

Teachers' Perspectives on SEL Implementation in Urban Manitoba Elementary Schools

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Social Cognition Lab

Introduction

Mental health awareness is growing in Canadian culture yet, our youth are facing growing mental health challenges. In fact, statistics from the Government of Canada show that youth ages 15-24 are among the highest at risk for completing suicide.¹

Social and Emotional Learning

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) aims to address these growing mental concerns by developing students' social-emotional skillsets². Leading the SEL initiative is The Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). CASEL fosters five core areas of healthy social-emotional development in students (see Figure 1). Students can gain additional benefits from SEL implementation which includes increased academic success and decreased challenging behaviors^{3,4,5}. Currently, SEL implementation is being widely used in Canadian classrooms, although, Canadian research in this area is lacking. Moreover, it is known that teachers face many barriers to effective SEL implementation including lack of administrative support and low confidence implementing lessons^{6,7,8,9,10}.

Objectives and Research Questions:

The present study aimed to seek teachers' perspectives on SEL in Manitoba classrooms using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). To better understand what these perspectives look like, the following questions were posed:

1. What are Canadian teachers' beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and personal experiences with SEL?
2. Which SEL strategies are currently working, and which ones are not for Canadian elementary teachers?

Method

Participants

- Manitoban teachers from elementary schools were recruited via word-of-mouth to participate in a focus group session (N = 3).
- 2-9 years teaching experience

Focus Group

- The focus group session took place at a local library and lasted approximately 50 minutes.
- Semi-structured interview questions were adopted to facilitate the focus group and responses were voice-recorded.
 - E.g., "What student characteristics do you feel make SEL teaching a priority?"

Analysis

- Audio recordings were subsequently used to create a transcript for thematic analysis.
- Transcript was coded and thematic analysis procedure was facilitated using a constant comparison method.

Discussion

Teachers provided their perspectives on SEL in their classrooms. Based on the findings, **diversity** was identified as the overarching theme that guided discussions on SEL challenges, opportunities, and current strategies and goals. All teachers spoke about the diverse needs of students and the importance of SEL in accommodating these needs from emotional/behavioral needs, to family structure and cultural perspectives. Diversity was also found amongst SEL teaching strategies and goals as well as amongst the opportunities that it can offer students, teachers and entire schools.

Novel finding: French immersion teachers spoke to the added barriers they face when searching for French-language SEL programming. When materials must be translated to English, these teachers reported experiencing increased workloads highlighting the need for language-appropriate SEL materials.

Strengths and Limitations

Adopting a qualitative study design allowed for rich data collection allowing teachers to contribute their authentic perspectives on SEL. This methodology additionally led to unanticipated findings on French Immersion challenges.

Due to the current study's small sample size, findings cannot be generalized to the wider teaching community.

Implications

Results of the present study may be used to inform school policy and implementation of SEL. Moreover, it provides the groundwork for future quantitative studies investigating the impact of SEL in Canadian classrooms.

"We go around a circle almost every morning and do a 5-point scale so that we can understand if somebody is saying to you that they are a one . . . you need to be, you know, especially kind to this person cause they're going through something."

Current strategies and goals



I think part of it is, is honoring where the kids are coming from . . . sometimes you talk about the classroom being a family, but their definition of family can be very different from the next person sitting beside them.

Challenges



"[student] problems . . . become easier to deal with in the moment, right? Instead of having to put out the fires you kind of have all the stuff ready so you don't have to worry."

Opportunities

Findings

Findings of the present study uncovered several super-ordinate themes:

SEL Challenges:

Teachers saw student diversity as both a reason why SEL is needed in classrooms and as a challenge to SEL implementation. In particular, the teachers expressed similar daily challenges faced in helping their students overcome their diverse emotional needs. Prioritizing and balancing SEL lessons with mandated curriculum was another common challenge that teachers discussed arguing that further support on a school-wide level is needed.

SEL Opportunities

Teachers expressed the benefits that SEL has provided for their students. Some noted fewer behavioral problems while others acknowledged better autonomy in their students' abilities to regulate their emotions and work through problems.

Current Strategies and Goals

Teachers shared a focus on using SEL lessons to develop students' awareness of the self and others including self-reflection and empathy.

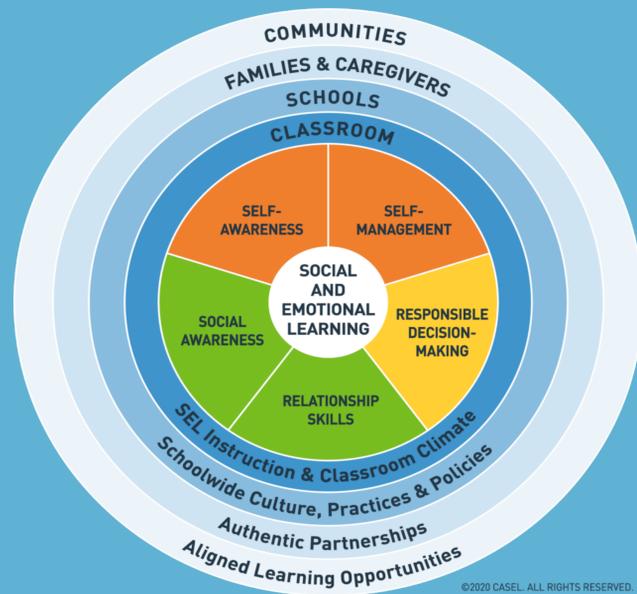


Figure 1. Social-Emotional Learning Competencies Wheel (CASEL)²

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