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INTEGRATING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING INTO CURRICULUM CONTENT, ROUTINES,
AND RELATIONSHIPS IN A PRIMARY CLASSROOM

A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY
RUTH HAUGSTAD

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BETHEL UNIVERSITY

INTEGRATING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING INTO CURRICULUM CONTENT, ROUTINES,
AND RELATIONSHIPS IN A PRIMARY CLASSROOM

Ruth Haugstad

November 2020

APPROVED

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Abstract

The increasing need for social emotional learning within the classroom, combined with rising academic expectations, are putting educators in a difficult situation. Educators need to be more creative in how they teach, blending curriculum and SEL learning. The purpose of this paper is to research the impact of social emotional learning and how social emotional learning can be most effectively integrated into existing curriculum, routines and classroom procedures. Research was limited to studies conducted with primary aged students measuring the impact of various strategies on social emotional growth. Findings showed that the integration of social emotional learning could occur in the areas of Morning Meeting, curriculum content, Project-Based Learning, free play, instructional techniques, and teacher-student relationships. A common thread throughout the research seemed to unravel the realization that however good the plan of integration, the social emotional learning success of the students primarily depends on the quality of the teacher's implementation and the perceived relationship between teacher and student.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Standing before me was a long line of Kindergarten students arguing and waiting to tattle on the friend who had just betrayed them during recess. I paused and looked longingly at my lesson that I had prepared and then at the clock, and wondered, do I have the time to stop and use this moment to help my students learn to listen, understand, and compromise to mend their relationships, or do I forge ahead into my lessons as planned? The reality of the increasing academic expectations for our youngest students is causing teachers to pause and need to decide what is most important. Do we spend our time plowing through the curriculum that stretches out before us, or do we use our time to help our students learn to become good and kind people? The answer cannot be one or the other but needs to be both. So how can teachers integrate essential social emotional learning into their classrooms while also completing all the necessary academic requirements?

Fulghum (2004) once wrote, “All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten” (p. 11). Kindergarten is a special transitional age when children learn how to learn, how to be a friend, how to persevere through challenges, how to do school, and how to be who they are out in the big world on their own. I never would have expected that when I grew up, I would be teaching Kindergarten, but fifteen years later I am still completely in love with this one-of-a-kind time in a child’s life. These students have aged out of preschool but are still just babies to the educational world. Kindergarten is their time machine from dependency to

independence, and I want to make sure I am giving my students the tools they need to make their transition into the big kid world and beyond successful.

Research Rationale

I believe that in schools today, we are to teach the whole child. Education is no longer only about how well you can retain the academic lecture; but as educators we have been tasked with teaching our students how to do life and do it well. Along with the academic curriculum, we are now seeing, more than ever, a need for Social Emotional Learning. The demands on our time in the classroom continue to grow, and knowing the importance of the social and mental welfare of our students, I am left wondering, how can and should Social Emotional Learning be integrated into the existing curriculum, routines and climate of the Kindergarten classroom? Erik Jensen, author of *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, states “When blending into the curriculum, teaching social skills takes little extra time. And you may get a significant payoff in terms of efficiency: fewer disruptions, more camaraderie, and better overall feelings about the learning” (Jensen, 2005, p. 100). It is this payoff that is my driving passion to seek additional knowledge about how to best implement social emotional learning skills into the curriculum to create resilient students. As educators in today’s world, there are many layers to the learning we need to provide. The behavior of students will directly affect their ability to learn and develop the resilience they will need to make the most out of their schooling. It is for these very reasons that educators need to take steps towards providing SEL (Social Emotional Learning) into their classrooms.

With the need for effective time management, and the necessity to make the most out of each classroom moment, my research questions became, what is the worth of social emotional learning for my students and how can I best integrate that learning into my already existing curriculum, routines and classroom procedures? As I defined my research boundaries and discovered classroom integration possibilities, I found research that gave me direction as to what areas have been the most successful in integrating SEL for students. These research findings included integration in the areas of Morning Meeting (a Responsive Classroom practice), curriculum content, Project-Based Learning, free play, teacher routines, instructional techniques, and teacher-student relationships.

The foundation we give our students as they grow through our education system should be able to provide them with the tools to support their social skills, their emotional wellbeing, and their personal, cultural acceptance all while incorporating them into the joy of learning. It is a huge task, but what a powerful advantage our students would have if everything they needed to know about life, they really did learn in Kindergarten? For, "Everything you need to know is in there somewhere. The Golden Rule and love and basic sanitation. Ecology and politics and equality and sane living. Take any of those items and extrapolate it into sophisticated adult terms and apply it to your family life or your work or your government or your world and it holds true and clear and firm" (Fulghum, 2004, p.12). As I work through this process, it is important for me to find ways to improve how I can educate the whole child so my students can

discover ways to recognize and develop strengths within themselves and find ways to reach out in kindness and empathy to others. Educators can truly use our influence, time, and instruction to help make this world a better place: one child at a time.

Theoretical Framework of Social Emotional Learning

Although the need for appropriate social skills within our society is becoming more commonly understood, the expectation that children will learn moral values and social expectations from their parents and families can no longer be assumed. There are skills that children naturally possess or are gifted with, however many of the interpersonal skills that are needed in life must be taught and learned. Unfortunately, as our culture has shifted into becoming busier, technology driven, and individualized or self-centered, many of our children today are coming to school with limited exposure to healthy social interaction and emotional wellbeing.

A child has a natural temperament with which they express themselves very early on in life (Fraser-Thill, 2019). Their “emotional, attitudinal and behavioral choices” (Fraser-Thill, 2019, para. 6) combine to eventually create what is known as their personality. However, when digging deeper into the heart of a child and his understanding of himself and the world around him, we need to take a closer look at the character traits that can be developed through social emotional learning education. Character traits and social skills work hand in hand, both impacting the other and contributing to the social responses and personal feelings of a child. Character traits define the morals and values that a person emulates providing background to the

reasoning and purpose behind their choices. Social competencies are then how that child places herself into the world: her reactions, responses, relationships, and impulses in how she interacts with others.

CASEL, which stands for Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, is an accredited organization that recognized the need for character development and consistent social expectations as schools began floundering under lowering test scores and an increase in negative and aggressive student behaviors became more apparent. CASEL has become a leading pioneer in the understanding and development of Social Emotional Learning frameworks and provides evidence-based strategies to school with the goal of empowering teachers and administrators with the tools needed to fill the “missing piece” of education and strive to make a difference in the social development of children (CASEL, 2019a).

CASEL was created in a 1994 meeting where distinguished stakeholders came together committing to finding a way to support educators and schools with authentic strategies that had proven to be successful in supporting students with the use of their newly fabricated term “social emotional learning” (CASEL, 2019a, para. 2). When presenting this message to the world, “SEL was introduced as a framework that addresses the needs of young people and helps to align and coordinate school programs and programming” (CASEL, 2019a, para. 3).

In 1997, CASEL worked together with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) to publish a book, *Promoting Social and Emotional*

Learning: Guidelines for Educators, that laid the foundation for what we now know of and perceive social emotional learning to be. Since then, CASEL has developed and published the five core social competencies that are used as a guideline and rubric for most any social emotional program today. These competences include **self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills** which are all further defined later in this thesis (CASEL, 2013). As new SEL programs and frameworks are developed, CASEL takes on the responsibility to ensure that they are researched and valid before recommending them in any school.

As a country we need to continue to support the forward momentum that is recognizing the significance that a person's social and emotional wellbeing has one's life. Providing a quality and equitable academic curriculum is important and necessary for the future success of our children, however, that in of itself cannot overpower the need to help our children grow and become responsible, thoughtful, kind and confident members of society. We must understand the need to balance both ways of educating a child within their time at school, especially if many student's families are not in a place to provide this education for their own children. For what lesson will have the most lasting impact on a child's future? The historical dates and facts of the revolutionary war? Or the ability to problem solve, compromise, and think critically with the ability to learn from our past?

Key Terms

There were several key terms that were used throughout the research. “Social Emotional Learning” is defined by CASEL as “an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, 2019b, para. 1). “Social skills”, and “social competencies” are used interchangeably and refer to the qualities necessary for a child to learn what will allow him or her to have healthy and strong interpersonal relationships and social interactions. “Responsive Classroom” is “an evidence-based approach to teaching and discipline that focuses on engaging academics, positive community, effective management, and developmental awareness” (Responsive Classroom, n.d., para. 1).

“Project-Based Learning” is an instructional framework that promotes a practice of allowing students to work together to research and solve real world authentic problems.

Research Questions

The following research is centered around these questions: What is the importance of social emotional learning? How can it be integrated within the academic curriculum, daily procedures and routines, and teacher-student relationships? The goal of this research is to uncover tools and strategies for when and how educators can best

integrate social emotional learning into the daily routines of the classroom, allowing students to learn and practice social skills without realizing they were learning. This would enable educators to maximize the impact they have on their students.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

The literature research for this thesis was located through Bethel Library search engines, such as ProQuest and Scopus. Additional searches were done in Education Journals, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, and EBSCO were conducted to find articles within the years from 2000 - 2020. Each search using the key words such as: “social emotional learning”, “Responsive Classroom”, “Morning Meeting”, “social skills”, “integration”, “curriculum integration”, “student-teacher relationships”, “literacy”, “social studies”, “STEAM/STEM”, “Project Based Learning”, “small group learning” was narrowed with the criteria of how Social Emotional Learning affected each area. Only peer reviewed and primary research articles were selected. Resources from articles were also explored to see if they applied. This chapter will address the overall importance of social emotional learning and research findings on how it can be integrated into the classroom, specifically in the areas of morning meeting, instructional content, Project-Based Learning, play, teacher routines and techniques, and teacher-student relationships.

The Impact and Importance of Social Emotional Learning

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has made strides in frequent years by showing its importance in the world of school education. The increasing number of children who are coming to school lacking in **self-awareness** (the ability to recognize one’s emotions and personal strengths), **self-management** (the ability to control one’s emotions, set

goals, and handle stressful situations), **social awareness** (the ability to understand social norms, such as read the situation, cultural differences, and be able to sympathize with others), **relationship skills** (the ability to build and maintain healthy relationships while resisting inappropriate social pressures), and **responsible decision making** (the ability to make responsible decisions and understand the consequences of their choices) (CASEL, 2013). The Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2013) has created an SEL framework while also identifying the above social competencies as being needed for teachers, districts, and states to begin implementing social emotional learning into the curriculum. Education Boards across the nation are beginning to look at their common core education requirements and contemplate the addition of SEL (Social Emotional Learning) standards into the curriculum. Eklund et al. (2018) completed a systematic review analyzing the standard systems of states and territories across the United States of America to determine how standardized education systems were responding to the increased need for SEL instruction in today's schools. CASEL has encouraged the adoption of SEL standards at the district and state level with the understanding that these standards will provide guidance, expectations and a framework to successfully implement SEL into schools (Eklund et al. 2018).

The purpose of the Eklund et al. (2018) systematic review was to identify states that were including these SEL standards into their expected common core as well as determining how they were being implemented either as freestanding standards or embedded into existing curriculum. Standards were defined as "written descriptions"

(Eklund et al. 2018, p. 319) of the expectations for students, not a directive on how those standards should be implemented. The four researchers, two college professors and two doctoral students, gathered data from education state department websites in addition to emailing or calling state departments for additional or missing information. The research was conducted by gathering data and compiling it into a spreadsheet by identifying four main categories: grade, freestanding or embedded into other content standards, age specification groups, and inclusion of CASEL's five core competencies (Eklund et al. 2018). The authors then worked through any discrepancies of their data before determining their findings.

The results of the Eklund et al. (2018) showed a wide variety of state adaptation of SEL standards within the department of education and the specified age group had a large impact on the implied importance. While all 50 states and the District of Columbia had specific freestanding SEL standards for preschool age children, only eleven had freestanding standards for all of Kindergarten through twelfth grade. Most commonly, most state departments had embedded SEL standards into health or physical education standards, and of these the majority referenced all five of CASEL's core competencies. These results indicate that there is clear acknowledgement that SEL standards should be addressed in the Early Childhood years, but less importance is placed on them as students continue through their school career.

Limitations that were identified by the authors of this study included the unknown accuracy of webpage data, and information received from phone calls. Eklund

et al. (2018) suggests that further research should be conducted to determine the specific content of the standards or quality of implementation. However, the study results suggest that states are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of SEL integration into schools and classrooms, but states need to embrace the opportunity to further develop these standards for K-12 students.

As state departments and school districts continue to muddle through the need to put SEL guidelines into practice for schools, evidence of successful SEL implementation and importance should be considered. The Seattle Social Development Project is a longitudinal study that began back in 1981 with the purpose of understanding the long-term impact of Social Emotional Learning interventions among students in an urban area on their future success and positive decision-making skills. The full-term group began with students in the first grade, where they received an average of just over four years of SEL intervention from then until the sixth grade. The partial intervention group had students who were given interventions in fifth and sixth grades only with an average of about one and a half years of intervention (Hawkins et al. 2008). Of the 1053 students who were a part of the study, 808 had parental permission to continue with the longitudinal follow up. The interventions that were implemented included teacher training on SEL integrated curriculum, student class interventions and skill building, and parents were offered sessions on child behavior management and academic development (Hawkins et al. 2008).

Using this intervention baseline, the Seattle Social Development Project study examined and measured different aspects of the now adults, at ages 24 and 27, to determine if the intervention group showed any additional signs of success compared to the control group. There were multiple measures, from subject interviews, to public record data, that was used to analyze a variety of aspects of the participants lives to determine the intervention impact success including, but not limited to, completion of high school, job commitment, prison time, household income, community involvement, substance abuse, and mental health problems. The results favored the full intervention group in showing greater achievement in the areas of community involvement, school completion, household income, and mental health over the control group. However, there was no significant difference in the results of participants in the areas of substance abuse or crime. Overall, the partial intervention group had slightly better results than the control group but were less positive than the full intervention group. It is pertinent to point out the potential powerful impact that SEL intervention can have on students after revealing results that show significant impact on the mental health and socioeconomic betterment of the lives of the students 12 and 15 years later. The primary takeaway from Hawkins et al.'s (2008) study for this literature review is that the evidence reveals the importance that SEL instruction at the elementary level can have on students as they age and in future adult years. The results also clearly show that the longer the students received SEL integrated interventions, the more successful the long-term results.

Hawkins and his colleagues (2008) state that some limitations of the study include its small geographic area and that much of the measurement data depended on the responses of the participants. Another factor to include in the study limitations is the consideration of additional life experiences that participants had in the interim years between receiving SEL interventions and the follow up study.

The above research results show evidence on the impact and importance that SEL can have on a student's academic achievement and behavior wellbeing. However, research has also shown academic behavior, and social predictors that can happen when there is a lack of any SEL interventions. In a research study done by Izard and her colleagues (2001), they sought to determine whether a child's verbal ability, emotional knowledge, and academic competence at age five can predict the academic and behavioral success that same student will have at age nine.

The data for this study was taken from a longer study which was researching the social development of children who were living in poverty environments. It was discovered by Izard et al. (2001) that this has shown to be an unrepresented demographic in research. Information was gathered from teachers, mothers, and students on 102 five-year-old children, in the last semester of their Head Start year. Data collected represented their verbal ability, emotion knowledge, and their mothers provided behavior temperament data. To complete the accumulation of the needed data, 72 of the 102 children were evaluated once again at age nine, during the last semester of their third-grade year, using the Social Skills Rating System, which was

determined to be an equivalent and developmentally age-appropriate assessment. The seven components of this assessment could be combined to assess academic intelligence, social competencies, and behavior problems.

Because Izard et al. (2008) designed the purpose of this study to determine whether the academics, social and behavior of a student at age five could predict how they would be performing at age nine, there was no procedure put into place by the researchers. It was merely a measure and comparison of the students initial and final assessments. The results from these comparisons showed that emotion knowledge in preschool was a strong contributing factor to positive behavior and academic development in third grade. To explain further, the ability to recognize facial emotions and social cues appeared to have direct, long-term, positive effects on students' academic and social behavior. While at the same time, research can then imply that the reverse could also be true; that the failure to recognize facial emotions and social cues could be a direct predictor of a child's future social emotional failure (Izard et al. 2008). These findings suggest that providing SEL integration at an early age can profoundly impact the progression of students' academic competence and emotional knowledge. Izard et al. (2008) identifies a limitation of this research to be the differing assessment tools that were used for each data point. Although the Social Skills Rating System was more developmentally appropriate for third grade students, it did provide an avenue for comparison and ultimately validity of the data. It would also be necessary to duplicate

this study on additional students in other schools to determine whether the same predictor conclusions would be reached.

The research done by Izard et al. (2008) implies that self-awareness and social awareness, two of CASEL's five core competencies, are primary indicators to predicting a student's future success. If even just these two core social competencies can be addressed and integrated into school curriculum, promoting improvement in students, is it feasible to consider that schools and teachers could alter the prediction from a student expected to perform and behave poorly, to a prediction of improved success?

At this juncture, the aforementioned CASEL is worth pausing on as the question of how best to deliver SEL instruction should be addressed. CASEL is a revered organization in the field of SEL that provides research, guidance, and frameworks for schools to use as they consider the SEL implementation process. The 2013 handbook, with updates and edits made in subsequent years, also analyzes and recommends SEL programs that have evidence-based research showing the validity of the program to have shown to be successful. A recent update in the analysis of SEL programs also now considers the ability for the program to be integrated into the existing classroom curriculum as an area that is considered when programs are evaluated (CASEL, 2013). This does not change CASEL's expectations of the programs, it only shows the endorsement of CASEL for schools and districts to consider the possibility of SEL integration. CASEL's sole purpose is to share the importance of SEL instruction for children in our education system. There is also a general consensus amongst

researchers that SEL is an important part of a child's education. However, even with the acceptance of this movement becoming more commonplace, the increase of academic expectations continues to bring time constraints on how often social emotional learning is being addressed in the classroom. With the support from CASEL and data from researches, it is becoming increasingly apparent that there is a need for the integration of social emotional learning into the curriculum content, classroom routine, and teacher-student relationships as opposed to a standalone SEL program that would be an add on to the existing expected curriculum and standard instruction. The remainder of this literature review discusses research that has been done on a variety of ways SEL can be integrated into the classroom and the results of the collected data.

Ways to Integrate Social Emotional Learning into the Classroom

Integration through Morning Meeting.

In her active research thesis, Lily Allen-Hughes (2013) sought to understand the role that the Responsive Classroom format of the morning meeting would have on the social skills of the students and the climate of the classroom. Allen-Hughes (2013) acknowledges that schools are placing more time and importance on academics when we should also be spending time providing a safe space to model and encourage students to practice 21st-century skills that they will need to become well-rounded humans. The study consisted of interviews and observations of one third grade and one fourth grade elementary teacher in a small, private, Quaker school in Northern California. The teachers had been trained and were implementing a Morning Meeting

time into their day where they integrated intentional social emotional skill learning. Each teacher was observed and interviewed once, and the results were compiled, compared, and analyzed.

In the interview results, both teachers reflected upon the significance the Morning Meeting routine has on creating a safe space, time to address social issues, and developing a positive community climate for the students (Allen-Hughes, 2013). It is one of the only times during the busy academic day when social emotional learning can be specifically taught and practiced (Allen-Hughes, 2013). The researcher summarized the study findings as showing the social emotional skills that students learned during Morning Meeting were carried over into their academic time, portraying students who were better problem solvers, critical thinkers, and independent and efficient learners (Allen-Hughes, 2013).

A significant limitation of this study is the small sample size. Allen-Hughes suggested that to expand upon her study, research should also be done on the separate components of the Morning Meeting format (greeting, sharing, game/activity, message) (Responsive Classroom, 2016) to determine if one area is more beneficial than another. This information could then provide direction for teachers to be more intentional about incorporating these components into other learning opportunities that the educator implements during the day.

Building on the suggested research that Allen-Hughes (2013) identified, Abry et al.'s (2016) research addresses the question of whether there are certain components of

Social Emotional Programs that produce greater impact for students in their social and academic growth. With the lack of classroom time that can often restrict SEL instruction and a desire for efficient and beneficial teaching, there is a need for educators to know and prioritize the components of SEL programs that will provide the greatest benefit for students. When programs are evaluated and implemented as a whole unit, the individual influence of the embedded skills are often overlooked (Abry et al.'s (2016). For this reason, Abry et al. (2016) selected the Responsive Classroom (RC) program for their research, which has shown to be successful in its contributions to SEL and has been accredited by CASEL (2013). They strove to uncover the components that made the most promising impact. Four of the ten responsive classroom components were selected to be evaluated: Morning Meeting, Rule Creation, Interactive Modeling and Academic Choice, determined by their ability to be measured within the context of the quality of teacher-student interactions pre- and post-intervention. One hundred and forty-three third, fourth and fifth grade teachers from twenty-four elementary schools were selected to participate in the study because of their interest in the Responsive Classroom program. For three years, teachers were observed as the students moved from second grade into fifth grade. Teachers were initially asked about their usage of RC in the classroom and had a baseline observation to determine the rate of their teacher-student interactions. In order to keep the validity of the data, the five 60-minute teacher observations that were done during the year were recorded and sent to a lab to be coded by component and teacher - interaction quality by trained research

assistants familiar with the RC components (Abry et al.'s 2016). Components were measured against the positive or negative levels of teacher-student interactions during these observations. As this is one of the first studies known to be done on the significance of each SEL component and the role that it plays in the SEL interventions done by teachers, the results are a step forward in identifying what strategies should be integrated into classroom routines. After analyzing the data, Abry and her colleagues determined that the Morning Meeting and Academic Choice components had the most positive impact on teacher student interactions when in related to emotional "positive climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for student perspectives" (Abry et al. 2016, p.197) and instructional "concept development, quality feedback, creativity, problem solving and scaffolding, etc." (Abry et al., 2016, p.197) supports. For example, in the Morning Meeting data, Abry et al. (2016) found that the routine of the students greeting each other and participating in a group activity helped form a positive climate and allowed students to practice communication and work collaboratively while enjoying an activity together. The Sharing and Message aspects contributed to a classroom of acceptance and building empathy for one another while providing useful information for the teacher to use during his/her interactions. On the other hand, when students were given Academic Choice, the teacher was better able to meet and understand the individual needs and interests of each student. Giving students a choice about how and what they were learning seemed to provide a chance for students to collaborate with peers, take additional responsibility for what they accomplished each day, and built an

enthusiastic environment in which to learn. However, Abry et al. (2016) clarified that just providing choice to students is not necessarily going to attain these results.

Academic Choice needs to be integrated with high quality, providing joint teacher-student planning, individualized feedback, and “scaffolding as students plan, execute, and reflect” (Abry et al. 2016, p.201).

Finally, in the results of teacher-student interactions that Abry et al. (2016) analyzed, the interaction quality when the four Responsive Classroom components were integrated showed significant growth in the classroom environment and positive teacher-student interactions. However, this growth of positive interaction was primarily for teachers who pre-RC had scored lower in the quality of student interactions. This caused Abry et al. (2016) to consider whether teachers who already showed high-quality interaction with students while maintaining a positive classroom environment even needed to use SEL programs such as RC. These results verified the researchers’ hypothesis that by integrating specific SEL components in the classroom, these social competencies would improve the emotional and academic well-being of students through high-quality teacher-student interactions (Abry et al. 2016).

While Abry et al.’s (2016) research showed positive results in teacher-student interaction in addition to social emotional and academic growth, their choice to focus on the teacher and student interaction piece could be because of the lack of significant academic or social improvements found in a research study done by Rimm-Kaufman and Chiu in 2007. The goal of Rimm-Kaufman and Chiu’s (2007) research was to determine

how teachers' use of Responsive Classroom routines impact students' social and academic growth, and how the results are impacted by any homelife trauma situations students may be facing. With a fairly small and limited sample size of 157 students at six schools with 62 teachers, select students in each class were scored in multiple areas through a variety of social emotional and academic tests. The study was developed around the understanding and pre-assumed acknowledgement that the teacher has a significant role in creating intentional RC practices such as the use of the morning meeting to build class community (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). These RC practices fall under the overarching RC principle understanding that social emotional learning is as important as academic instruction (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). Unfortunately, the results, though positive, were minimal in their research.

There was small positive growth in the research results that showed an improvement in reading scores. Rimm-Kaufman and Chiu contribute these results to the integrated RC practices. A proactive approach to discipline is encouraged in the RC model, which should help to limit the amount of time spent later on discipline issues, allowing more time for teachers to be teaching and students to be learning. RC also encourages teachers to build student autonomy through group work and independent learning which then can help promote self-control and responsibility. Additionally, the data showed a slight improvement in the social skill development of students. Students showed confidence in social assertiveness and less fearful and anxious behaviors (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). The researchers contribute these results to the direct social

instruction that occurs within a morning meeting format. A daily morning meeting is designed to promote positive social interaction amongst students. For example, during the sharing time, students are accepted and encouraged to share things about themselves, while also being expected to listen and make connections with their friends. Tools to handle social situations are directly taught, modeled and students are given opportunities to practice a safe and healthy response.

While these results did show some improvement in academic and social growth in students, the researchers questioned why the data did not reflect greater growth amongst students. Much of the data that is collected in social emotional studies is dependent upon the perceptions and ratings that teachers give students. The limitations that this places on the validity of the data needs to be acknowledged. Do teacher perceptions and or judgments of a student's social or academic growth determine how much that student actually improves? They reference research previously done by Malecki & Elliot (2002) that showed a connection between the scores that teachers gave students and their academic growth scores. Are teacher perceptions of students then predictors in how well that child performs? In conclusion, Rimm-Kaufman and Chiu (2007) pose the question of whether the RC approach can only be successful with increased teacher knowledge and practice of how to promote positive interactions and relationships between the teacher and student.

Although not directly stated, the data from the above study could be derived from this longitudinal research study done by Rimm-Kaufmann and her colleagues

(2006). For three years, academic data in reading and math was collected from three cohorts of students from six different elementary schools: three that were implementing and receiving RC training and three that were control groups. Students in the second-grade cohort were followed through fifth grade, the third-grade cohort was followed for two years through fifth grade, and the fourth-grade cohort was followed for one year. The goal of the Rimm-Kaufmann et al. (2006) study was to assess the response that the RC approach has on students' reading and math academic growth and whether the length of RC practices exposure has any increased impact on students. A third of teachers were trained each of the three years, indicating a potential limitation that the data was being collected by teachers who were just beginning to integrate the RC routines into their classrooms. The advanced training that followed the first year covered additional resources and strategies for teachers on problem-solving techniques to cover during morning meetings, and how to adjust the language they use with students from praise to encouragement (Rimm-Kaufman et al. 2006). This specific feedback provides students with more constructive insight on how they are performing, what is expected, and how they can improve.

The data used to determine results were based on achievement tests, teacher questionnaires, and observations done to determine the fidelity and quality in which teachers were integrating RC practices such as greetings, logical consequences, sharing time modeling, student choice, and reflection, etc. into their class routines. The data that was collected in the three cohort groups showing the result that the RC approach

had on students' reading and math achievement had significant implications for its impact. All three cohorts that were receiving interventions had increased gains in their reading and math proficiency. When comparing the improvements of the one-year cohort with the two- and three-year cohort; the longer the students received RC interventions, the greater the growth seemed to be. These findings have a weighty implication to the success that the RC approach can have on students' academic performance. Rimm-Kaufmann et al. (2006) conclude that the RC practices that encourage academic performance are a significant contribution to the academic gains that students are making. Some of the RC practices that they highlight include Morning Meeting, interesting Academic Choice, and intentional use of beneficial feedback language. Educators should use careful discernment when considering these findings to integrate the Responsive Classroom Morning Meeting practice into their classroom routine.

Finally, although data showing teacher perceptions and academic improvements shown through research of the RC approach are critical to the educational impact, is it also pertinent to pause and consider the students' perceptions during the use of RC integrated practices as well and how they feel the integration of RC practices are impacting their growth. This is precisely the goal of the Brock et al. (2007) study as they seek to understand the inner workings of children and how their perceptions of the classroom environment differ or complement those of their teachers. The child's view should not be overlooked, and it is through their lens that this study finds its

importance. Brock et al. (2007) highlight a study done by Connell and Wellborn (1992), which develops the psychological theory that children need to feel competence, autonomy, and relatedness as the three foundations of basic psychological needs. Since the learning happens inside the child, it is important for educators to understand the perspectives students have on the SEL integrated approaches that are being used in the classrooms to ideally be of a benefit to them.

The data used in the findings of this angle of research, which was spearheaded by Laura Brock in 2007, was quite possibly part of Rimm-Kaufman et al.'s (2006) three-year RC study evaluating the academic performance of students. The 520 student participants, varying in grades from second through fifth throughout the three-year study, had parental permission to complete questionnaires about home demographics and School-Related Attitudes in conjunction with the research study. Several other assessments and questionnaires were completed by teachers for additional and further research for student-teacher comparison results. Analyzing models were used to determine the correlation between student perceptions and their academic outcomes.

Big picture results indicated a link between RC integrated practices and students' positive perceptions and increased academic outcomes. When looking more deeply at data specifics, three findings were revealed by Brock et al. (2007). First, students who were in classrooms where there was an increased amount of RC practices being integrated scored higher on social emotional and academic skills. This highlights the importance of quality integration by teachers to provide students with the optimal

environment for success in both SEL and academic competencies. The second finding revealed the connection between student positive classroom environment perceptions and the integration of RC practices. Third and finally, how the children felt about their classroom environment made RC practices more effective, which then contributed to higher social skill (but not academic) ratings from teachers (Brock et al. 2007).

Although this study does highlight a student lens, the foundational data that is used is the same data that was used in the previous two studies that were analyzed. It would appear that the researchers were motivated to analyze and use the data collected in multiple formats to answer several research questions. While this is an efficient way to address various research questions at once, the studies are limited by the reuse of the same data. Brock et al. (2007) continued her analytical discussion of this data and synthesis with additional research conducted to support the integration of Responsive Classroom practices such as Morning Meeting into the classroom. As will be discussed further on in this Literature Review, it appears that the development of teacher-student relationship connectedness is a key component to the social emotional success of a child in the school setting.

Integration through Instructional Content Areas.

English Language Arts

With the continued increase of academic demands on students, the lack of time for SEL instruction remains a common theme amongst educators. For this reason, integrating SEL instruction directly into the academic instructional content would be a way to accomplish not only academic gains but to encourage and develop social skills within students as well. In addition, with increasing amounts of research indicating that SEL instruction does not only help promote social skill development but is a key component to the academic success of students, the need to bring these two pieces together is significant for educators to consider as planning their daily instruction.

An article by Venegas (2019) that was published within the International Literacy Association has research embedded within it that alludes to the social emotional growth of students through the use of Literature Circles. Literature Circles are a discussion amongst students where the text is divided, and students are given roles through which a scaffolded, higher-level thinking discussion can occur (Venegas, 2019). Venegas (2019) reported the success of Literature Circles develops from, while also developing, the social emotional competencies of students. She goes on to assess that the benefits that Literature Circles can have on the social emotional learning of students stems from the specific characteristics of the discussion process. This includes skills such as dialogue and student interaction, along with the development and self-interpretation of social rules which can foster a student's intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (Venegas, 2019).

The dialogue that Literacy Circles encourage can emulate a sociocultural experience where students have the opportunity to socially engage in cooperative learning which according to research done by Venegas (2019) can help strengthen cognitive development. The success of Literature Circles depends on student's ability to possess intrapersonal skills. Venegas (2019) summarizes this need for students to be able to monitor and control their own emotions while adapting to their social situation by reading the emotions of others and responding with empathy, kindness, and confidence. The opportunity to practice and fine tune the development of these skills is ideal within the dialog of these small group discussions which can also blend into other content areas such as math, social studies and science (Venegas, 2019). The discussion practices of dialogic reading, which is a group conversation led by the teacher with intentional text-based questions, and the reading of fictional texts, were also found and stated by Venegas (2019) to encourage the development of social skills such as student empathy and stimulate understanding of social interactions.

During this research study, one of the students, a ten-year-old fifth grader, who was given the name Grace, was evaluated and selected for this case study based on her social emotional growth during Literature Circles. The teacher in the study, Mrs. Ivan, intentionally chose the fictional book *Rules by Cynthia Lord* as the book to be discussed in hopes of developing the inter and intrapersonal social skills of her students. The book selection can play a key role in building emotional empathy and understanding within students as they read into the life of a fictional character. The hope is that as children

connect with the story, they are able to transfer the social emotional knowledge into understanding in real life social situations. Mrs. Ivan structured the participants of her Literacy Circle groups with the intention of including a wide variety of personalities that would provide students with an opportunity to practice collaborating with different people. Each group participant was given a role within the group, which scaffolded a natural discussion by giving all students a job which, as a result, forced all students to participate. The data collected for this case study, which stems from a larger research study done on literature circles, included interviews with Grace, the analysis of her recording sheet each day and observations of her literacy group over an eight-week period while they discussed the book. As the researcher noted the inter and intrapersonal social emotional growth that Grace exhibited and reflected upon herself, the results reflect significant development of social emotional learning especially in the areas of self-management and social awareness. The implications of the use and benefits that intentionally structured Literacy Circles can have on students' social emotional growth should be a consideration of how to integrate SEL instruction by educators. Even with the study's limitations of it being a single sample case study, Grace's social and emotional growth over the course of the eight weeks should be what educators are striving to achieve with their own students. Additional research should be done to confirm the consistency of the SEL impact that can be achieved through integration of Literature Circles during academic content instruction.

As previously mentioned in Vanegas's (2019) case study, the selection of rich social emotional learning texts is crucial in the integration of SEL instruction in the academic content area of English and language arts. A properly selected text has the potential to further develop the cognitive development of students through social awareness and situational and character empathy. A child's need to see others through a culturally responsive lens, is an important part of their self-awareness, social awareness and relationship management skills development. Garces-Bacsal (2020) researched and developed a booklist that benefited the celebration of diversity within the classroom as well as promote social emotional learning. She included books from countries around the world as well as suggestions on how to promote family involvement. Early childhood is a prime foundational time for student SEL growth. As teachers seek training on how to integrate SEL into literacy content, the knowledge of how to embed books that focus on character themes with SEL competencies in addition to a diverse cultural background would be highly beneficial. Garces-Bacsal (2020) references that there is a need to recognize and take into account the diverse backgrounds of students. Whether the SEL instruction is integrated throughout the routine, relationships, and environment of the classroom or is a directly taught self-standing program, what works for some does not work for all. The intentional selection of literature can further enrich the character development and global understanding in children. The list of books that Garces-Bacsal (2020) has compiled has a blend of mirror and window books (books through which to recognize oneself and those through which

to understand others Brinson, 2012), and is also intended to be a model for teachers. It is only meant to introduce teachers to some of the diverse SEL literature that is available and encourage them to seek out more.

Garces-Bacsal's (2020) research involved a team of interdisciplinary teachers from a variety of countries who worked together to connect literature with the five main (CASEL 2013) SEL competencies that they gathered through contact with global library boards, authors, and school librarians. Of the 5,000 books initially gathered, analyzed, and coded only 500 were selected that fell directly into one of the social competencies and early childhood age frame. The use of literature through family friendly book initiatives promote further discussion at home, two of which, book-bonding and literature bags, were researched strategies that Garces-Bacsal (2020) found during her study that contributed to her research results.

In her concluding remarks, Garces-Bacsal (2020) stresses the power that literature can hold to provide windows for students to understand more complex issues that typically are avoided in the classroom by teachers, such as death, slavery, and race. Garces-Bacsal (2020) cited a study done by Kim and colleagues where books with themes relating to racism, equality, and injustice were discussed in a Korean class to twelve Kindergarteners. Results showed that within six months, the perspective through which students saw African Americans shifted from one of pity to respect. Books should not be meant to tell students what to think, but to provide them with an opportunity to reflect and discuss new perspectives; teaching students how to think, not what to think.

Garces-Bacsel's (2020) list of researched books is an invaluable resource for educators who are looking to integrate powerful literature into their English Language Arts instruction.

STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Art Math)

Although literature, in the content area of English Language Arts, is the most natural place to integrate direct instruction of SEL skills, there are other content areas that provide ample opportunities to review, set expectations and most importantly practice those skills. STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) has become a popular initiative in schools across the country as educators have begun to see and recognize the positive impact intertwining content areas can have on the amount of learning students can have. The philosophy behind STEAM is not to focus on each content area separately, but to blend them together in cohesive units that allow for interactive and engaging real life learning experiences for students.

DeJarnette (2018) conducted a research study on the implementation of STEAM into Early Childhood classrooms, as she found it had been better received by older grade teachers and wanted to determine the impact it could also have on younger children. 50 teachers were trained, surveyed, and interviewed in addition to observations and interactions with the preschoolers to determine their responses. DeJarnette (2018) looked specifically at the impact STEAM had on the self-efficacy and disposition of the teachers who attended the STEAM two-day training. Her results showed that teachers became more confident and encouraged about the impact STEAM could have for their

students. During one of the practice opportunities, teachers were able to work with students rotating through centers and found the hands-on creative design to be highly engaging and motivating for students, encouraging positive interactions and cooperation. Additional research should be done on the efficacy, integrity and impact the STEAM program implementation can have on students' ability to develop and practice SEL skills. Providing all students with early exposure to fields such as science, technology, engineering, arts and math in an integrated manner can give students early access to fields and tools that they may not have otherwise considered available to them.

The connection between STEAM and the positive impact it can have on the social emotional learning of students is valuable and needs to be developed further. Working collaboratively to problem solve through a creative prompt provides the space and freedom for students to begin to see what their role is, and can be, in social situations, and how to appreciate the skills and differences of others. Garner et al. (2018) found that the integrated hands-on learning of STEAM in an afterschool program had the potential to influence students' SEL growth. In a study, done by Garner and his colleagues (2018), they aimed to infuse SEL principles into a STEAM program, by embedding SEL instruction into hand-on thematic STEAM activities during afterschool programming and a special summer-school program.

Through the process of implementing the program, they reached out for feedback from professionals who rated the quality of SEL instruction that was being

given in addition to the lessons that were being taught. The feedback was positive and constructive which has allowed the creators of this program to continue to make changes to improve the experience and beneficial outcome for students. Reflecting on their research, Garner et al. (2018) stated that they wanted to help determine the emotional connection that science can have on the positive and negative actions of children, including their self-awareness, self-management, and social relations of how they view themselves and others (Garner et al., 2018, p. 890). One particular feedback result that was provided on the curriculum research study, and that educators should take note of and include into their own STEAM routines, requested that students have more time to work in groups to allow for greater opportunity to practice the social skills being learned. Experts also concluded that students should be given additional time to “evaluate the outcomes of their social interactions and behaviors through critical and reasoned thought” (Garner et al., 2018, p. 900). However, within the given feedback, there were many positive outcomes as well, as teachers and students were able to identify that the SEL was an intentional part of the STEAM program focus and recognized that the collaboration of both content goals was a good idea (Garner et al., 2018).

Arts

A powerful infusion of SEL into instructional content can empower children to learn without the realization that they are learning. This is one discovery that Müller et al. (2019) had in their research study of an IAP (Integrated Arts Program) in a school-based program at a private school that was specifically designated for students who were struggling with social cognitive skills, such as ASD, ADHD, and cognitive delays. Although the sample size was small with sixteen students within four classrooms, one in each grade of Pre-K, Kindergarten, first grade and second grade, the results were a motivating new contribution to the impact that SEL integration within the arts and social studies instructional content can have on the social competencies of children. Over the course of 20 weeks, teachers instructed students on a wide variety of artists (who were chosen based on the developmental needs of the students' age and their ability to perceive themselves and their place in the world). Through the data collection in interviews and surveys, teachers recognized a notable difference in the social behavior of students before and after the observation time frame.

Müller et al. (2017) describes many of the art projects within the program and they are heartwarming in their ability to build empathy, confidence, and motivation within students. Teachers intentionally selected artists that would prompt student reflection of the feelings of the artist and how those feelings could have influenced the art created. In one heartwarming example, during the study of Henri Matisse, students took turns sitting in a wheelchair directing a peer where to put the pieces in a collage,

building communication and empathy skills. In another, students worked together to build their own version of Claude Monet's impressionist bridge, needing to build collaboration and flexibility skills. While during another, they went on a nature walk and were asked to take pictures of nature through a new perspective that was different from that of their peers. The researchers realized that the social skills being developed, aligned within CASEL's core social competencies. In the reported results of the study, the authors listed out the five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision making, and outlined the language and process used during the projects and contributed to the development of social themes that fell within those competencies. Müller et al. (2017) noted that the teachers realized one of the more powerful contributors to the success of the program was the fact that students were not needing to participate in a designated time to learn SEL skills, but they were being prompted, through language scaffolds, encouraged, and instructed on social skills that were being infused within an art curriculum designed to build and develop these skills. Without even realizing it students who were already struggling with social cognitive disorders were showing significant gains in flexibility, empathy, recognizing feelings in themselves and others, self-advocacy, handling mistakes and self-confidence; all of which are social skills that fall within the five core competencies (Müller et al. 2017).

The Integrated Art Program gave students a safe means to explore and share feelings that they normally would struggle expressing. Intentional educators provided

infused and intentional scaffolds within the projects that provided the framework, language, and understanding of how students should respond and act when they made a mistake, when a friend was struggling, or when they created something beautiful (Müller et al. 2017).

CASEL Approved Integrated SEL Program: 4R

When considering the integration of SEL skills into instructional curriculum, there are also more structured SEL programs that provide a framework with which to follow. CASEL (2013) has created a spreadsheet with approved SEL programs that have been researched that would still encourage integration within content areas while also providing more guidance and direction for the teacher on how to provide direct instruction of specific social skills. The 4R Program (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution) is one such program. In a two-year research study done by Jones et al. (2011) with a large student sample size throughout eighteen elementary schools, they found that the integrated 4R SEL program contributed to the improvement of several aspects of students' aggressive behaviors. The 4R program is designed with the intention of integrating deliberate social skill inclusion, strategies and practices in the format of reading and writing content instruction.

This Jones et al. (2011) study is a part of a longer study evaluating the effectiveness of the program on students' social and academic growth in inner city schools. The integrative piece allowed teachers an avenue with which to approach direct instruction for needed social and emotional skills. Similarly, to the Müller et al.

(2017) findings that showed the integration of social instruction was more powerful for students when they didn't realize they were being taught, and to the plethora of influential literature outlined by Garces-Bacsal (2020), the 4R program uses stories as conversation starters to encourage empathy, problem solving, and the development of self-management strategies without being presented in a cookie cutter way.

Given the needs of the students in the study, the researchers focused primarily on the results the 4R program would have on different aggressive behaviors exhibited by the students. After two years of data collection following students from third grade to fifth grade, their data indicated a slight decline in aggressive behavior and an increase in social competencies (Jones et al. 2011). This research continues to confirm the importance of including SEL instruction into and allow side academic instructional goals.

Brown et al. (2010) conducted research with the 4R SEL program through a different lens, wanting to go deeper into the impact that social intervention programs can have on the "emotional, instructional and organizational processes of elementary school classrooms" (Brown et al., 2010, p. 153). While the previous research article focused primarily on the impact that the 4R program had on students social and academic skills (Jones et al. 2011), Brown et al. (2010) conducted a three-year longitudinal study focused more on how a teacher's emotional state could impact the overall climate and environment of classroom and whether the 4R program could still influence student's SEL growth or even the teacher's emotional growth. Their study included 82 teachers and classrooms, half of which were anonymous control schools for

data validity purposes in a large metro area. Brown et al. (2010) collected and analyzed data on the teachers influence and the delivery of the 4R program that could contribute to the positive or negative classroom climate, the organization and delivery of content lessons, and the influence of the program on students' social emotional growth. Their questions are similar to the inquiry into how much influence does a teacher and his or her actions or emotional behaviors have on the impact of a social emotional learning program? In addition, does a formatted SEL program allow for teachers to be more successful and in turn influence their own perceptions of the classroom climate creating a cycle of success?

The analysis and results of the Brown et al. (2010) study were thorough and intense, however for the purpose of this review, only a few will be mentioned. Teacher burnout was surveyed and did not end up having an impact on the overall success of the 4R intervention program, however the perceived confidence of a teacher seemed to motivate him or her and appeared to be an indicator for positive student relationships and the interaction of quality social classroom procedures. In agreement with results from the Jones et al. (2011) research, the classrooms that received the 4R SEL intervention program showed greater success in areas of “social processes” (Jones et. al., 2011, p. 163) or the overall quality of social interactions within a classroom environment.

This mentioned research showed that the integrated 4R SEL intervention program could not only improve the school wide aggressive behavior and student

academics, but it also was a significant contributing factor to the positive development of classroom procedures and climate. Whereas some schools may prefer to have a set developed SEL program to provide consistency and a framework in which their teachers could thrive, others may prefer to focus on specific integration within content areas. In either case, the limited amount of research that has been done has begun to emphasize the positive impact that quality teacher integration of SEL in content areas can have on the social and academic success of students.

Integration through Project-Based Learning.

The importance of integrating SEL instruction into curriculum material is evident in the research above. However, the method used to practice and integrate social competencies can have an effect on the success of the SEL goals as well. Another instructional integration avenue where educators have found success in the development of social competencies is through Project Based Learning (PBL). Previously suggested research has emphasized the importance of hands-on collaborative learning to encourage student engagement, creativity, problem solving, and the opportunity to practice social skills being taught, modeled and expected. Project-Based Learning is a student initiated authentic hands-on approach to learning. Although it can be more time consuming and requires significant front loading to prepare students, it has the potential to initiate student led learning, provide opportunities to practice collaboration skills during group work, and create a healthy classroom climate promoting acceptance, understanding and positive attitudes towards learning and others (Kaldi et al., 2011).

These were some of the findings of a study done by Kaldi et al. (2011) in a quasi-experimental study conducted in three towns in Greece.

Kaldi et al. (2011) determined their research results through pre and posttests, interviews and attitude scale scoring of 70-, nine- and ten-year old students during a project-based learning unit on sea animals. Although the results of student knowledge learning showed the greatest improvement through the Project-Based Learning method, for the purpose of this literature review, the focus will be on the social skills gained. When completing the post unit interviews and assessments, the researchers found that there was an overall sense that the students preferred working and learning within a team rather than independently. They became more in tune to the feelings of others and how their choices could impact others (social awareness) by developing positive attitudes towards students who were different from themselves (Kaldi et al., 2011). These results were limited and, at times, seemed implied from other data, which makes it necessary to consider that data collected at times can be objective, even though measures are often taken to minimize the variance. Nevertheless, for the purpose of building social emotional skills the value of this research demonstrates the significance in providing students with opportunities to engage with peers, learn from and with peers, and be given opportunities to self-motivate and take the initiative in developing relationships. What should be considered however, is the process that needs to happen to set up routines and expectations in a classroom in order for this organic student and

peer led learning to take place. These are strategies that would contribute significantly to the integration of SEL in the classroom.

Miranda Fitzgerald (2020) commemorates similar reasons for furthering SEL integration research as others in the field who have stated that lack of time and inconsistent realities of the longevity of a SEL program have led to the need for SEL skills to be taught and practiced in and during authentic learning experiences. Thus, providing some of the motivation behind her research Fitzgerald (2020) evaluates the process of embedding Literacy and SEL into authentic and relatable Project-Based Learning (PBL) units. She points out that the current English Language Arts (ELA) Common Core State Standards (CCSS 2010) is requiring even young students to work together and reflect on possible ways they can best contribute to the group. As integrated SEL is an area that continues to require additional research to determine the most effective means of integration, Fitzgerald conducts a case study of one third grade teacher to observe the potential impact the integration of literacy and SEL can have on student's growth and development while engaging in a collaborative and interactive Project Based Learning unit of study.

Fitzgerald (2020) was an active observer and researcher in her project as she observed, coded and analyzed data as an active observer during all twenty lessons during twenty-nine days in the teacher's class. She states this allowed her to follow the process the instructor used when interweaving the SEL instruction and practice opportunities throughout the lessons. She was also able to see firsthand how the

process unfolded. She acknowledges that her SEL criteria followed the key elements that Baines and colleagues had identified as being essential SEL standards during the PBL model: collaboration, expression, ownership, and reflection (Fitzgerald, 2020). Using these key competencies as her data collecting lens, Fitzgerald (2020) states that the data she collected led her to the conclusion that the integration of SEL and literacy into the PBL method of instruction allowed for the success of SEL growth and learning in the observed classroom.

Data was sorted throughout the Social Emotional Learning Competencies to determine the effective integration process that unfolded in the course of the PBL unit on how to help local birds. For example, In the area of collaboration alone, the teacher was said to have provided modeling for empathy of peers, building and maintaining healthy and encouraging relationships, while also facilitating opportunities for group collaboration, discussion, and tools to organize their process and strategies to come to common decisions (Fitzgerald, 2020). Her findings also revealed areas where the other three elements were also noted and observed of students presenting their findings, practicing expressing themselves to field experts and peers, and the importance of students' reflections on their own learning through the process, and relationships throughout the unit.

Researchers in the area of SEL integration into Project-Based Learning seem to agree that there is a need for continued research. However, the studies that have been done so far have shown positive results in the impact that SEL integration within

upcoming new learning models such as PBL can have on the implication of social competency growth in students.

Integration through Play.

Looking specifically at Kindergarten and early childhood aged classrooms, there is commonly more flexibility in academic expectations that allow for additional play time. The research done by Lindsey and Colwell (2013) contributes to the theory that play is still another significant avenue to consider in the social emotional development of children. Lindsey and Colwell (2013) identified emotional expressiveness, emotional knowledge, and emotion regulation as the social competency skills they observed during a two-year study of 122 preschool children at a daycare facility. The goal of their study was to determine the correlation between different types of play and the positive or negative impact it could have on the “affective social competence” of children (Lindsey & Colwell, 2013). They defined the play types as physical play: which includes the categories of exercise and rough and tumble, and pretend play, which includes fantasy and sociodramatic play. With these clearly specified areas of play, they were able to be meticulous in the coding of their interviews, mother surveys, and videotaped observation data to determine their results.

Sociodramatic play is defined as taking on “social roles” and acting out “play themes” where children are becoming a different character than themselves (Lindsey & Colwell, 2013, p. 354). To maintain this type of play and stay in character, children need to be able to navigate and compromise with playmates about the direction in which the

play will go, read and respond to the emotions displayed by the other characters, and be able to present emotions that may be different from what they are feeling to stay in play. This requires children to identify the emotions of themselves and others, and to remain in control of their own emotions as they respond to the developing play. The results Lindsey and Colwell found supported the positive effect of sociodramatic play in children by promoting and building emotional expressiveness, emotional knowledge, and emotional regulation (Lindsey & Colwell, 2013, p.357).

Rough and Tumble play (wrestling, roughhousing, physical contact, etc.) requires children to be able to read the emotions of their peers in the situation. If one or both of the children playing begins to feel like they are no longer playing, the aggression of the situation could quickly escalate. Exercise play (games, exercise, running, etc.) also deals with emotion regulation through sportsmanship and the monitoring of their physical response throughout the activity (Lindsey & Colwell, 2013). Lindsey and Colwell's (2013) research results determined that although physical play did not have a significant positive impact on the emotional expressiveness and emotional knowledge of children, it did contribute to the emotion regulation of the children. It is theorized that because these types of play require children to read the emotions of their peers, it would allow children to practice skills such as determining when to stop the rough and tumble play and how to navigate the physical play.

When considering the SEL needs of our students, Kindergarten teachers should consider these results and the benefits that maintaining free choice time with dramatic

play and building centers and classroom games and activities can naturally have on building social competencies in children without the need to be specifically taught. The design and implementation of Lindsey and Colwell's (2013) research which showed the power that play can have on the specific areas of affective social competencies was a significant contribution to this area of research. Although their study only included children from one day care center, they acknowledge the fact that a wider spread research study should be conducted to minimize the possibility of other factors that may have related specifically to that day care center (Lindsey & Colwell, 2013).

Goldstein and Lerner (2018) agreed that additional research should be done on the natural social skill development that can happen through dramatic pretend play. They conducted a study on 97 preschoolers in a headstart program to determine if dramatic pretend play games, that encouraged students to identify and take on the emotions or go into character of another, would positively impact their social emotional growth. They used three of CASEL's (2013) social competencies to measure in their study which included: self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. Contrary to the natural play observations of the Lindsey and Colwell (2013) study, Goldstein and Lerner (2018) chose to implement twenty minutes dramatic pretend and role play game (DPPG) interventions with the children each day. The activities were similar to those that would be done in an acting or theater camp, for example, asking students to take on the role of another character, such as an animal, and act out what they thought it would act like or be feeling, or ask the students to pretend they were

walking through mud or on the moon. Another example was a hat game where students put on a chef hat and had to take on the role of making a meal for the group leader (Goldstein & Lerner, 2018).

In addition to the intervention group, the researchers also organized control groups with additional children to do building blocks or story time activities but did not ask the students to actively engage or relate emotionally to the activity. The Dramatic Pretend Game times were recorded, and children were scored following each activity based on their social classroom behaviors such as participation, willingness to help others, and their ability to match emotions. Goldstein and Lerner (2018) results showed that the DPPG intervention had positive results on the emotional control skills of the children. This positive influence was predicted to be because the children were required to switch roles, take on the emotions of another, or reflect on how another was feeling, all while controlling their response (Goldstein & Lerner (2018). As this is a relatively quick, affordable and easy intervention to integrate into a classroom daily routine, Goldstein and Lerner (2018) can see the widespread implementation possibilities. However, although the results showed favor for the emotional control skills, the other social emotional competencies that were measured, such as empathy, theory of mind, and compassion did not show the same amount of positive increase. Could it be that the structured and nonorganic framework of the DPPG intervention did not allow for the children to further engage in the play unintentionally stunting its impact? This study does however support the integration of pair, small or large group

activities that are designed to provide students with opportunities to identify and control their feelings and begin to seek to understand the emotions of others. These activities could be done during transition times, as a morning meeting activity, or as an isolated instructional time in younger and older children.

Additional research was done by Szumski et al. (2016) on a SEL play program called 'Play Time/Social Time' (PTST; Odom et al., 1997). The PTST program prioritized acquiring social competencies involved with the interaction of students with peers vs. the skills needed to interact with adults. PTST includes 100 daily lessons that for this study were translated into Polish for use in a preschool setting where 151 children in fourteen schools participated in the research, that was broken up into three phases throughout the year. Each lesson provided direct instruction of a social skill, immediate practice and application for the children, and then follow up, encouragement and feedback as the children interacted and played (Szumski et al., 2016).

During these lessons the six main objectives were "(1) sharing with others, (2) developing persistence, (3) requesting to share (an object) (4) organising play, (5) agreeing with others, and (6) helping others or asking other children for help (Odom et al., 1997)" (Szumski et al., 2016, p. 44). An important component of this research was the social diversity of the children who participated. These children included those who had been identified as having low social skills, children with emotional or behavioral disabilities, and children with strong existing social skills to use and act as role models for the other students. The most noteworthy findings from the data collected from

teacher evaluations showed significant positive growth in the social skills of all the children, but especially in the children who had initially been identified as having low social skills. The combination of children exhibiting all social skills levels created an environment of inclusiveness that the research showed was beneficial for all levels of students (Szumski et al., 2016). Researchers stated that the teachers provided positive feedback on student engagement, and excitement at the additional games, partner and small group activities that had been added to their repertoire through the PTST program. Unfortunately, there was only one form of assessment, and they were unable to have a control group, which Szumski et al. (2016) mentions as limitations. Although the lessons of the program were structured and provided a solid framework with which the teacher could follow, it also provided ample time for students to practice the learned skill and engage in play. It would be interesting to note the distinction between time allowed for structured practice play and free play where children are not given specific parameters.

Is the difference between structured or free play significant in the SEL development in children? To contribute to the growing yet limited research on play, Veiga et al. (2016) conducted a study on the impact that free play can have on children's social emotional growth. They begin by presenting a fascinating perspective and research on the idea that play to children is for pure enjoyment only. This then can be assumed that play is and can be a naturally intrinsic way for children to explore, escape reality, and practice life in a pretend realm with no consequences or fear of making a

mistake. Because of this presumed safe freedom, children are more open and willing to go outside of their comfort zone to extend their knowledge and social emotional development (Veiga et al., 2016). Veiga et al. (2016) references the American Academy of Pediatrics as saying that child led and non-structured play is more beneficial than adult guided play, which can stunt the creativity and emotional growth that can naturally occur during play (Veiga et al., 2016). When children are allowed the freedom of play, they are being given the opportunity to make decisions based on their own instincts building confidence in risk taking and providing a safe space to try out and explore new ideas (Veiga et al., 2016).

In addition, as the amount of free time slowly decreases for children today, Veiga et al. (2016) reported research of some disconcerting connections between lack of free time and an uptick in negative behaviors in children now and as they get older. Veiga et al.'s (2016) own research wonders whether it is the lack of free play or specifically the social skills that are acquired during that free play. Veiga et al. (2016) quotes "In order to achieve and maintain the joy of playing together children have to be able to consider others' perspectives and emotions, to communicate their own ideas and emotions, and to empathetically react to others" (p. 50).

Veiga et al.'s studies aim to fill a research hole to determine whether the decreasing trend of free play is, in fact, contributing to less developed emotional competencies and, therefore, the lack of social functioning development in children. As the amount of free play time is consistent for students in school, they went to parents

to get data on the playtime at home. In a series of student and parent interviews conducted with seventy-eight children in a Portugal preschool, they determined that the amount of free playtime appeared to have a direct correlation to the negative external behaviors. Children with less time to play were more likely to act out with negative or disruptive behaviors. Emotional recognition also showed to improve with the presence of free play which supports the notion that play time is a significant contributing factor to the social and emotional learning of children (Veiga et al., 2016). However, additional long-term studies are needed to support this data and to learn more about the connection of free unstructured play and the development of social competencies in children. If studies are finding that more and more children are having less free play time and more screen time at home (Veiga et al., 2016), what are the future implications we can assume if the amount of free play time also continues to decrease and eventually disappear altogether in schools?

Educators, particularly those in Kindergarten, are beginning to wonder this very thing. Research continues to grow on the positive impact and necessity that play, and social time, has on the development of a child's social emotional learning. However, continued pressure from administration, parents, and colleagues have left Kindergarten teachers scrambling to find a way to do it all (Lynch, 2015). This very idea brought about the netnographic research approach that Lynch (2015) conducted on the perspectives and messaging of seventy-eight kindergarten teachers. She defended the idea that research needed to be expanded to not only give teachers the knowledge that social

emotional learning through play time in classrooms is beneficial and necessary, but also the techniques and know-how of how to continue to provide these play opportunities for students in what has become a decreasing reality in today's schools (Lynch, 2015).

As the research presented by Lynch (2015) continues to point to positive language, behavior, and peer relationship development, in addition to contributing to academic success, the value of considering play an essential part of the Kindergarten curriculum is evident (Lynch, 2015). She also reported fascinating research done by Jaynes that traced the decrease of allowed play time in Kindergarten to the removal of religious instruction in 1960s, which then led to the decline of test scores, creating a panic and an increase of standardized testing in the 1980s, and finally to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act in the 1990s that placed struggling schools under intense scrutiny, which made districts believe they needed to implement testing practice into any extra time (Lynch, 2015). Reflecting back on this history, the removal of religious instruction in schools was necessary for inclusion and the division of religion and state, however when the instruction and practice of moral values were taken away without a replacement, a hole was left in the educational development of the whole child. Our country was undecided as to what values needed to be taught and present in public education that could be agreed upon by all cultures and religions of our diverse population. The five essential social competencies that were introduced by CASEL (2013) are a strong start in beginning to fill that hole that was left. Yet now, the question remains of how to convince society and to demand the time needed to

reintroduce the significance of social emotional learning through guided and free play in the classroom.

Lynch (2015) used public social media teacher message boards to research the perspectives of teachers, look for patterns, and to gain an authentic insight into the reality of what is happening in the classroom in terms of play time. From her analysis of three months of monitoring seven different message boards, Lynch (2015) discovered that teachers were expressing both positive and negative beliefs about play in the classroom. Many were expressing the desire to make play more academic, labeling them to have a more “academic tone,” or needing to take away play centers to make room for something more “academically important.” There was also the negative opinion expressed about play-based preschool programs that didn’t adequately “prepare the students academically” for Kindergarten (Lynch, 2015, p. 359). However, there were positive opinions defending the use of play and its impacts on student’s social development on the message boards as well. Yet, even these comments in support of play had a defeated tone, reflecting on the time limitations, or how playtime should be more of a reward for completed work, or the feeling that Kindergarten teachers were feeling of being critiqued or looked down upon because they were allowing their students to “just play”(Lynch, 2015, p.359). There were also teachers who expressed frustration towards “people in power” who were making decisions without realizing the implication it would have and others who stated they were “fighting” against school or district policy to maintain play time in the classroom.

When reading through the comments of Kindergarten teachers across the United States, the results seem dim. Lynch (2015) identified the three main influences affecting teachers' ability to integrate social play time in the classroom as "interpersonal factors (personal beliefs and attitudes), organizational factors (expectations from principals and school administration), and policy factors (NCLB and testing standards)" (Lynch, 2015, p. 359). Lynch's (2015) results are limited due to only hearing from teachers who post to a message board, and also taking into account the personal emotional need that was brought on to enact that message post. Nonetheless, the netnographic research results represent a disappointing reality that teachers are facing and will need to continue to overcome in order to successfully get to the point where play time in Kindergarten is not only accepted but advertised as a benefit to help educate our students on how to recognize and manage their own emotions while learning how to interact, communicate and relate to others. With so many restrictions on play time teachers have had to become more creative in identifying ways to integrate the instruction and practice of social competencies into their classroom environment.

Kirk and Jay (2018) analyzed three case studies that were a part of a larger study to examine the importance and connections of play, relationships, and environment. They reflected that how these elements are integrated by the teacher can influence the social emotional development of four-year-old students. Kirk and Jay (2018) begin by defining "social" development as "learning the values, knowledge, and skills that enable children to relate to others effectively and to contribute in positive ways to family,

school and the community” (Kirk & Jay, 2018, p. 474) and “emotional understanding” as “the ability to recognize emotions and regulate strong emotions to maintain effective relationships with others” (Kirk & Jay, 2018, p. 474). When considering the integration of social learning and emotional learning within the classroom, it would present a challenge to attempt to instruct on either idea individually. This continues to imply the need for integrated social interaction to contribute to the emotional growth for students in the classroom structure.

Over the course of a year, data was collected through interviews and observations on three teachers, all of whom were intentionally varied in their teaching style. The observers looked for how the teacher created an effective learning environment using guided participation (an intentional lens through which to determine how to structure and organize the classroom climate, cultural acceptance, and social interactions) to support the students’ SEL and found that there was a connection between “play, positive relationships, and effective environments” (Kirk & Jay, 2018, p. 478).

Findings in the classroom environment showed positive results when there was choice and freedom within the learning and the promoting of positive relationships between students and between the teacher and the students. This connection appears to have a role in creating a positive environment in which SEL can be integrated. Kirk and Jay (2018) were intrigued by the natural development of SEL and found that how the class is organized and the routines and relationships that are embedded within the

day can in fact be used to naturally guide students towards social and emotional development. Although they present some positive research showing the need for play and relationship building integration, their research was limited in the data collected and fidelity of the research. With the continued agreement amongst researchers that the lack of time for playtime because of all the academic standards that need to be covered, another potential powerful teacher tool to promote the development of SEL are the classroom environment, routines, and teacher techniques that can be integrated throughout the daily activities.

Integration through Routine Teacher Techniques.

How can teachers make intentional teaching and instructional choices within their day that will positively contribute to the development of CASEL's (2013) five social competencies? Selecting from recommendations from experts on quality teaching, Ng and Bull (2018) center their research around three main areas or times in the classroom when SEL integration could take place. These three areas include: "group size (small vs. large group), type of activity (core instruction, learning stations, outdoor activities, mealtime and transitions), and type of teaching opportunity (modeling, physical presence, and active directions)" (Ng & Bull, 2018, p. 339-340). Conducting observations and interviews, 32 times of quality SEL integration were identified within the six Singapore preschool classrooms that were selected out of a larger research study pool. Within the analysis of these instances, Ng and Bull (2018) determined that there was greater opportunity for SEL reinforcement within small group activities and during

outdoor free play and then followed by lesson instruction, mealtime and transitions, with learning centers showing the least amount of social skill practice opportunities amongst the areas that were observed and identified. Outdoor free play time, or less structured activities provided the greatest opportunity for social skills practice, likely because of the increase of disagreements when students are left to play on their own (Ng & Bull, 2018). They also found that instruction teaching of specific social skills also appeared to have a greater impact than more incidental or happenstance teaching moments that would arise during a given day.

From the observed circumstances that provided for SEL development, Ng and Bull (2018) then broke down the types of strategies the teachers used to integrate SEL into their daily classroom routines into four main techniques. These strategies: “setting a positive tone, suggestion of solutions, task allocation, and extension” (Ng and Bull, 2018 p. 345) provided teachers with the tools to maximize their time with their students to include SEL instruction and integration within their normal classroom rhythm.

“Setting a positive tone” refers to the ability of the teacher to create a space where students feel encouraged, supported, and are given opportunities and the freedom to make mistakes, try to do hard things and to become the best versions of themselves.

“Suggestion of solutions” is the ability to talk students through a problem, either a relationship disagreement or a situational problem, in order to guide them to discuss and brainstorm possible solutions.

“Task allocation” refers to the leadership opportunities or jobs that are allocated to students to allow them to learn to share, take

responsibility, and become socially aware of the classroom. Finally, “Extension” was the final strategy that was recommended from the research done. This technique identifies the benefit of adding or to a student’s ideas and modeling the expectations for students to listen to one another and build on with questions or comments (Ng & Bull, 2018).

Although the research was limited to the observance of strategies that were most present and by its small sample size and lack of comparables, the results could be helpful for educators in determining the most beneficial techniques and times during the day to integrate to maximize the natural promotion of SEL.

On the flip side, teachers may wonder if there is continued evidence that the use of these classroom strategy interventions are effective in developing social emotional skills in our children today. In a meta-analysis research study conducted by January et al. (2011), they wondered the same thing, and analyzed twenty-eight peer-reviewed research studies assessing classroom interventions and implementation to find common threads of success or failure. Their analysis did not do much to support the need of classroom SEL intervention programs. Although the need for social and emotional development in children today was apparent, the quantitative results showed only slight improvements from the implementation of classroom wide SEL interventions. This should raise awareness and cause for pause and reflection for educators as the notion that just doing something isn't necessarily going to provide the most impact for their students. Processes and techniques should be researched and evaluated for their effectiveness before teachers place high expectations of their continued effectiveness.

What was noteworthy from the research done by January et al. (2011) was the evidence that early intervention in grades such as preschool and Kindergarten showed greater impact in students. They did predict that another window of opportunity would come at early adolescence due to the vast change of friends and attitudes of children during that time, they are at a greater vantage point to the practice of learned social skills. Another result of January et al.'s (2011) study provided evidence to support the idea that duration of an intervention matters. The more time allotted for students to practice and develop patterns and embed social skills into their daily routines, the higher the probability that those skills will remain. They also concluded that the method and intensity of an integrated social and emotional intervention or strategy also determines its overall impact. With the understanding that children learn best with hands-on instruction, the same rings true for social emotional learning. January et al. (2011) determined that the interventions that included more role playing and active activities were overall more effective for children. In conclusion, January et al. (2011) recognize the need for further research to determine the long-term effectiveness of social emotional strategies, and also identify the limitation that most interventions are implemented by newly trained teachers to the program. Although to determine the effectiveness of a program, it does need to be implemented in its fullest quality, however if the reality of the situation remains that teachers are to be the ones using these programs and strategies in the classroom, research done with the designer doing

the implementation may not adequately represent what will happen when educators choose to implement the researched recommendations.

Program frameworks such as Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS) and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) that are designed to be integrated schoolwide, have phases of implementation, one of which is the small group intervention phase as described in the research done by Humphrey et al., (2009) at five recommended schools in England that had implemented the small group phase in their school. Humphrey et al.'s (2009) main objective was to determine how these small groups were run and what if any were the impacts that they were having on the students who had been identified as needing additional support in developing their social emotional skills. In the ideal world, classroom integration strategies within the content, instructional practices, play time and techniques would be enough to adequately prepare students with the social competencies needed to be successful in life. However, this is not the reality of the diversity of social abilities coming into the classroom. The amount of trauma that a child has in his or her life can have a direct implication to their behavior and the amount of SEL intervention they receive. Taking into consideration the differing academic and social ability levels of classroom students, educators need to also be able to recognize and be prepared to offer additional intervention scaffolds and supports to the students who are not finding success within the classroom wise integration efforts.

The findings of Humphrey et al. (2009) from interviews, observations, and data analysis point to several key aspects used during the structured small group interventions of the SEAL framework that could be directly applied to small group interventions within the classroom. An immediate limitation that should be mentioned is the lack of formal research and connection to the small group intervention data from Humphrey et al.'s (2009) research and how it could be translated and applied in the classroom. However, for the purposes of this review, only the findings and determinations of the effective small group techniques and practices by Humphrey et al. (2009) will be considered.

During their evaluation of the SEAL small group intervention processes that were put into place at the five recommended model schools, there were specific components of the small group structure that were identified. These included: "setting achievable targets for children, providing constant reinforcement of desirable behavior, providing opportunities for pupils to verbalise their emotional experiences, and engendering a sense of fun" (Humphrey et al., 2009, p. 233). They also reported on the importance of creating a safe space that is warm and welcoming where a child can feel safe and ideally begin to open up and become vulnerable and comfortable with sharing their feelings. The value of creating opportunities for students to succeed, implementing appropriate scaffolds and encouragement to build self-confidence all while providing choice allowing for fun are all techniques that should be considered when educators reflect on creating an optimal classroom environment that fosters social emotional learning.

Unfortunately, although these key aspects of the SEAL small group interventions were consistent and appeared effective in the interviews and analysis of the process of small group implementation, they are only a guideline of suggestions per the SEAL program and per the researchers' knowledge, have not been specifically researched for their effectiveness (Humphrey et al., 2009).

One last additional strategy to mention that has been researched and shown to support the social and emotional development of children is peer tutoring. Capp et al. (2018) conducted a research study on the *Learning Together, Math Together* program that was implemented in a small K-8 school in Northern California. The Learning Together peer tutoring program was developed in 1998 with the objective of addressing bullying, self-confidence and academic and social needs within schools (Capp et al., 2018). The program holds the belief that by providing students with leadership roles, it would foster confidence, independence, and lead students to become more autonomous and motivated in their own learning. In Capp et al.'s (2018) research, fourth, fifth and sixth grade students were tutored by sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. 55 pairs of students were surveyed three times during the year to collect baseline, mid-year and end of year data. Parents and teachers were also surveyed on their thoughts of the program at the beginning and end of the year. The goal of this research for Capp et al. (2018) was to determine the academic and social and emotional growth of the tutors and tutees through their perspectives, teacher and parent insight, and academic testing and behavior documentation data. When looking at the academic

results from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, there was no significant evidence that the peer tutoring program had helped the academic growth of either the tutors or the tutees. From the observation and recordings of the teachers, their perceptions indicated that the tutors, and not the tutees, were the ones who made the greatest amount of growth regarding social skill development. They were described as learning how to have more positive and respectful dialog and taking on the leadership and responsibility of teaching their students (Capp et al., 2018). However, teachers also didn't feel that the program helped the tutor's overall classroom behavior or improve school violence. There were some parents that felt the program helped their child's grades, however most felt that it was a positive experience for their child and would want him or her to participate in the program again (Capp et al., 2018). Although this study is limited in its size and longevity it would be interesting to see the results of students who consistently continued in this program in subsequent years. The social emotional data results were taken only from teacher, parents and student perspectives, which could have been impacted by outside factors, however gaining the perspectives from a variety of sources showed to be a strength of this study. Overall, it was determined that the social emotional and academic impact of this program had enough positive impact that it should gain weight in being a positive teaching technique that could be used to further promote students SEL growth. Capp et al. (2018) observed that the school social worker would be a valuable resource of someone who could organized and execute this program across a school or schools.

The above-mentioned teacher techniques are just the beginning of what routine could be useful in the classroom setting, and although they all did show positive results, more specific research is needed to extend and further investigate teaching strategies that would have the greatest natural impact on students' social emotional learning.

Integration through Teacher-Student Relationships.

With a growing pool of evidence that points to the increasing need for training and intentional education or integration of social emotional competencies in our schools today to better our students for tomorrow, this last section addresses the question of how much influence or impact the teacher or the development of teacher-student relationships have on the social emotional competencies that are gained by the students. Can a teacher's behavior, quality of implementation, or personal influence really make a difference, positive or negative, in the social and emotional growth of his or her students? Or are the life experiences and risk factors too overwhelming of an influential force in the character development of a child (Poulou, 2015)?

Poulou (2015) proposed that because of the relationship connection between the system of a students' environment and their behavior within that environment, she questioned "what aspects related to classroom context, teachers or students themselves are likely to be most important in predicting school behavior?" (Poulou, 2015, p. 86). In other words, what is the determining factor that supersedes and has the most influence on the other? Do the behaviors of students and teachers influence the school and classroom environment or the other way around? Poulou (2015) was

motivated to do her study based on the research she found that seemed to point to the connection between teacher-student relationship and student behaviors in the classroom, as well as the connection of poor student behavior and low social emotional skills. Her study focused on the interpersonal behavior of the teacher and how that impacts students' social emotional learning.

Poulou (2015) hypothesized in her research with nine hundred and sixty-two students in twenty-five public elementary schools throughout Greece that the perspective the student has about the teacher and classroom has more of an impact on his or her behavior difficulties than the actual teacher or classroom environment. This would then lend to the conclusion of the importance and need for a positive teacher-student relationship in order to contribute to the social and emotional growth of a student. In Poulou's (2015) research, students of ages eleven and twelve were asked to rate their teacher's interpersonal behaviors and how they felt about their relationship with him or her, and then they were also asked to self-rate their own social emotional skill level through two evaluative measurement tools. Both a limitation and a benefit to this study was that Poulou's (2015) data is only representative of the student's perspective. What actually happened, or how the teacher viewed the student or situation was not considered. However, Poulou looked at this as a strength, indicating that the measured perceptions of the student on his or her relationship and interactions with the teacher, and the value that he or she placed on the importance of social and emotional skills showed insight into the meaning and value that students have when in

the school environment (Poulou, 2015). The study's results showed that the interpersonal behavior of the teacher, aka whether or not the student perceived the teacher's behavior as being friendly, supportive, or helpful vs reprimanding, apathetic, or disapproving had a direct correlation to how the student interpreted his or her behavior and motivation to behave properly. If the student perceived the teacher as being disapproving or more reprimanding, his or her behavior tended to be more negative and disruptive, whereas if the student felt a positive connection with the teacher, indicating he or she exhibited a helpful and friendly demeanor, the child also then implied that he or she had a more positive outlook about school with greater intention to make appropriate choices (Poulou, 2015). Interestingly, the data showed the importance of which students placed on the need to have and receive adequate social emotional learning skills. Students are more adept to learn and grow from someone they feel they can trust and that cares about them. One big takeaway for educators from this research should be the need to first develop positive relationships and interactions with their students in order to then be able to have the greatest impact when providing academic and social emotional instruction and support.

A few years later, Poulou (2017a) continued her research in the preschools of central Greece to extend her study and look more closely at the perceptions of both teachers and students within the teacher-student relationships and how those perceptions influenced SEL. She included results from multiple questionnaires of 92 teachers and interviews from 170 of the 238 student questionnaires to determine

similarities and connections between a teacher's perspective and the student's perspective. Poulou (2017a) also focused on the emotional intelligence (EI) and perceptions of teachers and how it affects their ability to develop relationships, respond to student behavior and maintain an overall positive calm environment in the classroom. Could teachers who struggle with their own ability to maintain control over their emotions, ultimately have a negative impact on the SEL of his or her students? Poulou (2017a) formulated her research question by reflecting and reporting on the existing research and idea that relationships for students and adults are dependent upon good social and emotional competencies. This could suggest that success with SEL integration is not so much centered on the curriculum and instruction elements as the interpersonal and SEL skills of the person doing the integration. In order for anyone to maintain a healthy relationship, whether professional or personal, there are certain social competencies that are necessary to be held by both parties involved. When the emotional intelligence (EI) of a teacher is lacking, he or she may not have the ability to create the type of classroom environment where students are able to thrive and grow both emotionally and academically.

Poulou (2017a) reports that there is limited research about how the social and emotional skills or EI of teachers impacts their ability to teach and model social and emotional skills to their students. Also in question is the teacher's belief that SEL skills are an important part of the instruction he or she feels needs to be delivered and practiced in the classroom, which was measured by the "Teacher SEL Belief's Scale"

(Poulou, 2017a, p. 428). Poulou (2017a) quotes Gunter and colleagues research stating that “secure teacher-student relationships are the foundation of SEL” (as cited in Poulou, 2017a, p. 428). If this is in fact the case, then the perceptions of those relationships are going to be the measurement of the value of the relationships.

The inconsistency of her results made conclusions difficult in Poulou’s (2017a) research study. However limited, some conclusions can be drawn from Poulou’s (2017a) findings. The value in seeking both the teacher and student perspective is important to gain a better picture into how the intention, commitment and comfort level of the teacher to provide SEL instruction to the class can at times positively or negatively portray feelings of warmth and closeness or lack thereof in the students’ own perspectives and impact the relationship that is formed. In her results, Poulou (2017a) reported that the percentage of teachers who held a high belief in the need to improve SEL skills in their students was high, which remained consistent with other research done. Teacher’s comfort and closeness perceptions were at times found to be connected which could show that when teachers were more comfortable instructing SEL strategies to students, they also felt a closer relationship with their students (Poulou, 2017a). This feeling of confidence in SEL instruction proved to have the most significant perceived impact on student-teacher relationships for the teacher. However, the student’s perceptions of teacher warmth did not directly connect with the teacher’s perceptions of their own EI which was a surprising finding for Poulou (2017a). Ultimately, more research needs to be done on the differing perspectives of the teacher

and students in the ability to develop and maintain a healthy relationship that could lend itself towards the positive growth and development of social emotional competencies.

Finally, with the need for further clarification, Poulou (2017b) continued her research in the Greece elementary schools looking specifically at the connections between student and teacher perspectives on SEL, relationships, and emotional intelligence (EI) and the impact it can have on the student's behavior difficulties. The same measurement questionnaires were used as her previous studies and 98 teachers participated in filling out these questionnaires about one or several of their students, bringing the total number of students involved in the research to 617. Poulou (2017b) found in her results that the perspective of the teacher is often different from that of the student. As her study involved many voluntary teachers filling out questionnaires about only a select few students, additional research should be considered to compare and potentially validate the perspectives of an entire classroom of students as they would relate to the perspective of the teacher's interactions and feelings of closeness.

Through this continued research, Poulou (2017b) has made some application claims that educators can reflect upon as they consider their own experiences. One claim is that a positive classroom climate and healthy teacher-student relationships would positively impact classroom behavior disruptions (Poulou, 2017b). She also concludes that teachers who have stronger personal and professional social and emotional competencies, are better equipped to build and maintain positive

relationships with their students, thus affecting the social and emotional growth and development of those students while limiting the number of student behavior difficulties.

Throughout Poulou's (2017b) studies, several things remain clear. The personal perspective the students have of what is meaningful and of value within the classroom's social emotional learning platform needs to be considered when contemplating how to best integrate SEL into the classroom curriculum and routines. The teacher can provide amazing lessons or techniques demonstrating how to develop needed social competencies, however if there is no personal commitment to these social competencies from the teacher, or no relationship through which these skills can be delivered, the success may be limited at best.

Although it is unfamiliar to think of the need to integrate and strengthen relationships as an instructional strategy, relationships require adequate social skills to be healthy and maintained. What better way to integrate social emotional learning into the classroom, than by developing and modeling healthy relationships with students.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Summary of Literature

The research for this literature summary was centered around the questions: what is the impact of integrated social emotional learning in the classroom and how can social emotional learning be integrated into the areas of content, routine, and relationships in the classroom? The growing need for social emotional learning within the education system is becoming more apparent as students are coming to school lacking in social competencies. Following Hawkins et al. (2008) foundational Seattle Social Development Project study which revealed significant evidence of the impact extended SEL instruction can have on behavior and life choices of the students ten and fifteen years later, the importance of SEL implementation within the classroom was being contemplated more seriously. CASEL (2013) became a grounding foundation for standard development and research studies as they researched and presented to the world a framework with which schools could use to begin the importance implementation process. In Eklund et al.'s (2018) analysis of the United States of America SEL common core standards, many states and territories had begun to require some SEL instruction either as a separate standard or integrated within the current existing curriculum.

With academic expectations on the rise, many districts realized that the combination of academic and social curriculum could be most beneficial for students and teachers. Although Eklund et al. (2018) identified a gap in the standard

expectations for older grades, researchers began to find results showing that the most significant gains could be made when students are younger and are in a more transitional mindset, from dependency to independency (Eklund et al., 2018; Hawkins et al., 2008; Izard et al., 2008; January et al., 2011). When Izard et al.'s (2018) research discovered that two of CASEL's five identified needed social competencies were able to be used as a predictor for a child's future academic and behavior performance several years later, the academic community began to take note of the significance SEL can have on a child's education.

One program that began to gain popularity amongst school districts was the Responsive Classroom (RC) approach which included ten principles to integrate within the classroom that were designed to promote and support social skills development in students. Although some of the RC components were separate components in the daily classroom schedule, many were designed to be integrated as intentional strategies to be used when instruction was being given. This integration was important as teachers began to feel the pressure of rising academic expectations with limited time for special social skill instructional time (Abry et al., 2016; Lily Allen-Hughes, 2013). Allen-Hughes's (2013) research on the RC Morning meeting component determined this practice was a valuable contribution to the development of a safe and positive classroom community, while also providing a necessary time when intentional SEL skills could be taught and practiced (Abry et al., 2016; Lily Allen-Hughes, 2013; Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007).

Through the RC practices, researchers were finding that intentionally taught SEL skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking, independence and constructive peer interactions, were being carried over into the academic success of students (Abry et al., 2016; Brock et al., 2007; Lily Allen-Hughes, 2013). Rimm-Kaufman and Chiu (2007) began to look at which of the RC components were having the most positive impact on student academic performance. The intentional student interaction of the Morning Meeting proved to be a valuable contribution to SEL instruction while Academic Choice allowed an opportunity for the teacher to focus on a students' individual interests, while providing them with freedom and independence in their learning. This trust from the teacher motivated students to work more naturally with peers, develop autoimmunity and seemed to motivate their personal investment to learn which then brought about greater academic success for the students (Abry et al., 2016; Brock et al., 2007; Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2008). However, one key component not to be overlooked is the importance of quality teacher integration and feedback throughout the learning process. Students who were both exposed to SEL strategies for a longer length of time and had a positive perspective of how the teacher was integrating SEL within the classroom, had a higher academic success rates than those who did not feel a sense of belonging within the classroom or a connection with the teacher (Brock et al., 2007; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2006). These results hold significant weight to the impact that quality teacher-student relationships within the classroom can have on a child's SEL success.

One of the more natural areas of SEL integration is within the academic content itself. The CASEL's (2013) framework that is used within many state common core standards encourages the use of SEL rich literature and content to support or replace other similar curriculum when applicable. A few content related areas that have been researched and shown success in promoting social emotional growth in students are through English language arts, STEAM, art, and the 4R CASEL (2013) approved SEL integrative program. Venegas (2019) found that Literacy Circles have the ability to provide a safe, scaffolded time when students are able to practice and mimic life's interactions while reinforcing their understanding of social norms. This allows time for students to monitor and reflect upon their own social reaction to those rules. This builds confidence, self-regulation, and helps a child find their place in social situations (Venegas, 2019).

In addition, book selection used during English language arts or social studies instruction can play a key role in building empathy and understanding within students as they connect to the characters and themes embedded within rich diverse SEL literature (Garces-Bascal, 2020; Venegas, 2019). Garces-Bascal (2020) researched and created a booklist that highlighted all five CASEL (2013) competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills, and found that even young children are able to grasp more complex social issues when they are presented through the window of a book (Brown et al., 2010; Garces-Bascal, 2020). Children can use the insight they observe and discover in the central message of stories

and transfer those social strategies and understandings to their own lives (Garces-Bascal, 2020; Jones et al. 2011).

The blended and intertwined curriculum approach of the STEAM initiative and the Project-Based Learning instructional model is naturally motivating for students. In addition, it encourages the determination of students to work together within the freedom of their own creative imaginations with the use of hands-on activities that contribute positively to the students' SEL growth (DeJarnette, 2018; Fitzgerald, 2020; Garner et al., 2018; January et al., 2011; Kaldi et al., 2011). The independent, yet group dependent, design of the STEAM philosophy promotes self-awareness, self-management, and the internal need to find one's role within the social climate (Garner et al., 2018), while also building confidence, independence and creativity (Kaldi et al., 2011). The ultimate SEL practice can and should be so integrated within the context that the students are learning and developing social emotional competencies while not even realizing the social skills with which they are developing. This intentional instruction by the teacher yet unrecognized social learning by the students was found to have had the most positive impact on their academic success (Jones et. al 2011; Müller et al., 2019). The 4R (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution) SEL program is designed to embed problem solving and conflict resolution strategies within the literature, writing and reflections of the instructional content the students are receiving. This was shown to have a positive impact on the improvement of aggressive behavior demonstrated by students (Brown et al., 2010; Jones et. al 2011).

Playtime in Kindergarten and younger grades has been identified by researchers as an additional significant SEL integration platform. Natural or free social and physical play has shown to be a significant contributing factor to a child's ability to develop the ability to read and identify emotions in him or herself and others, regulate his or her emotions and respond to the emotions of others (Goldstein & Lerner, 2018; Kirk & Jay, 2018; Lindsey & Colwell, 2013; Lynch, 2015; Szumski et al., 2016; Veiga et al., 2016). These playtime activities are naturally intrinsic which motivates children to go into character, imitating and practicing life in a non-threatening fun way that is free from the fear of making a mistake (Goldstein & Lerner; Veiga et al., 2016). Although some studies use more structured play to determine the impact that play can have specifically on students who have been identified as having low ability social skills (Goldstein & Lerner, 2018; Szumski et al., 2016), others felt that free social or outside physical play had a far greater impact on the freedom, creativity, independence, emotional control, and the motivation to make positive behavior choices that a child gains through free social and physical play (Kirk & Jay, 2018; Lindsey & Colwell, 2013; Ng & Bull, 2018; Veiga et al., 2016). However, encouraging this research is in identifying valuable ways to promote SEL within the classroom, many teachers are feeling that play is no longer necessary or useful, there is no time for play, or pressure from administration for higher academic expectations (Lynch, 2015).

Research has also been done on specific teaching routines and techniques that have claimed to contribute positively to the SEL of students. A small group size allows

students to have more opportunity for interaction and contributions during group work while also learning how to negotiate, cooperate, and be a team player (Humphrey et al., 2009; Ng & Bull, 2018). Setting a positive tone in the classroom space that welcomes students to make mistakes without fear and become the best version of themselves also proved to be a key social contributor in the classroom environment (Humphrey et al., 2009; Ng & Bull, 2018). In addition, providing structure for students by identifying the target learning goal, allowing time to talk and make connections to the content being taught, and reinforcing good behavior also was shown to provide positive reinforcement for the development of social competencies (Humphrey et al., 2009). Finally, Capp et al. (2018) discovered that in the integrated math tutoring program, the tutors showed significant positive gains in confidence and independence while being put in charge of reinforcing the math curriculum to their students.

A theme that threads through the SEL research that has been done, is the continued question regarding the teacher's role and amount of impact that plays out in the integration of SEL in the classroom. The strongest results of SEL growth were in conjunction with positively developed teacher-student relationships and in quality implementation of the practices by the teacher (Abry et al. 2016; Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). Are teacher perceptions or bias of a student a predictor of how well that child performs? This would imply a powerful connection to the students' perception of how the teacher feels them contributing to their willingness to behave well and or perform well academically (Brown et al., 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007; Poulou,

2015). The child's view is important and shouldn't be overlooked (Brock et al. 2007) as their perception of reality often has a greater impact than reality itself, and often differs from the perceived reality of the teacher (Poulou, 2015; Poulou, 2017b). This ultimately suggests that the success of any SEL in the classroom can only be as great as the teacher's own emotional intelligence and the quality of his or her SEL implementation (Poulou, 2017a).

Limitations of the Research

The area of Social Emotional Learning has become very broad over the last few years especially as the need for SEL in the classrooms became more and more apparent through negative student behaviors and dwindling motivation to want to learn, being displayed from students. As I began my research, the limitation of time constraints in the classroom was a very real reality for me, thus creating my first research boundary. The SEL instruction that was going to be the most useful and effective for classroom teachers would need to be something that could be integrated into the existing classroom routines and procedures, content area, or naturally developing student-teacher relationships. Any free-standing SEL studies focused primarily on proving the connection between social competencies and academic performance were not used. Instead, I looked specifically for strategies, techniques, and content connections that related directly to the integration of Social Emotional Learning competencies. I then limited the research results to only include studies that were within the primary age group.

The research represented includes all original research that was peer reviewed. One consistent limitation of any social and emotional learning research data is its subjectivity to the perspective and bias of the one interviewing, or the ones being interviewed, surveyed or scored. The makeup of a classroom dynamic, the experience of a teacher, the mood of a teacher on the day he or she filled out the score sheets for a child all can contribute to the validity or lack thereof of a study. This requires the reader to review the results with a critical eye, understanding the limitations of data based off of opinions and perspectives.

Implications for Future Research

Additional research needs to be done to validate the success of SEL integration within differing areas of curriculum determining where SEL can have the most natural impact. As the data that is collected during SEL studies is so subjective, additional avenues to collect data should be developed to contribute to the research studies. There was some research done on classroom routines and procedures, however more in-depth studies of specific teaching strategies such as turn taking, turn and talk, group work, leadership roles, personalized learning, and academic choice need to be considered and studied as well to provide teachers with the best strategies to use to maximize the effectiveness.

Multiple studies referenced the benefit of providing SEL instruction to children when they are younger as it is a prime transitional phase in children's lives, when they are letting go of their dependency of their caregiver and branching out into the world

and feeling the first taste of independence. As the transition into adolescence can also be a significant part of a child's life, it is possible that this could be another window of opportunity that could be maximized to further develop the SEL competencies of children. Additional research could determine the key times in a child's life when social emotional instruction could have the most positive impact for a child.

In addition, the majority of studies were with a select group of students, within a limited time frame, which leaves additional long-term studies necessary to truly be able to understand the potential impact SEL has on the future possibilities for a child. Finally, the role of teachers became very evident throughout the research, and the positive or negative impacts they can have on the students in their care. Are students only ever as good as their teacher? And if that is the case, how can we attract, train, and maintain quality educators for children?

Implications for Professional Application

As a Kindergarten teacher, I continue to strongly believe in the importance of teaching the whole child. My question of how to make the most of each moment by providing both academic and social instruction to my student simultaneously, gained some clarity with my research findings. Although I feel more research needs to be done to provide clear direction on how to most effectively integrate SEL into my classroom, I can use this research to be more intentional with the daily schedule by ensuring there is still time for a morning meeting where I can directly introduce and model character traits. I can build off the suggestions of providing academic choice, collaborative group

work, and free play as opportunities for students to practice learned social skills, be creative, collaborate, and take responsibility for their learning. I can use the Project-Based Learning framework to motivate student learning, teamwork, and build confidence through authentic problem solving. Finally, the research was clear about my role as the classroom teacher, and the impact that I can have, either positive or negative on my students' success.

The expectations of teachers today require them to provide so much more than academic instruction, but to also prepare students to be critical thinkers, problem solvers, able to manage their emotions and impulses, able to develop and maintain healthy relationships, make positive choices, be sympathetic and understanding towards others, and have a positive self-image all while teaching them their ABCs and 123s. This pressure can at times seem daunting and impossible for teachers, but we need to remain hopeful and confident in the research that has been done to best integrate strategies within our control into our classrooms that will be more effective for our students.

I plan to personally begin implementing some of the above research findings into my classroom while maintaining a critical eye to their subjectivity while also being hopeful for their success. First of all, I'd like to be intentional about my literature selections and integrate diverse and SEL rich stories into my ELA instruction to foster and stimulate discussion, connections, and windows through which my students can see and understand others. These stories would be used in conjunction with our character

education word of the week, during our making meaning literature discussions, to introduce social studies themes, or as guided reading texts.

I am also fascinated by the possibilities that Project-Based Learning can have for the practice and development of social competencies within my students while also motivating them to take charge of their own learning. The hands-on learning approach lends itself beautifully to my active Kindergarteners. However, there will need to be adjustments and scaffolding in order to allow my students to feel and experience success in their research, creation, and presentation of their projects.

Additionally, my insistence to maintain a designated free play time for my students was reinforced by the research showing what a significant impact it can have on the development of social awareness. I hear quite frequently from parents during conferences that Kindergarten today just is not what it used to be, and they would be correct. Even within the last 13 years that I have been teaching Kindergarten, I have watched the mounting reading and math expectations slowly replace the time allotted for outdoor physical play, social free play, or even quiet time when students can rest and reflect on their learning. Right now, as we are in these unprecedented times of hybrid and distance learning, I want to make the small amount of time that we have together count. When I think about the huge amount of learning that needs to happen and the curriculum we need to cover, I must remember the significant importance of letting my students play.

When considering the area of teacher-student relationship, the power I have as a teacher to develop positive relationships with my students and promote social emotional learning within all areas of our day is a weighty responsibility. The significance of the classroom environment and the culture of safety and trust that needs to be developed made an impression on me. I plan to continue my responsive classroom practices as they were shown to have positive impacts on students' SEL growth and on classroom community. I also plan to take on the responsibility of maintaining my own personal emotional stability to be able to better promote the social competencies of my students. I need to remove all bias and extend respect, warmth, patience and caring to all of my students. This will not only provide them with a positive perspective of me and our class climate, but also provide a model of appropriate behavior for them to follow.

Educators today need to make the most of each moment, maximizing the integration strategies in order to not only encourage student academic growth and intellectual potential, but strive to reach the whole child through quality social emotional learning. Students need to learn the skills of working together, understanding others and accepting their differences, while also learning to identify their strengths and gifts to build confidence in their own self-image. The children put in our charge are the leaders of tomorrow, and we need them to be thoughtful, considerate, problem solvers and have the ability to think for themselves, but not only of themselves, with a heart to change the world. If teachers are able to find the balance of SEL integration into their

existing classroom routines and curriculum, maybe then it can truly be said that everything you need to know about how to do life, you can learn in Kindergarten (Fulghum, 1990).

Conclusion

Social Emotional Learning is a significant and valuable part of a child's education. Not only do children's social competencies impact their academic performance but they also can determine their quality of life. With the continued pressure and rise of academic expectations, teachers are needing to become creative in the implementation of SEL by integrating the development of these social skills into the instructional content, classroom routines and procedures, and relationship development throughout the day. With quality teacher implementation and the development of positive relationships with students, the impact that a teacher can have on his or her students' social emotional development can have a significant impact on the lives of children today by helping them become the best versions of themselves; prepared and ready to contribute in a full, rich and healthy life.

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