

How do Educators support Social and Emotional Learning for Adolescents in High School?

by

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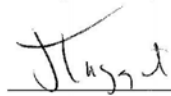
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How do Educators support Social and Emotional Learning for Adolescents in High School?

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Abstract

The purpose of this research paper is to determine how to effectively create and integrate a program that addresses social and emotional development of high school students. The central question explores how we are currently supporting social and emotional development of adolescents in high school. The sub-questions explore what programs are currently in place, what common elements these programs have, and what specific skills these programs address in regards to social and emotional development. There are many programs that are currently in place at an elementary level, but minimal at a high school. Of those that are in place, there are common key characteristics and key skills that are addressed in the Programs. Programs must cater to the culture of the school, be continued over a period of time, emphasize relationships, and provide a sense of autonomy for students. Programs should involve skills in all three concepts of emotional processes, social and interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Research clearly indicates that there is a lack of programs implemented in high schools that target social and emotional learning. There is strong evidence to support the benefits of social and emotional learning on school connectedness, student mental health, and academic achievement. There are currently many programs that support social and emotional development at an elementary level, but these programs almost completely diminish as students reach their adolescent years. Programs that target social and emotional learning must be implemented into high schools to ensure that we are creating contributing, self-sufficient members of society.

Keywords: social emotional learning, high school

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How do Educators support social and emotional development of adolescents in high school?

Chapter I: The Problem

Introduction

Today students grow up facing many challenges that are emotionally and socially straining. The many changes in today's society are negatively impacting students and a lack of supports for these students is evident. Many factors can have a negative effect on students' social, emotional and academic development (Zins & Elias, 2007). A few of these factors include increased economic and social pressures on families, weakening of community institutions, and easy access to media that encourages damaging behaviors (Greenberg et al., 2003). Through personal experience and observation, the effect of these factors is alarming. It is evident in a lack of social and emotional development seen in adolescents. Self-sufficiency, respect for others, and empathy are all skills that need to be learned. These skills should be taught, reinforced and mastered in the social setting of a high school. Benson (as cited in Durlak & Weissberg, 2011) found only 29-45% of students reported that they had social competencies such as empathy, decision-making, and conflict resolutions skills. The purpose of a school is to not only academically educate students, but also teach them to be responsible, socially-skilled, emotionally-healthy, caring, and contributing citizens (Greenberg et al., 2003). Students must be prepared to pass the tests of life, not just the tests at school (Zins, & Elias, 2007). Educators can cultivate empathy in youth to help them thrive emotionally, socially, and academically (Ogilvie, 2014). Social and emotional learning (SEL) must be integrated into high schools to ensure we are creating positive, self-sufficient members of society. SEL programs not

only provide the tools to enhance students' understanding of their own emotions and responses to stress, but also how to focus quietly and improve their academic motivation (Ogilvie, 2014).

Background of the Problem

Social and emotional skills are associated with academic success through many pathways (Stephanie M Jones & Bouffard, 2012). The need to address challenges that interfere with students' connection and performance in school is critical. When students feel connected to or have strong bonds with their schools, they are more likely to experience academic success. Alarming, only about 50% of the students in schools report feeling connected to or engaged in school (Blum 2005 from (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Gaenzle, Kim, Lin, & Na, 2012). In the same study previously mentioned by Benson (as cited in Durlak & Weissberg, 2011) he found that only 29% of students indicated that their school provided a caring and encouraging environment. Given that one of the basic needs of humans is a sense of belonging, students must feel cared for in order to thrive to reach their potential. We, as educators, cannot expect students to succeed academically when their other needs are not being met.

Adolescents are in a vulnerable time of development as they are in a constant state of change. Biologically, adolescents are going through a tumultuous time (Spinks, 2002). Adolescents are developing physically, but often do not have the social or emotional capabilities to adapt to these changes. Physiological and neurological systems are under rapid development (Hess et al., 2012). Synaptic pruning, the overgrowth of cell connections that precedes shedding and hardening of synapses, occurs over the adolescent years (Hess et al., 2012). This means that cells and connections that are not used will be shed, while ones that are used will be reinforced (Spinks, 2002). This biological fact supports that adolescence is the time to intervene and teach students social and emotional skills. It also highlights the need for students to have a range of

experiences while in high school to challenge them and facilitate healthy growth. During adolescence, executive functions of the brain are still developing which encompasses their ability to strategize and organize (Spinks, 2002). Interventions need to be put in place to give adolescents the tools needed for the challenges of life.

Adolescents are exposed to easily accessible negative coping mechanisms. The brain is most vulnerable at this stage, yet many adolescents engage in risky behaviors (Spinks, 2002). The damage that can be done to the brain with abuse of drugs and alcohol can last well into their adult years (Spinks, 2002). When adolescents are not anchored with caring adults, they become morally and spiritually afloat (Ogilvie, 2014). This state leaves them vulnerable to superficial connections to one another that can lead to feeling hollow, angry, depressed and self-destructive (Ogilvie, 2014). Adolescents are also going through the post-conventional stage of moral development (Hess et al., 2012). When making a moral decision, students in the post-conventional stage consider the perspective of others and more importantly base the decision on their own foundation of morals (Hess et al., 2012). When deciding to engage in a risky behavior, many will rely on the moral belief engrained in them before the exposure. Adolescents with strong social and emotional competencies demonstrate resiliency when put into these stressful situations (Durlak & Weissberg, 2011). Educators can help lay a healthy foundation including an overall positive sense of self. This factor in itself is a good predictor of social skills and success later in life (Hess et al., 2012).

Statement of Problem

There is strong evidence to support the benefits of social and emotional learning on school connectedness, student mental health, and academic achievement. Research clearly indicates that there is a lack of programs implemented in high schools that target social and

emotional learning. Schools must integrate coordinated instruction in social and emotional learning to maximize students' potential to succeed not only in school but throughout their lives (Zins & Elias, 2007). In order to create self-sufficient, positive, contributing members of society, there must be a shift in school culture to integrate social and emotional learning.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research paper is to determine how to effectively create and integrate a program that addresses social and emotional development of adolescents. The study will analyze programs that are currently being implemented in schools and explore their common characteristics.

Research Questions

The central question of this research is: how are we currently supporting social and emotional development of adolescents in high school?

The sub-questions are:

1. How are programs that are currently implemented in high schools targeting social and emotional development?
2. What are the common elements of these programs?
3. What specific skills do these programs address in regards to social and emotional development?

Importance of the Study

With the rapid increase in technology use in the past decade, social skills are not being practiced as frequently. Technology is taking over the human interaction that was once necessary for communication. A 2010 Kaiser Foundation study showed that elementary aged children used entertainment technology 7.5 hours per day and that 50% of North American

homes have the TV on all day (Rowan, 2013). When elementary children enter middle school or high school, their technology use increases since they often get their own phones and iPods. With all of this time spent indulged in technology, the face-to-face social time significantly decreases. The skills that are learned during human interaction are not being learned and practiced by these adolescents. The social media that adolescents engage in often lead to a flawed sense of self as they portray themselves through their online profiles as opposed to who they are in person.

The technology generation has led to the new phenomena of “cyber-bullying”, increasing the accessibility of bullying. Victims of this type of bullying are then left alone with the emotional and social strain and often do not have the skills or supports necessary to cope. In terms of development, the increase in technology use has led to sedentary bodies with overbearing sensory stimulation which has resulted in delays in reaching developmental milestones (Rowan, 2013). This delay results in students entering school with a lack of self-regulation and attention skills which often leads to behavioral issues in the classroom (Rowan, 2013). Educators must recognize the phenomena and adapt the students’ learning experience to incorporate practice of these social and emotional skills.

Given the time spent in school, it is clear that this system is one of the most influential microsystems in a student’s life (Hess et al., 2012). Eccles & Roeser (2004) discuss the impact of schools on development during adolescence from an ecological view. Classrooms, school buildings, school districts and secondary school transitions, and embedded organizations in the larger community are all highly impactful systems within an adolescent’s life (Eccles & Roeser, 2004). At home, there are many children who are lacking support and encouragement.

Definitions

For the purpose of this paper, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined as the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, effectively solve problems, and establish positive relationships with others (Zins & Elias, 2007).

Limitations and Scope of Study

The literature review analyzes studies that have been conducted on social and emotional learning in education. This literature is a hot topic that includes school connectedness, and social and emotional learning. Literature is limited on research of social and emotional programs since many of the programs are in the beginning stages. Most of the social and emotional programs that are reviewed are implemented at an Elementary level, whereas the focus of this paper is on high school level programs. The positive outcomes that are evident in the studies are assumed to be transferable to an equally effective High School program. Common characteristics, elements and skills within the social and emotional programs use different language within the literature, but were categorized through groupings of similar concepts.

Structure of Paper

Chapter II is a literature review of research conducted on Social and Emotional Learning in schools. Programs that are currently implemented in Elementary Schools and High Schools are also reviewed including common characteristics, elements, and skills that are addressed within the programs. Chapter III summarizes the findings of the literature review and outlines implications. This chapter also discusses an action plan of implementation of a homeroom program and outlines further recommendations.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Social and emotional learning

Schools must integrate coordinated instruction in social and emotional learning to maximize students' potential to succeed not only in school but throughout their lives (Zins & Elias, 2007). Social and emotional development positively affects academic achievement. Parker et al (2004) found that top academic students had higher levels of interpersonal, adaptability, and stress management abilities over all other groups. This finding supports the link between social and emotional competency and academic success.

Educators do not expect students to know how to calculate the limit of a derivative nor should they expect them to know social and emotional skills. In accordance with behavior theory, you must learn how to be civilized, caring and considerate (Ogilvie, 2014). We are currently educating our students academically, but failing them socially and emotionally. To create ethical, engaged citizens, schools must provide opportunity for students to grow and develop through shared decision-making, social justice, civic responsibility and service learning (Ogilvie, 2014). Too often, students are coddled at school and unable to cope independently when needed. Integrative processes, being able to simultaneously mix togetherness and separateness, is something adolescents need to be aware of as they find their place in their world (Ogilvie, 2014). Resilient and self-sufficient individuals are not born, but made (Ogilvie, 2014). Adolescents need to make mistakes, learn from failure, and learn to accept the things that they cannot change or control (Ogilvie, 2014).

There has been limited research conducted around implementation of SEL programs within schools. Of the experiments that have been done, results have yielded positive supports of SEL programs. Durlak et al (2011) found significant positive results with the implementation

of SEL programs. The results were positive across all six categories they tested which were social and emotional skills, attitudes toward self and others, positive social behaviors, conduct programs, emotional distress, and academic performance (Durlak & Weissberg, 2011). It has been found, however, that there are some limitations to the programs that are being implemented. Programs that are currently being implemented have insufficient dosage, duration and effectiveness (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). They are also often fragmented and marginalized, and only focus on the classroom (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). The lack of staff training is evident in these programs, and without this training and knowledge there is no room for the program to grow since buy-in and understanding of the teachers is low (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). The challenges with SEL programs are that there is no time, attention and resources available to implement a program (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Many educators see that the program could be beneficial, but these factors make it unreasonable to implement. In order to help staff and schools with these issues, schools need specific strategies in addition to or apart from a full comprehensive SEL program (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Jones & Bouffard (2012) believe that schools need a continuum of approaches that range from routines and structures to full, integrated programs.

Prevention and promotion programs of social and emotional development in high schools will enhance student success in not only school, but also their lives. Research shows that social and emotional learning and academic achievement are related and that integrated, coordinated learning of both will maximize students' potential to succeed (Zins & Elias, 2007). This approach to education will enable children to embrace their potential and become lifelong learners who are active, positive participants in society (Cohen, 2006).

Programs currently implemented

According to research, there has been a growing trend in programs that target students' emotional capacities, interpersonal skills, social problem-solving abilities, and self-regulation (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Although awareness of the importance of SEL is on the rise, there is still a lack of SEL programs that are integrated into classrooms and schools in a meaningful and sustainable fashion (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Of the SEL initiatives that are currently in place, most of them are focused at the elementary level. Few programs are available for middle schools and very limited attention is given to high schools (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Programs that are currently in place range from comprehensive counselling programs to mentoring programs with peers and adults to other SEL initiatives within the school and classrooms. All of these programs are focused on enhancing social skills and emotional abilities of students so they all fall under the category of SEL.

Comprehensive school counselling programs impact educational and personal development (Borders & Drury, 1992). Individual and group counseling, classroom guidance, and consultation activities contribute directly to student success, but are often neglected by school counsellors as their time is taken up on other administrative tasks and reactive work (Borders & Drury, 1992). The need for a shift in focus of counsellors is not a new idea. Whiston and Sexton (1998) found focus seems to be on responsive services rather than on guidance curriculum, individual planning or system response. With counsellors as social and emotional advocates in high school, SEL could be enhanced and engrained in schools if counsellor programs were more catered towards promotion and prevention. This would allow time for counsellors to create programs that could be implemented either as an extracurricular program, a course, or as a guide for classroom teachers.

A variety of mentoring programs have been implemented in high schools. These have been adopted to allow for both individual support when needed by a student and promotion of social and emotional support. Although SEL generally caters to the overall population of students, mentoring is still a form of social and emotional support. The types of mentoring that have been implemented are peer, adult-oriented and multidimensional. Peer mentoring programs provide support for students in a non-threatening, comfortable way to increase bonds and connectedness among peers (Carty, 1989). Carty (1989) found that peer mentoring had a positive effect on healthy development including a decrease in adolescent stress and increase in social support. These mentoring programs have a positive effect on changes in self-esteem, social skills, and behavioral norms when the mentors' attendance was reported as effective (Karcher, 2005). This suggests that relational process is effective to positively influence social and emotional development of adolescents (Karcher, 2005) and that if students have relationships in which they feel comfortable and supported, it will be beneficial to their social and emotional development. Karcher (2005) also found an overall positive effect on connectedness to school and parents for those who participated in the mentoring program. Multidimensional mentoring programs have been implemented that focus on getting students involved in group settings where activities are interactive and student-oriented involving decision-making and cooperation (King & Vidourek, 2002). This multidimensional approach involved parents, peer tutoring, and peer mentoring (King & Vidourek, 2002).

ConnectZone (Ogilvie, 2014) is a school-based initiative that starts with the adults in the building. This type of mindset requires research prior to implementation to recognize the needs of the individual school. The belief of this initiative is that school climate has a large impact on school connectedness, and that school climate is set by the adults within the school by the

policies and procedures, the foundational beliefs, as well as the practices guided by these adults.

Ogilvie (2014; p. 106) outlines the following key points of a ConnectZone:

1. They are welcoming and nurturing arenas of infinite possibilities that foster a sense of rootedness, harmony, belonging and connection.
2. They value meaningful relationships, physical and emotional safety, security, exploration, self-expression, growth and maturation.
3. They represent communities of care.
4. They embrace trusting and caring relationships.
5. They re-establish resiliency by reconnecting to our grounding, our resources and one another.
6. They promote the maintenance of personal boundaries and an awareness of when to attend to our own self-care.
7. They promote the protective practice of heartfelt, empathetic engagement.

The key points of this type of initiative are much different than any academic outline. Schools that have committed themselves to being ConnectZones have created and maintained safe, warm, welcoming, supportive, inclusive environments. They are places of human connection, communication, collaboration, trust, compassion and tolerance (Ogilvie, 2014)

DASHBC has partnered with a plethora of other groups to implement a program that funds individualized programs for schools to promote safe and caring learning environments. They believe in creating a school community where everyone is not just safe, but seen, heard, supported, significant, and cared for (DASHBC). The basis of this program is around school connectedness, which has been proven that if the students feel connected to their school then their academic achievement will increase (DASHBC). The benefits include increased

attendance, classroom engagement, and increased school completion (DASHBC). Socially and emotionally there is also a decrease in risky substance use, emotional distress, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and depression (DASHBC). Schools that apply and receive this funding implement programs that are created for their individual needs within the school. An example of this is a First Nations school that integrated cultural programs to allow the students to feel connected and welcomed within the school.

Classroom initiatives that focus on SEL learning have proven to be very effective. The classroom-based SEL program MindUP (MindUp Curriculum) was used in a study to examine the effects on children's cognitive control abilities, regulation of stress, wellbeing and pro-social skills (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). In this particular study, the MindUP program was implemented for elementary-aged students, but can be effective at any age. The program consists of twelve lessons based on Mindfulness which move from subjective sense-based experiences to cognitive experiences to actions such as the practice of gratitude and kindness (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Although this program was implemented with elementary-aged students, mindfulness has been proven to be effective for stress reduction in adulthood meaning it can be implemented for a high school program as well (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). In this particular study, the results were positive including an increase in cognitive control and stress physiology, improved empathy, perspective-taking, emotional control, optimism and self-concept (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

Roots of Empathy is a Canadian initiative that is an evidence-based classroom program that focuses on empathy. It has been proven to reduce levels of aggression, increase social and emotional competence, as well as increase empathy in the students (Gordon, 2009). The program focuses on relationships through regular visits of a mother and a baby. These visits are

utilized as a template for positive, human interaction (Gordon, 2009). The baby is put in the role of a teacher of empathy, since he/she has no biases towards different children, but sees them all as people to love (Gordon, 2009). This program is implemented at an elementary level, but could also be effective at a high school level.

PATHS program is an effective comprehensive SEL curriculum that is evidence-based (Channing Bete Company, 2015). The PATHS program covers five domains of social and emotional development. The domains are self-control, emotional understanding, positive self-esteem, relationships, and interpersonal problem-solving skills (Channing Bete Company, 2015). The program is implemented in preschool to grade six classrooms. There are a series of 30-minute lessons that are clearly outlined that have a combination of the five domains interspersed among the lessons.

Jones & Bouffard (2012) offers implementing routines as a non-structured, yet effective way to implement SEL learning into the classroom. Routines would include emotional regulation and conflict resolution, games that hone attention skills, and class council meetings for resolving classroom issues (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). These types of routines could be implemented from an elementary level all the way up to a high school level depending on the way that you approach the routine. There is currently a program called SECURe (Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Understanding and Regulation). This program is implemented at a K-3 level and encompasses this type of process-focused SEL.

It has been thought that integrated, everyday approaches could be even more efficient than full-scale programs that teach SEL skills during structured time (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). In these cases, there is teacher education on the importance of SEL. Teachers who believed in the importance of this type of education then integrated it into their practice through daily

interactions with their students. This method avoids the substantial challenge of the other types of SEL programs that require large blocks of time that take away from academic instruction (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Clearly, the importance of teacher training for staff around SEL programs is necessary for a successful program. Not only does the training need to be a priority, but the administrators need to infuse SEL skills into their mission and daily work of schools (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). This means there needs to be support for all of the adults within the school and their current SEL skill set (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). It is critical that the adults within the building who are honing in and promoting these skills have a strong handle on their own skill set (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Of the programs discussed, quite a few of them are only being implemented in elementary schools. The programs currently implemented in high school are limited due to insufficient coordination with other components of schools (Greenberg et al., 2003). Another current problem with efforts to promote SEL is that programs are often fragmented (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). This separation is detrimental to the students as it does not allow time for programs to be properly integrated in the culture of the school (Zins et al., 2004). The complex issues involved in SEL make it challenging to create a curriculum or outline to effectively address all of the social and emotional issues. However, research has identified common characteristics of effective programs as well as key skills to address within the program (Cohen, 2006).

Common characteristics of programs

There are many common characteristics of successful SEL programs at a high school level. These characteristics include consideration of school culture, implementation over a period

of time, emphasis on relationships, and sense of autonomy for students. Zins et al (2004) outline clear and concise guidelines for SEL programs:

1. They are carefully planned, theory and research based;
2. They teach SEL skills for application of daily life;
3. They address affective and social dimensions of learning;
4. They lead to coordinated, integrated and unified programming linked to academic outcomes;
5. They address key implementation factors to support effective social and emotional learning and development;
6. They involve family and community partnerships;
7. They are designed to include continuous improvement, outcomes evaluation and dissemination components. (p. 198)

Although this list is clear and concise, the points are also quite broad, general and vague. I believe that this is due to the fact that each program has to be unique to the individual school or classroom. Ideas similar to each of these guidelines can be found in other research. As stated before, the four characteristics that were emphasized most consistently were consideration of school culture, implementation over a period of time, emphasis on relationships, and sense of autonomy for students. These four characteristics are seen interspersed in the above guidelines between 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7. The second guideline in the above outline, teach SEL skills for application of daily life, is to be assumed within each of the programs. This guideline also relates to student buy-in and autonomy that is also intermixed within the other four addressed characteristics. Furthermore, the sixth guideline of inclusion of family and community

partnerships, is an important characteristic as well, but was discussed less in other research. The four characteristics stated earlier will be now discussed in more detail.

In order for SEL programs within high schools to thrive, they must be integrated into school culture (Zins & Elias, 2007). SEL efforts can be implemented in a classroom and have the adverse effect of having an impact on school culture and climate (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Culture and climate are the way that people in an organization think, feel, interact and behave (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). According to Jones & Bouffard (2012), school culture refers to a school's set of norms, beliefs, and practices. Climate is the aggregate of individual people's perceptions of the environment's impact on well-being (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Culture and climate together set the tone and focus of relationships and interactions within schools between leaders, staff, and students (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). On the other hand, school culture and climate can be researched first to find the need for the SEL program. Given the uniqueness of each school community, the programs need to be individualized for the particular school as each school has different characteristics including size, composition, and accessibility (Cohen, 2006). Schools must integrate the teaching and reinforcement of SEL skills into both their missions and daily interactions with students (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Jones & Bouffard (2012) suggest that schools must take a systems approach to SEL that matches the needs and contexts of individual schools and communities. Successful SEL programs have recognized the current school culture and acknowledged the need for change. Programs are then implemented that start with current needs of the school culture to ensure that they are embraced by the school community. A vital aspect of school culture is school climate. To implement change within the school culture, school climate has to be conducive to change. The shift in school climate must begin with the adults in the building. Without the support from the leaders in the schools, the program will not

thrive. Teachers and staff must buy-in and believe in the values of the program to allow for it to positively affect school climate and thus, school culture (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkings, 2004). The shift in school culture occurs over time and requires conscious effort.

For SEL programs to be effective, they must be continued over a period of time (Zins & Elias, 2007). This allows for adaptations and adjustments to be made to cater to the needs of the individual school and students (Zins & Elias, 2007). Programs must also provide consistency and familiarity (Ogilvie, 2014). Numerous successful school-based interventions are multi-year and continually promote positive academic, social, emotional, and health behavior (Greenberg et al., 2003). Cohen (2006) agrees that programs must be comprehensive, multiyear school reform efforts. The benefit of multiyear programs is the stability of routine and predictability (Ogilvie, 2014). This is important for any type of program that is integrated into a school environment. It allows for the program to change the culture of the school and become engrained in the students. All skills are developed but need continual practice. This is true for SEL skills as they are constantly developing throughout all stages of life. Although it is crucial that the foundation of SEL skills be built at a young age, it is just as important that these skills be mastered as individuals move into their adolescent years (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). In this sense, SEL skills should be vertically aligned throughout an individual's development (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Just as importantly, these SEL skills should be horizontally aligned, as argued with importance of school culture, in that they are intentionally connected and consistent within the context of the schools (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). The pattern of repetitive experiences in a safe environment is key in implementing an SEL program (Ogilvie, 2014).

Another common characteristic of effective programs is that they provide caring and compassionate relationships within the supportive, positive school climate. Trust, respect, genuine interest, and confidentiality must be present in relationships with counsellors or mentors (Borders & Drury, 1992). Community, collaboration, and sense of belonging are all key components to creating a successful program (Cohen, 2006). All these factors are adult-driven and require a shift to a focus on social and emotional needs of students as being equal to academic needs. Successful programs have found that students will buy into the programs if they have attachment or affective relationships (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkings, 2004). These relationships should be fostered with other students and caring adults within the school. Relationships and human connection are the things that will make a difference in students' lives (Spinks, 2002). As stated by Jones & Bouffard (2012), relationships are the soil in which children's SEL skills grow. Teacher-student role is the second most important role after parent-child role in terms of development of skills (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Relationships are critical to the development of SEL skills (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Therefore, the relationships between students and staff are critical in the consideration of an SEL program (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Teachers need to interact with students in positive ways to validate the students' emotional experiences to ensure a sense of security for the student (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). In order for students to realize and reach their potential, they need to be connected with adults (Ogilvie, 2014). Once connected, they are able to emerge as separate beings with their own set of skills and abilities to be self-sufficient (Ogilvie, 2014). As adolescents mature, they have changing emotional, cognitive and social needs as well as personal goals (Eccles & Roeser, 2004). They need the support and guidance from caring adults as they adapt to these changes and flourish into self-sufficient individuals. Adults need to create a safe,

positive, inclusive school environment to set the groundwork for a successful SEL program.

Ogilvie (2014; p. 146) outlined the role of the adults within the school:

1. Inspire a shared vision for school connectedness.
2. Nurture a health promoting school environment
3. Model the way for respectful and supportive relationships.
4. Challenge the process to be one where kindness is valued and practiced.
5. Enable others to act more interpersonally to build community.
6. Encourage the traits of compassion, integrity, gratitude, authenticity and humility.
7. Become a mentor.
8. Ensure that every student has a mentor.

The relationship that we, as educators, have with students is within our control. Teachers SEL competence plays a crucial role in influencing the implementation of SEL programs into schools (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). Educators need to not only buy into the program, but they must work on their own wellbeing. Teachers SEL competence and their training around the subject matter have a huge impact on the effectiveness of an SEL program. Teachers who implement and train in SEL have students with better social and emotional competencies (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012). We must learn to change our own belief about the school community in order to provide a welcoming, caring, compassionate place for students to learn.

A sense of autonomy is another characteristic that is important for a program. Allowing student choice increases the buy-in of the student. Students must be involved in the program by having opportunities where they are involved in the decision-making process (Catalano et al., 2004). It is important to provide opportunities for them to have a sense of control over logistics

of the program (Ogilvie, 2014). This could be in controlling who they talk to, what they discuss, or length of processing time (Ogilvie, 2014). This autonomy within the program must continue throughout the duration of its implementation. Students respond to adults who take the time to try to understand them and who facilitate collaborative approaches where they feel their voices are being heard (Ogilvie, 2014). Connecting with them on an individualized level also allows them to identify what it is that makes them feel connected, alive, and safe (Ogilvie, 2014). Again, the importance of the support being ongoing in stable relationships is a key factor of any type of SEL program (Ogilvie, 2014).

Overall, the underlying element of belonging and connectedness to school will positively influence the social and emotional development of students. This connection positively influences school climate and overall sense of wellbeing at the school. The sense of wellbeing drives academic achievement and ownership within the school. This positive domino effect is necessary for development of students into positive, contributing members of society in their life after high school.

Skills programs address

Research is consistent with specific social and emotional skills that need to be emphasized in an effective program. SEL encompasses the set of skills that students need to learn in order to succeed not only in school, but also in their life after high school. Relationship and citizenship (Jones & Bouffard, 2012) skills need to be taught, practiced, and reinforced (Zins & Elias, 2007). Zins, Elias, and Greenburg (Zins & Elias, 2007) found with promotion of SEL programs, the students had consistently positive increases in many social and emotional skills. They found students had:

“Higher sense of self-efficacy; better sense of community and view of school as caring; stronger commitment to democratic values; more positive attitudes toward school and learning; improved ethical attitudes and values; greater trust and respect for teachers; improved coping with school stressors; increased understanding of consequences for behavior; more pro-social behaviors.” (p. 241)

These findings are consistent with other SEL program research. Jones & Bouffard (2012) found that there are five core social and emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. All of these skills are encompassed within the three conceptual categories of emotional processes, social and interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Jones & Bouffard (2012) defined each of these categories as follows:

“Emotional processes include emotional knowledge and expression, emotional and behavioral regulation, and empathy and perspective-taking. Social/interpersonal skills include understanding social cues, interpreting others’ behaviors, navigating social situations, interacting positively with peers and adults, and other prosocial behavior. Cognitive regulation includes attention control, inhibiting inappropriate responses, working memory, and cognitive flexibility or set shifting.” (p. 4)

These skills are related to academic achievement, behavioral adjustment, and emotional health and well-being (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Emotional processes encompass many of the critical skills that must be learned within the SEL program. These skills include self-awareness, empathy, and self-sufficiency (Zins & Elias, 2007). Students must also learn how to recognize and manage their own emotions (Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, Bloodworth, Tompsett, & Weissberg, 2000). Another critical key skill is

empathy. Empathy is being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes. Programs should enhance the students' capacity to appreciate the perspective of others (Payton et al., 2000). Effective SEL programs also teach students to set positive goals (Payton et al., 2000). The process of creating, striving and re-evaluating goals is a skill that is essential to overall wellbeing. Positive coping mechanisms is another key skill that must be addressed within any SEL program which also falls under the umbrella of emotional processes (Ogilvie, 2014).

Social and interpersonal skills also need to be learned and practiced within SEL programs. Humans are social beings and relationships with others are key to success in life. These types of skills include responsible decision-making, social awareness, and communication skills (Zins & Elias, 2007). Being able to act appropriately in stressful social situations as well as being able to process social cues are skills that needs to be practiced. Communication and interpersonal skills also need to be addressed within the context of an SEL program. Students need to be able to solve life problems using a variety of interpersonal skills (Payton et al, 2000). Interpersonal skills include the adolescent's sense of self within the school and in relation to others. Students should learn how to communicate respectfully with their teachers and all other individuals within their school community. By building a sense of ownership and pride through an SEL program, the students will begin to care more about their school and the people in it. It is also important for students to learn the skills of democracy. With the emphasis on student autonomy, their own equal voice, students will learn the skills of how to be democratic.

Cognitive recognition is a skill that must be learned that is rarely addressed throughout adolescent development. This concept revolves around internal dialogue, and the ability to recognize ones' own feelings and thoughts. By recognizing the power of internal dialogue and self-talk, adolescents will be able to feel in control of themselves and thus, be able to regulate

their actions towards others. Attention control and working memory must also be learned and practiced within an SEL program (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). These skills are directly related to academic outcomes as they directly transfer to the classroom setting and learning process.

When discussing these sets of skills that are pertinent to an SEL program, it is evident that they are all interrelated. Once one of these types of skills is addressed and recognized, the rest of them will be easier to practice and master. Students who have trouble within one of the three skill sets will likely have difficulty with the others. The idea is using each of these different sets to trigger an interest with students and allow them to practice and hone in on their own strengths within these skills. Those who have practiced and mastered these skills will be more likely to succeed in life as an independent member of their community (Zins et al, 2004).

Chapter III: Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this research paper is to determine how to effectively create and integrate a program that addresses social and emotional development of high school students. The central question explores how we are currently supporting social and emotional development of adolescents in high school. The sub-questions explore what programs are currently in place, what common elements these programs have, and what specific skills these programs address in regards to social and emotional development.

After exploring the research questions, it was evident that there is a lack of SEL programs in the high school setting. There are an abundance of programs being implemented at an elementary level, but the programs fade out as the students entered the higher levels of education. This is a shocking fact since adolescents are going through a tumultuous time in terms of their development. Adolescence is a time in a humans' life is when support is needed. Given that the concept of SEL is a relatively new topic within the educational field, there are limitations to the amount of research. Nonetheless, there is research on programs that are being implemented at an elementary level. There is also a wide range of other programs in schools that have yet to be researched. The overall academic research surrounding SEL learning brought forward different characteristics of programs that could be implemented.

The challenge with an SEL program in a high school setting is that it must be relevant to the needs of the particular school. There is no formula package that can be implemented in any given high school to ensure success. There are, however, common characteristics and skills that can be addressed in the program to enhance its effectiveness. The first characteristic is that the

program is in line with the school culture, and therefore, positively changes the school climate. The second characteristic is that it is implemented over a period of time. This means that there must be the commitment to the program so that adaptations can be made to allow it to adapt to the school culture. The third characteristic is that the program has an emphasis on relationships within the school. Humans thrive in relationships. Students must feel connected to their peers and accepted by the adults in the school. There must be a sense of trust between all members of the program. The fourth characteristic is that there must be a sense of autonomy for the students. This means that the students must have some choice within the program. This enhances buy-in from the students and affects the program's overall success. It is evident that these four characteristics are intertwined. With focus on one of the characteristics, the others will flourish as well. Skills that must be addressed within the program fall under the categories of emotional processes, social and interpersonal skills, and cognitive recognition. All three of these concepts need to be addressed and connected to learning outcomes and real-life situations that are relevant for the adolescents.

Implications

The findings of the research support my underlying belief that SEL needs to be integrated into high schools. The purpose of this research was to explore existing programs in high schools that targeted social and emotional learning. After research, it was evident that there was a lack of programs implemented at the high school level. Although there are many programs in elementary school and some in middle schools, the lack of programs in the high school is shocking. The research supports my belief that programs must be implemented at all levels of

education. With these findings, I would propose that a homeroom system be implemented into the timetable of a high school setting.

Characteristics of the Homeroom program

This homeroom program would be engrained in the weekly timetable to allow students opportunity for SEL, to increase students' connection to school, as well as to cover administrative tasks. The homeroom would meet once a week every Thursday between first and second block. The students would be with the same homeroom teacher throughout their high school career. For organizational purposes, the students would be split up by last name. Homerooms would be used for typical administrative duties such as report cards and locker delegation, but would go much deeper into the students' social and emotional needs. There would be objectives of the homeroom including SEL learning and career and personal goal setting. There could also be competitions between homerooms to build a sense of community. Although there will be structure within the homeroom content, there will be some leniency with how and when the material is covered. This allows for the homeroom teacher and students to come up with a structure that works for them. Since the students will be with the same homeroom teacher throughout their high school career, connections can be made with this adult role model. This formation also allows each of the students to be connected to at least one supportive adult in the building.

One of the purposes of the homeroom program is to create a sense of belonging at the school for the students. This sense of belonging will allow for connection for the students. Connections will be made to the adult running the homeroom program as well as within the group of students who share a homeroom. The relationships that are built within this program will last throughout their high school careers. Since each homeroom will have students from

grade nine to twelve, there will be a peer mentoring aspect. The older students will be able to help guide the younger students, and a sense of connection between grades will be made. The fourth characteristic is that there will be a sense of autonomy for students. This is a crucial part of the homeroom program. There will be multitude of opportunities for choice. The activities will be conducted in a fashion that the homeroom teacher and students mutually agree upon. There will also be roles within the program that can be chosen by the students to give them a sense of autonomy.

The challenges of this program include teacher buy-in and student accountability. This extra homeroom time will take away from academic instruction. This may be challenging for teachers as they often struggle to get through the curriculum within the structure of the timetable. Taking time away may be frustrating for teachers. To ensure buy-in from the teachers, there must be a survey done before the program is implemented to gain feedback. Information sessions must also be held for the teachers to ensure that they understand the value of the program. The second foreseeable challenge is that students need to be held accountable for the time spent in their homeroom class. This could be avoided, at first, by making the homeroom program count towards a grade. It could also be used as a time to structure other mandatory classes such as Planning 10 or Grad Transitions in order to keep the material “meaningful” for some of the students who may see it as an easy block to skip. Another tactic to gain buy-in from students would be to delegate jobs to each of the students within the homeroom. By having the students individually valued and needed within the homeroom process, the students’ buy-in will increase. It would also be effective to have the students able to choose what they want their role in the homeroom to be. Allowing choice within the program is essential to its success. Once

students have bought into the program, it will become a valuable time of the day where students will want to attend.

Recommendations

Through the literature review conducted, it is evident that there is a need for SEL within all levels of education. Given the developmental needs of students throughout their education, it is pertinent that we, as educators, support them socially and emotionally. There are many elementary programs that have been implemented over a long period of time. Research has been conducted on some of these programs finding positive outcomes. The need for programs in middle schools and high schools has been addressed through research, and there has been some programs implemented at these levels. However, further research needs to be done with SEL programs that are implemented in high schools. The lack of research is alarming given that there is an abundance of literature stating the importance of SEL in adolescent years. I recommend that research be conducted on the programs that are currently out there in the high schools. Analyzing the effectiveness of individual programs would greatly benefit further initiatives in this area.

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