

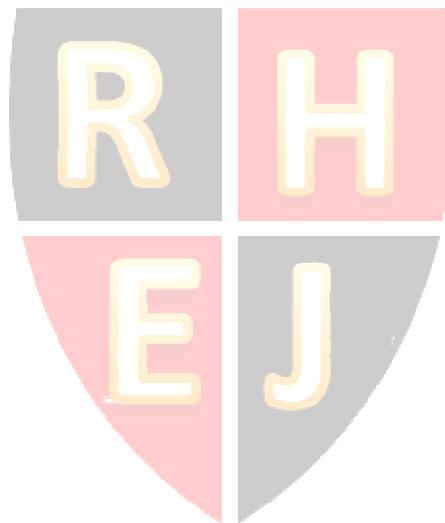
## **Social Emotional Learning in Teacher Education**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper will focus on the importance of bringing Social Emotional Learning and teaching into teacher education. The experiences teacher candidates need to equip themselves with the knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed to promote the success of their students for school and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be explored.

Keywords: social emotional learning, teacher education, prosocial, social emotional competence, teaching



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## **INTRODUCTION**

As a teacher educator concerned about the social emotional welfare of students, one might ask, what can be done to better prepare teacher candidates to meet the challenges in store for them as they prepare to enter classrooms with the goal of positively impacting the lives, hearts, and minds of our nation's youth? The classrooms that teachers in training will enter today is distinctly different from the ones many veteran educators trained for as a future teachers in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Training in the 1970's through the 1990's emphasized the importance of teaching the "whole" child with efforts made to include this line of thinking into teacher preparation and instructional planning. However, the emphasis in education over the past couple of decades has shifted away from the whole child and focuses instead on labeling schools and children based on the outcomes of standardized test results. The world of teaching has become one of strict accountability with the primary goal of developing knowledge and skills for college and career readiness while, for the most part, excluding the affective, social, and emotional needs of children.

## **EDUCATING THE HEART AND THE MIND**

Aristotle is credited with writing something akin to the following: Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all. Most educators would acknowledge the inherent truth in this statement. Yet, educators exist in a world surrounded by countless demands from administrators, parents, and the community at large to expand the repertoire of their teaching goals to focus specifically on making a positive impact on P-12 student academic learning as measured by numerous standardized tests. There seems, however, to be recognition amongst the rank and file of those involved in educating children that the time has come to reconsider instructional priorities; asserting the importance of nurturing academic skills alongside social skills (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). The net must be cast further than merely capturing and teaching to the intellectual and academic needs of each student. In our current climate of social change and yes, turmoil, the nation is in great need of teachers who can embrace students as whole beings, educating, as Aristotle asserted, both the mind and the heart. Teaching students to be smart and good is a tall order, especially for beginning teachers who may not possess the innate skills of knowing what is meant by "good" in the first place and then most importantly, how to go about teaching it. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) acknowledged that teaching students to be good and smart is a challenging task in today's educational arena. This challenge, however, is slowly beginning to be addressed in the research on pre-service teacher training and Social Emotional Learning.

## **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

The Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as the process of implementing policies and practices to teach individuals competencies and skills to assist in the development of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, making reasoned choices and developing and maintaining healthy relationships. Persons who embrace the constructs of Social Emotional Learning possess Social Emotional Competence (SEC). Research indicates teachers with SEC are better able to create nurturing, safe, and healthy classroom environments which lead to higher academic

achievement (Durlak et.al. 2011). The organization recommends advancing SEL in schools through quality teacher training.

## **BENEFITS OF SEL IN TEACHER EDUCATION**

Teaching SEL to future teachers can be especially powerful when grounded in theory and empirical evidence. The good news is that social and emotional skills and values can be taught. Future teachers need to realize that when adult stakeholders in children's education are actively involved in cultivating and modeling their own social and emotional competencies (Brackett et. al., 2009), the results are positive impacts on their student's learning. Eccles and Roeser (1999) contended that a student's learning experiences in the classroom are shaped in large by the student's teacher. Therefore teachers who possess Social Emotional Competence set the tone of the classroom by creating supportive, nurturing, and caring relationships with their students. These social and emotionally competent teachers develop lessons built on their student's strengths, promote intrinsic motivation, effectively coach students through conflict, encourage collaborative and cooperative learning, and are exemplary role models of prosocial behavior. Prosocial behaviors are those intended to help others and are characterized by a concern about others rights, feelings and welfare. Examples of prosocial behaviors include feeling empathy and concern for others and acting in ways to help or benefit other people. So what's in it for future teachers? Research tells us that when SEL is taught and modeled by teachers in a classroom setting, bonding and motivation to learn increases, discipline problems decrease, and test scores go up. Brackett and Katulak (2006) suggested developing the social and emotional skills of teachers would help them create stable, supportive, and productive learning environments. Such environments promote positive social interactions, active learning, high levels of engagement and academic success.

The benefits of bringing SEL into teacher training are well established. However, Schonert-Reichel, Hanson-Peterson, & Hymel (2015) reported that teacher training programs today fail to provide candidates with the knowledge and skills needed to promote their own as well as their students' social and emotional skills. They also fail to adequately equip future teachers with skills needed to create positive classroom environments that promote student success.

Jennings and Greenberg (2009) explained that teachers who possess SEC create optimal classroom environments which are characterized by low levels of conflict, smooth transitions, appropriate expressions of emotions, respect, and interest and focus on tasks. Teachers who exhibit social emotional competence, also have a strong sense of self and social awareness, can self-manage, know how to develop meaningful relationships, and make good, ethical decisions. Because of this, they tend to be more efficient at creating pleasant classroom learning environments. They may also be more proficient at facilitating positive interactions with peers, students, and supervisors, thus contributing to a more positive school climate and culture. In a more positive classroom environment where all feel cared for and respected, there is a greater chance for a teacher to experience greater job satisfaction and less burn out. It is apparent the positive affect demonstrated by the teacher is infectious and spreads to the students who in return bestow it back to the teacher, thus creating a positive cycle of caring, supportive classroom dynamics.

Teachers possessing social emotional competence may be more unlikely to lose control, and instead be more conscious of displaying appropriate emotions. Because of this, these

teachers forge better, more satisfying relationships with peers, colleagues, their principals, parents, and their students. In turn, this satisfactory level of personal interactions is less likely to yield negative relational outcomes like stress, burn out and job dissatisfaction. The teacher in this case, is more prone to stay in the profession and enjoy the career. By teaching future teacher prosocial behaviors grounded in theory, it is hoped they will be more likely to regularly experience more positive emotions regarding their teaching and therefore, may be more resilient, motivated, and better able to cope with the demands of the profession.

### **RETAINING TEACHERS IN THE PROFESSION VIA SEL**

There is another reason to embrace teaching future teachers about the social emotional side of teaching and learning. Colleges, schools, and departments of teacher education are facing accountability measures of program effectiveness imposed by state and national accreditation agencies which include placement and retention rates. Programs with low placement or retention rates are at risk of failing to meet requirements for initial and continued program approval and accreditation. It is incumbent upon teacher preparation programs to find ways to train teachers who will not succumb to teacher burn out, low levels of job satisfaction and disillusionment with the profession within the first five years of teaching. To combat high teacher turn over and career induced stress, teacher educators need to step up to the plate and implement effective strategies to teach future teachers how to thrive in the classroom. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future study (2007) indicated that teacher burnout costs our nation approximately seven billion dollars a year. Teachers who left the profession reported reasons for leaving as follows: classroom management, problems with student discipline, and student mental health issues. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) noted that when teachers received training in behavioral and emotional factors which impact the classroom learning environment, they felt more confident in trying positive, active classroom management strategies to divert aggressive student behavior. Plans need to be put in place that will encourage and incentivize new teachers to go into and remain in the classroom.

### **INCORPORATING SEL IN TEACHER TRAINING AND PROMOTING SEC IN TEACHER CANDIDATES**

Jennings and Greenberg (2009) offered several solid recommendations for incorporating SEL and the development of SEC into teacher training. Two of their suggested strategies, emotional intelligence training and mindfulness-based interventions will be discussed below.

### **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TRAINING**

Brackett and Caruso (2006) developed the Emotionally Intelligent Teacher Training to help teachers learn how to perceive, understand, use, and manage their emotions effectively in the classroom. The training consists of a one-day interactive workshop which provides teachers with the resources needed to create warm, nurturing, safe, and productive learning environments. Brackett and Katulak (2006) shared specific strategies which can be used in teacher training programs to help candidates cope with the stresses inherent in teaching and further their social emotional development. In one activity, teacher candidates are asked to recognize their own and others emotions. The activity requires the participant to write a short explanation of an event that

occurred along with the people who were involved. See example in Figure 1. Candidates then list examples of how the episode made them feel (including the intensity of that feeling) and how they think it made others involved feel (based on verbal and nonverbal clues). The rationale behind this exercise is that when a person takes the time to reflect upon and recognize the feelings they are experiencing, they may become better at expressing themselves in and outside of the classroom. This emotional self-awareness, it is reasoned, will assist in reading people in situations such as, parent-teacher conferences, interactions with colleagues, and meetings with administrators and other educational leaders.

Another exercise suggested by Brackett and Katulak (2006) deals with the ability to manage emotions. The ability to manage emotions is imperative in effective classroom management, stress reduction, inter and intrapersonal relationships, and the overall quality of a person's life. A more effective learning environment with fewer distractions can be achieved by teachers who know how to manage their emotions. For this task teacher candidates are asked to write about a negative emotional experience that occurred during the internship. They need to identify what triggered the emotion, how they dealt with it and how effective their strategy was for dealing with it. Then they are asked to think of other ways they could have managed their emotional reaction to the situation and put it in writing. The purpose of this activity is to ask teacher candidates to evaluate the effectiveness of their current strategies for dealing with tough emotional issues and to help them explore other options. See Figure 2 for an example of a template for this activity.

## **MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTIONS**

Another strategy for promoting wellness, prosocial behavior, peak performance and social emotional competence is incorporating some form of contemplative practice into ones daily routine. Implementing contemplative practice on a daily basis increases individuals' awareness of their thoughts and feelings thus promoting self-reflection, self-regulation and a greater sense of empathy for others. Contemplative practices are often referred to as mindfulness. Mindfulness is considered both a state of being and a centering approach based on meditation. Being mindful is synonymous with being focused, in the present moment, nonjudgmental, and accepting circumstances as they unfold. Mindfulness practices are being implemented in educational settings throughout the world and include strategies such as yoga, deep breathing, reflection and secular meditation. The 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and Ekman (2008) suggested that regular meditation leads to an increased ability to control one's responses and regulate stress. A number of evidence-based contemplative practice strategies are available for future teachers, some will be discussed here.

Elder, Sanford, Moriarty, and Nidich (2014) studied 40 secondary schoolteachers and educational support staff at a therapeutic school for children with behavioral problems to determine if the practice of Transcendental Meditation (TM) was effective in reducing stress for these educators. Their four-month study indicated significant and clinically important decreases in perceived stress and the emotional exhaustion typically linked with teacher burnout. The regular practice of TM reduced stress for the educators, and as a result, positively impacted the students they were teaching.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a contemplative technique developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003) which uses a combination of mindfulness meditation, yoga, and body awareness to help people become more mindful. He developed a special training specifically for

teachers offered through the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Gold, Smith, Hopper, Herne, Tansey, and Hulland, (2010), studied the effects of MBSR training of a group of primary level teachers to determine its effects on their levels of stress, anxiety depression, goal setting, and awareness. It was found that most of the teachers showed significant improvement in each of these areas as a result of engaging in the training. The study suggested that MBSR training could possibly offer an effective method for combating teacher burnout and stress. Micklejohn, J., Phillips, C., Freedman, et.al. (2012) reviewed studies and curricula to examine how mindfulness training affected K-12 teachers and their students. They found that teachers who actively participated in mindfulness-based training increased their sense of well-being, teaching efficacy, classroom management skills, as well as their ability to establish and maintain healthy, positive relationships.

A benefit of introducing contemplative practices into teacher education is that they nurture the ability of future teachers to create collaborative, cooperative, and caring classrooms that can support students in their care who are experiencing emotional conflicts (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Winzelberg and Luskin (1999) studied 21 secondary school student teachers and found that mindfulness training reduced mental and physical health problems they were experiencing attributed to the profession. These teachers self-reported a significant reduction in emotional, behavioral, and gastronomic stress symptoms as a result of regular contemplative practices.

Both mindfulness techniques, TM and MSBR are strictly secular in nature and are in no way, shape or form associated with any religious ideology or subversive movement. These secular forms of contemplative practice, as well as others that exist are strongly recommended for teachers in training.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd (2013) remind teacher educators that a teacher's social emotional competencies (SEC) affect everything that happens in the classroom including classroom management, teacher-student relationships, and teacher burnout. They note it would behoove those in teacher training to acknowledge that future teachers need to embed effective SEC to deal with the stressors they will face in their classrooms.

Jennings and Greenberg (2009) offered a number of recommendations for teacher educators regarding the next steps in advancing SEL in teacher preparation. They recommended: incorporating teaching about SEL innovations in coursework, designing experiences where teacher candidates apply SEL initiatives in field work, training program professors to develop a knowledge base in SEL, and placing interns with teachers who demonstrate SEL and teaching in their classrooms.

## **CONCLUSION**

Future teachers are faced with a multitude of stressors unlike those who preceded them into the profession in the past. With these new demands come increased stress, distress, and potentially, job burnout. Teacher educators can help combat this situation by embedding Social Emotional Learning and teaching strategies into teacher preparation programs. Strategies for incorporating aspects of SEL into teacher education have been discussed. It is suggested that

teacher preparation programs offer teacher candidates emotional training exercises like those described during field placements to encourage reflection and conversation about emotion recognition and management. Mindfulness training is also strongly recommended for those in the profession. The in educational world of strict accountability teacher educators are obligated to teach our students strategies for facilitating content knowledge and academic skills; these are crucial components of teacher training. Equally important, however, and not to be overlooked are the affective skills needed by future teachers to ensure balance, stress management and ability to thrive in the profession.

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require their candidates to take at least one course in child and adolescent development (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2010). This coursework is required to ensure candidates develop an understanding of the social, emotional, and cognitive development of the children they are training to teach. The application of this knowledge, however, seems limited ().Shriver and Buffett (2015) encouraged educators to realize that the real core of education is the relationship that exists between the student and the teacher and the extent to which this relationship nurtures the student to understand he or she matters.

**APPENDIX**

Figure1. Recognizing Social Emotional Feelings

Event/Situation/Those Present	Self Emotion(s) experienced as a result of event or situation/intensity of the emotion(s)	Others Emotions Demonstrated Based on Verbal and Non-Verbal Clues

Figure 2. Managing Emotions

What is the emotion?
What triggered it?
What was my strategy for dealing with the emotion?
How effective was my strategy for dealing with the emotion?
What are other possible strategies I can use to deal with the emotion?