MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL of EDUCATION

Strengthening Healthy Child Development (During/Post COVID-19): Research-Informed Approaches to Implementing Social-Emotional Learning in the Classroom

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MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY
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I. What is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)?

Social and emotional learning is a critical aspect of education and development in which people obtain and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to cultivate **healthy development**. SEL elevates **educational equity** through **authentic** school, family, and community-based efforts and partnerships through **ongoing evaluation**[1].

- ★ SEL must acknowledge **Dr. James Comer** who fought against racial segregation in schools during the 1960s. He was the first to integrate this intervention project, focusing on the **whole child.**
- ★ SEL (when carefully designed), can support addressing unmet personal needs of students (validation/sense of belonging), academic growth, inequity, and social injustices while empowering them to be active members in a safe/healthy community.

III. Benefits of Transformative SEL[3]

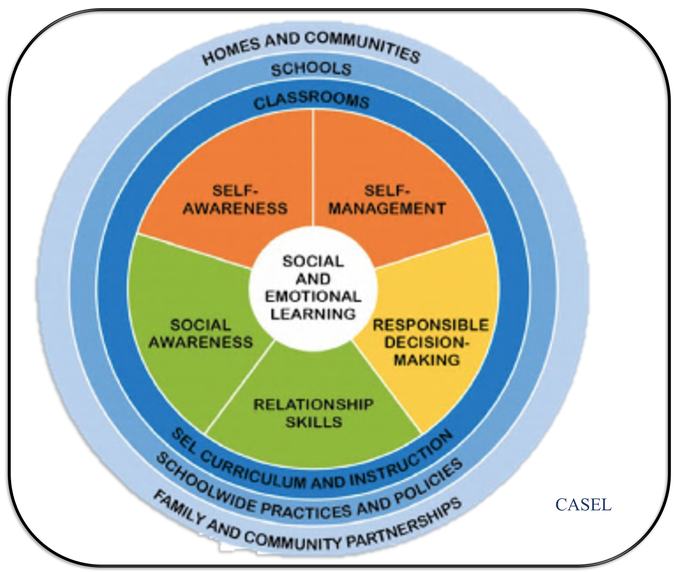
Students can benefit from teachers learning how to better model SEL skills. Implementing **SEL promotes 1)** supporting students' intellectual growth, **2)** validation in developing students' appreciation and celebration of their culture, including an appreciation for diversity, and **3)** practicing sociopolitical consciousness in a safe environment to analyze, identify, and solve real-world problems[4]. Students' **basic needs and emotional well-being** must be met before academic content learning can effectively take place.

- → **Transformative** SEL, which is **justice-oriented**, fosters optimal growth in students who are often marginalized and minoritized in society, being intentional by design[5].
- → Builds **emotional intelligence**, the ability to analyze, process, and use information. To maximize achievement and success, students need to be able to control/understand their emotional reactions and emotions of others' which in turn helps them **problem solve**[6].
- → Children with SE skills do better in school, the workplace, and life[7] which correlates with research that's proved associations between measured SE skills in kindergarten to adulthood in areas of **education**, **employment**, and **mental health**[8].

II. 5 Extraordinary Competencies

Through SEL, an increased likelihood of exposure to 5 overall competencies is possible. Students may access a range or plethora of sub-skills that, when combined, reinforce healthy development. With a goal of supporting academic learning, SEL can offer the following:

- ✓ **5 Competencies** and student exposure to identifying emotions/emotion management, impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation, self-confidence, self-efficacy, organizational skills, empathy, appreciation for diversity, respect for others, communication skills, teamwork, ethical responsibility and supportive relationships[2].
- ✓ There must be partnership between the family, school, other professionals, and community members. Doing so expands upon research-informed practices, which suggests ongoing professional development/learning opportunities.



IV. What has Affected Student Learning?

Facemasks & Social Cues

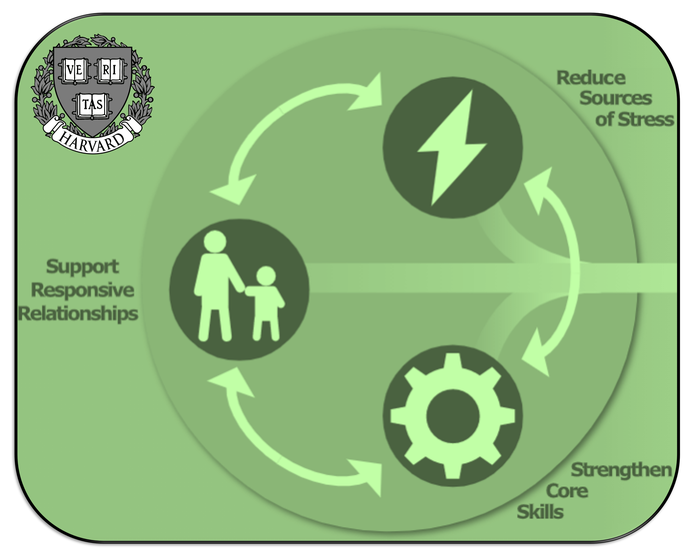
- Children read emotional cues to interpret situations, often relying on facial expressions to regulate responses. This is called **social referencing** and facemasks have prevented this.
- Help students recognize other ways of communication, such as eyebrow raises, body language, and tone of voice to raise **emotional cue understandings**[10]. Teachers can also utilize **Masked Emotion Posters**.

Stress, Trauma, Illness, Deaths, Racial Injustices, Etc.

- The brain, immune responses, and metabolic regulation are all related and work together to promote personal well-being.
- **Adverse environments** cause physical health declines and impacts emotional and physical well-being in students[11]. Possible health issues are chronic inflammatory conditions (heart disease, depression, autoimmune disease) and acute/temporary inflammation (fight or flight).

Less Social Play Time

- COVID has impacted the number of **social interactions**. Students need to recognize and deal with strong emotions that they feel within themselves and others, as **modeling** of appropriate social interactions has been minimal.



V. The Pandemic's Affect on Child Development

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has changed life overall and access to participation in the education system. In addition to stress, students have been exposed to high racial issues in society and trauma, heightening SEL concerns.

- ✦ Insight from schools around the world, like Delhi, India who implemented the ***"Happiness Curriculum"*** in 2018 has continued 35 minutes a day towards SEL through the pandemic which resulted in positive teacher-student relationship quality, participation increase, abilities to feel focused and calm within the classroom, and the transfer of skills to environments outside of school[9].

VI. Research-Informed Approaches to Implement SEL

Following **research-informed approaches,** SEL helps foster positive, inclusive, supportive learning environments that recognize the **whole child** academically and developmentally while addressing unmet needs. SEL must be **anti-racist** and **trauma-informed** and call attention to complex social-historical influences that impact learning and SEL implementation[12].

- ► **Mood/Emotion Charts:** Can be used to make future academic decisions. Can be done one-on-one or in morning meetings.
- ► **Student Roles/Responsibility:** Giving students jobs or roles within classrooms helps them gain a sense of responsibility and decision-making.
- ► Have **Restorative Conversations:** Incorporate restorative conversations to discuss social issues we currently face that may be impacting student self-perception, confidence, efficacy, or mindset.
- ► Use **Literature**[13]: This will connect to SEL and guide classroom discussions. Teachers may incorporate **perspective switching** with the characters, **mindfulness**, or restorative conversations.
  - ► This article *https://betterkids.education/blog/22-children-books-that-support-social-emotional-learning* highlights diverse books for different SEL themes for students and educators.
- ► **Resources: Racial equity resources** for teachers and **SEL video lessons** can be found at *www.lessonsforsel.com/sel-racial-equity.* There is **professional development** for SEL virtually on *www.321insight.com/smartbrief/* and professional learning resources on *www.casel.org/csi-resources-professional-learning/*.

VII. Conclusion

It is critical to continuously plan and prepare for SEL within the context of learning, pedagogy, and classroom engagement as it relates to developing the whole child and building stronger community relationships. Implementing SEL is important as students will need multiple developmental competencies to be addressed in the aftermath of the pandemic. As educators, we must make sure student's basic needs are met, while also unpacking the link of student reception to academic learning.

References

(1) CASEL, 2020, **(2)** CASEL, 2020, **(3)** Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019, **(4)** Ladson-Billings, 2014, **(5)** Paris, 2012, **(6)** Nasibova Sevinj Khalil, 2021, **(7)** Helen Shwe Hadani, 2020, **(8)** Damon E. Jones, Mark Greenber, & Max Crowley, 2015, **(9)** Esther Care, Vishal Talreja, Aynur Gul Sahin, & Sreehari Ravindranath, 2020, **(10)** Rachael Katz & Helen Shwe Hadani, 2021, **(11)** National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Harvard, 2020, **(12)** Julia Mahfouz & Vanessa Anthony-Stevens, 2020, **(13)** Helen Shwe Hadani, 2020.

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