional development, model positive

behaviors, increase engagement between peers, and encourage healthy relationships by showing respect, empathy, and kindness.

The social/emotional curriculum that I use in my school is called Second Step. It is a holistic approach to social/emotional learning. “A holistic approach to SEL supports both children’s and educators’ social-emotional competencies, provides SEL throughout the day and across the stages of child development, and occurs in positive, supportive environments” (Committee for Children, 2021). The Second Step at the Pre-K level concentrates on self-regulation, paying attention, friendships, emotions, and problem-solving skills. Teachers use puppets and read directly from poster size cards presenting situations similar to everyday life in pre-kindergarten. Through discussions and role-playing, students learn important social-emotional skills. I have been using Second Step for 4 years now and my students respond very well to it. They are very engaged in each lesson and look forward to learning more each day. We have incorporated Second Step lessons throughout our day, and I often refer to our puppets when certain scenarios arise.

On March 26, 2021, the CT State Department of Education announced that it will be introducing a statewide K-12 social-emotional learning assessment. This will include a universal screener to provide data in order to support students' social-emotional skills and help provide additional support to those in need. As an educator, I believe any support we can give children will continue to help them as they mature into adults. Social-emotional support is needed now more than ever in our schools. It is imperative that we, as educators, promote positive mental health.

Social-Emotional Learning at Lamar County Elementary School

Lamar County Elementary School in Georgia houses grades 3-5. Recently, a social-emotional learning program was implemented and is in its first year of the rollout. The lessons are conducted in class and will focus on five SEL competencies throughout the school year: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness. The teachings are strategically planned out to accompany the focus skill. All students participate in the SEL lessons, and in addition to the curriculum, students will be referred to behavior tiers as needed.

In my classroom, we use the program which also serves as an attention grabber. After the video, students are led in an open discussion revolving around the key focus. I teach third grade and at that age, the students respond well to the lessons. The teachings from the program are easy to follow and use real-life situations that the children can follow. There are other components to the program that we have not fully implemented as of now.

Social-Emotional Learning in Volusia County Schools

Volusia County's vision for Social-Emotional Learning is to integrate it into the academic experience for every learner. Their main focus is to provide a safe and positive foundation that ensures the student is successful not only in the classroom but anywhere else. For their 2020-2023 strategic plan, they are looking to implement SEL interventions to improve the school environment, which is to result in better social and increased outcomes for students. Their goal is to improve classroom behaviors and increase the ability to manage stress and behaviors (Volusia, 2021). Volusia County promotes a safe and supportive environment for the students and staff. We Pre-K teachers are taught how to teach our students the foundations of SEL and integrating it into our activities.

I currently use Conscious Discipline in my classroom. Conscious Discipline was founded by Dr. Becky Bailey. Conscious Discipline is made up of four components: Conscious Discipline Brain State Model, Seven Powers of Conscious Adults, Creating the School Family, and The Seven Skills of Discipline (Bailey, 2021). In my classroom, we are big on creating a school family. This concept increases connections in the classroom. Forming these connections ensures appropriate development for all of my students. To make sure that the school family concept works, we have to ensure that the students have the three essential ingredients for school success. The ingredients are willingness to learn, impulse control, and attention (Bailey, 2021). I've used conscious discipline in my classroom for 2 years, and I've seen the difference it makes in my students. They are taught concepts that stick with them for the rest of their lives.

Summary

In this research social-emotional learning (SEL) programs have demonstrated positive effects on children's social-emotional behavioral skills to build resilience in school, improve academic outcomes, and create a positive classroom climate. The most common practices implemented are emotional support in the classroom and the attitude of the professional staff to prepare and inform themselves of practical exercises suggested by research. "Classrooms with high levels of organization show effective strategies for behavior management, maximization of learning time, and engagement in the successful implementation of academic activities (Pianta, La Paro, et al., 2008)" (Meganat et al., 2015). More districts need to foster social and emotional learning strategies and create training for educators. "Most effective SEL programs are implemented by providing professional development (PD) and training to teachers. It is anticipated that teachers will then use the strategies taught in the PD sessions in their

classrooms” (Meganat et al., 2015).

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