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# Mental Health Matters: Promoting Social and Emotional Learning

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Mental Health Matters: Promoting Social & Emotional Learning

Shannen A. Menor

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### **Abstract**

The mental health of children is something that is overlooked and often not talked about. This is important because children need guidance to manage their emotions especially after going through traumatic experiences. The focus of this Capstone Project was on gaining more information about children's mental health and promoting the importance of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). By interviewing three elementary school teachers at Roadrunner Elementary, I collected data to see how they viewed social and emotional learning and what they thought could be done to improve students' mental health. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, three themes emerged: 1) incorporating a SEL program at the school; 2) hiring more counselors; and 3) building connections with students. From these three action options, the teachers interviewed as well as myself, reflected on how these actions will benefit each student in the school. Together we talked about activities and lessons that we can utilize to get to know students better and ways to build a stronger classroom community. Bringing awareness to students' mental health, will take us one step closer to positive change.

### **Setting the Stage**

The need for social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools is important because mental health matters. It is important to me because I have seen the negative effects of traumatic experiences with my own brother. My brother is two years older than me, and I always looked up to him for guidance and support. However, as I look back, I realize he needed the support and guidance more than I did.

My brother was a happy and energetic child. When he was young, he had a speech delay and did not talk until he was five years old. Throughout elementary school, he has battled his own obstacles with his learning disabilities. My brother was diagnosed by pediatricians that he has both an auditory processing disorder (APD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Due to these learning disabilities, my brother jumped from school to school for most of his elementary school years. In each school, he was a part of the special education program and he had the support he needed in his academics. However, he took a drastic turn when he started fifth grade.

I was too young to remember specific events, but I do remember my brother being more aggressive towards others. I always wondered why my mom would come home from work early, it was mostly because of my brother's behavioral issues at school. She would be called into school to pick up my brother because he would constantly get into altercations with other students. It was really odd behavior for him, because he never caused a lot of problems at home. There were several other odd behaviors that he would exhibit. My parents would frequently be called from work saying that my brother needed an extra change of clothes. My parents did not think anything of it, but it was alarming when they told me that they would frequently be called

around the same time of day. Overall, he was not happy anymore. In every family picture, he would not smile, which was not his usual self. He was distant at home and at family gatherings; he was not energetic like he was before. Additionally, I overheard my mom and dad make a comment that he would remove all of his clothing when using the restroom. At the time, I was only eight years old and I thought it was funny. I used to make fun of him for that, but I did not understand the whole magnitude of the problem.

One day at dinner time, we were all sharing about each other's day at work and school and that was when my brother told us what was happening to him. I do not remember everything, maybe because my brain suppressed those memories. Although, I do remember seeing my mom cry for the first time. My brother told us that he was being sexually abused at school. I did not get to hear the full story of what happened to my brother until I was a senior in high school. My dad told me that my brother was molested by his 5th grade teacher. That teacher not only was a special education teacher, but he also was involved with extracurricular activities in school. My dad also told me that my brother was not the only one being sexually abused, but many other boys in the class were abused as well. At that moment, as my dad was conveying all of these details and events, all of the dots connected. It made sense, all the warning signs my family and I overlooked, everything was his way of crying for help. It made me angry and upset knowing that my brother went through all of this without any support. He kept this deep dark secret for a long time because he did not know who to go to for help.

It was almost the end of my brother's fifth grade year, and he did not go back to school for the remainder of the year. My parents were in a furious rage, both were taking time off to help my brother deal with his emotions. My parents did not get any help from the school, they

basically told my parents to deal with it by themselves. They did fire the teacher, but for the students who had gone through this traumatic experience they did not receive support. This is why I am stressing the importance of SEL programs in schools, to give support and guidance to those children who have gone through traumatic experiences. If it were not for my parents, my brother would not be the successful person he is today. Yet, there are many children who do not have their parents support, that is why schools have the opportunity to provide that support. With a lot of extra support and counseling, my brother is growing to be happy and he is thriving. So what I am inquiring is how to integrate SEL programs in schools, to provide the necessary help students need.

### **Literature Review**

Imagine a child who just lost a family member to gun violence in the community. That child is expected to attend school and learn as if it were any day of the week. How can educators teach 20-30 students about math and writing, but still be able to care for each of their students mental well-being? Children go through a variety of feelings that they might not be able to control on their own. Many children act-out or misbehave to get attention, others may hold their feelings inside. Despite how children show their feelings, every child needs help dealing with them and building confidence to move on. If social and emotional learning (SEL) promotes confidence by, helping children manage emotions, helping children improve self-esteem, make positive decisions, and develop positive relationships, then why do we not have SEL standards in every school?

It is imperative that all elementary schools incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) in the classroom. Social and emotional learning is the process where children and adults

acquire the knowledge and skills to manage and understand emotions, set and achieve goals, maintain relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2017). Without social and emotional learning, students miss out on these opportunities to grow of self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making skills (Swartz, 2017). These four important skills fosters the students ability to form positive relationships and demonstrate academic and social outcomes. Negative childhood experiences have a big impact to the emotional development of children which hinders their learning.

Currently, educators are teaching students who come from diverse ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. Not only do teachers have to teach their students the competencies but they need to be aware of their students' diverse experiences. Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides an opportunity for schools to reach the students who are going through emotional distress. Students come to school expected to learn, but will not be able to learn if they have are stressed or upset. In the U.S., millions of children and adolescents are exposed to traumatic events (Greeson, Briggs, Layne, Belcher, Ostrowski, Kim, Lee, Vivrette, Pynoos, & Fairbank, 2014). These traumatic events, also known as adverse childhood experiences (ACE) take on many forms such as bullying, racism, homelessness, family separation, gun/community violence, abuse, etc. From a national survey of childhood trauma involving 1,400 U.S. youth, more than two thirds of theyouth reported exposure to at least one significant traumatic event by age 16 and more than one third reported exposure to multiple traumatic events (Copeland, Keeler, Angold, & Costello, 2007). All of these factors cause students' to undergo emotional stress. What can teachers do to help?

The important factor in SEL is to provide learning opportunities for students. However, in order to provide these learning opportunities, teachers first need to undergo teacher training. In training for SEL programs, teachers would need to have one-to-one coaching, learn and practice their emotional intelligence (EQ) development and also be certified by Six Seconds to provide EQ assessments. From an article by S.B. Stillman, Stillman, Martinez, Freedman, Jenson, and Leet (2018), they mention the Six Seconds' EQ competencies which similarly aligns with *The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)* model. In the Six Seconds' EQ model it serves as the foundation for the development of social and emotional skills. Simply put that this Six Seconds' has created guidelines to which schools can use to assess individual development of EQ competencies in the youth. S.B. Stillman et al., (2018) created these guidelines for schools to measure and analyze their current levels of SEL implementation and devise plans for further development. From CASEL, (2017) SEL programs have proven to be an effective way to help students through stress and anxiety. If SEL is proven by evidence-based studies to be effective, then what is being done currently to implement SEL in classrooms or schools state wide?

In the U.S., there is a movement toward the integration of SEL programs in schools. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) already mandated that all 50 states should have SEL standards in place at the preschool level (Swartz, 2017). However currently there are only 11 states that have officially adopted a SEL program at the K-12th grade level, Washington, Idaho, Kansas, Ohio and Connecticut to name a few (CASEL, 2017). In these states, the programs use a variety of approaches to foster children's social and emotional development. What is being done currently is that In CASEL took initiative to implement and



support SEL in multiple states. Just recently in June 2018, 25 states serving more than 30 million K-12 students have participated in the movement (CASEL, 2017).

In schools that have implemented SEL, there is not just one approach to teaching. One approach is to directly teach SEL skills through individual lessons. The second approach is to teach through other innovative approaches such as project-based learning and cooperative learning. The third approach that teachers can take is integrating SEL skills into academic lessons within math, english, health, or social studies. Furthermore, the last approach needs full involvement by the school (administrators, and faculty) by creating an environment or school climate that promotes Social and emotional learning (CASEL 2017). All of these approaches can be used within the school to create a healthy atmosphere for student learning. What are the benefits of SEL integration?

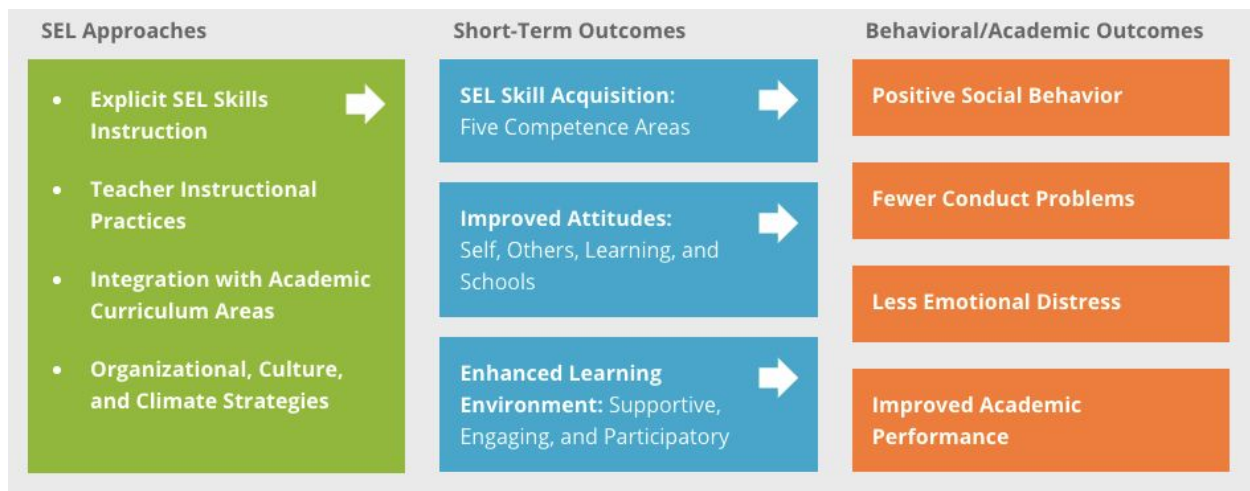


Figure 1: SEL Approaches and Potential Outcomes

As shown above in figure 1, the benefits as well as the behavioral outcomes are listed. The benefits of having a SEL program is improvements in mental health and academic achievement. Bridgeland, Bruce and Hariharan (2013), state that “SEL can accelerate student

learning by increasing students' intrinsic motivation to achieve, their ability to be attentive and engaged in their work, their satisfaction with learning, their sense of belonging, and their desire to work cooperatively with other student,"(p. 30). In other words, by increasing students' intrinsic motivation students would be more involved in their learning. CASEL (2017), says that students exposure to SEL continue to perform better than their peers in social behaviors and attitudes and academics. Also indicating that those students were less likely to have conduct problems and emotional distress. Furthermore, a meta-analysis of 270,000 students in the SEL program showed a 11 percentile point gain in academic achievement compared to students who did not participate in SEL programs (CASEL, 2017).

There are many children who are going through traumatic experiences each year, arising from these traumatic experiences children need help coping. If children have little or no parental and community support, eventually the schools need to provide that support. From synthesizing and analyzing many articles, SEL has shown that there are many positive aspects to the program. From the research, it exhibits how SEL programs promote academic achievement, positive social behavior, and reduced conduct problems (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). If SEL has a lot of positive aspects than what actions can be taken to implement SEL programs for K-12th grade students?

### **Methods**

How is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) being taught in the classroom? How can it be improved? This research takes a step forward to answer those questions. I interviewed three teachers on this topic to get their perspective on this issue. The expected benefits include an opportunity for participants to reflect on what social and emotional learning means for them and

provide concrete suggestions for improvement that may be translated into action.

### Context

Roadrunner Elementary School is located in the sunny city of Bayside, CA. Bayside is a vibrant and up-and-coming city near beautiful beaches. Roadrunner Elementary has a population of 48% Hispanic or Latino, 5.4% African American, 3.8% Asian, 14.9% White, and 18% students who identify as two or more races (www.ed-data.org). There are 403 students enrolled from kindergarten through 5th grade and of those 403 students about 71.7% are eligible for free and reduced lunch. English Language learners make up 21.1% of the student population (www.ed-data.org). Academically, Roadrunner Elementary has consistently not met their level 1 standards in yearly testing. In the CAASPP English Language Arts and Literacy results, in 2017 41.8% of students did not meet the level 1 standard (www.ed-data.org). In the CAASPP Mathematics results, about 41% of students did not meet the level 1 standard.

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

I interviewed three female participants for this study. All of the participants are teachers around thirty years of age.

**Teacher A** is a 4th grade teacher at Roadrunner Elementary. She has taught grades three and four for almost five years. She is of Caucasian background.

**Teacher B** is a 5th grade teacher at Roadrunner Elementary. She just started teaching at this school two years ago. This is also her 4th year teaching. She is of caucasian background.

**Teacher B A** 4th grade teacher at Roadrunner Elementary. She has been teaching 4th grade for 6 years. She is of Asian background.

**Researcher**

This concern was personally meaningful to me because my brother went through a traumatic event at school and this experience hindered his learning in the classroom. He had a hard time achieving positive goals for himself and maintaining positive relationships. I wanted to know how to improve this in schools and address children's social and emotional well-being effectively. Since I minored in Human Development, I have knowledge of certain topics in child development in order for me to formulate action. I think for me what set me apart from the "informants" and "influentials" was my lack of knowledge of what is being done with social and emotional learning in the classroom. I conducted multiple interviews to get a broader depth of this opportunity. Since I interviewed teachers, I unfortunately did not get the perspective of the student. However, I figured that if I did conduct an interview with a student, the student would respond with closed ended responses and confusion. Since I only got the teachers perspective, I did not get the full scope of the problem that I would have liked to. At Roadrunner Elementary, one teacher volunteered to be interviewed because she had a student in the past who had a lot of behavioral problems due to family issues. From her interview I got a lot of sufficient data in itself without upholding the identity of the student. In the interviews, I probed for more information on how the teachers address their students' social and emotional well-being and from there we worked together to find long term solutions.

**Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

1. Do you see social and emotional learning as a great opportunity for teaching in the classroom; or What are you concerned about when it comes to students social and emotional health?
2. What is currently being done to improve social and emotional learning - by whom - and do you think this is good, bad, or indifferent? Why?
3. What do you think should be done about students emotional and social well-being?

4. What do you think are the obstacles to changing or improving social and emotional learning in schools?

5. Is there anything else that you would like to say about children's social health and emotional/mental health and/or the improvement of social and emotional learning?

### **Procedure**

In conducting my research, I worked closely with the school principal to learn more about their policies in school. I observed several classrooms and found useful information from the upper grade levels, specifically in the fourth and fifth grade. The principal recruited participants for me by spreading the word around school. One teacher volunteered to be apart of this research and the other two showed Afterwards, I got in contact with those teachers who volunteered. I talked to the teachers after school to tell them more about my project and what I had planned to do within the next weeks. During this time, I also passed out consent forms. As I received the consent forms in return, I went ahead and started interviewing. I interviewed each participant in paper-pencil format with surveys to make it easier for me to transcribe my interviews. After collecting data, I emailed the participants for follow up questions and clarifications.

### **Data Analysis**

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes. After recieving the pencil-paper surveys. I went over the surveys looking for similarities and differences. I first separated the similarities and organized in what order of importance they should be in. The three themes were really obvious as I took time to read through each survey. There were one or two responses that needed more clarification, so I emailed the teachers for follow up questions. After looking for the similar themes, I looked over the surveys to see if the teachers provided any

suggestions or possible actions for this issue.

**Results**

For this capstone project, three teachers were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve Social and Emotional Learning. This is important because many children are exposed to traumatic events, which makes it difficult for children to learn in the classroom. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: Time, Cost, and Efficiency. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

*Evaluation of Action Options*

	Time	Cost	Efficiency
Counseling and support groups	Moderate	High	Moderate
SEL Program	High	Moderate	High
Improve Teacher-Student Relationships	Low	Low	High

**Evaluation of the Action Options**

In Table 1, the three action options that surfaced after interviewing three teachers about Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) at Roadrunner Elementary are listed. These options are:

1. Increase resources for students struggling with traumatic experiences (i.e. counselors and support groups);
2. Introduce and implement SEL program (school-wide program for every grade level); and
3. Improve teacher-student relationships

All three of these options were evaluated according to the criteria of time, cost, and efficiency. For the criteria of Time, it is important to take into account how long this action will take. Second, the criteria of cost, takes into consideration how much money the action will cost. Third, in the criteria of efficiency, it is critical to think about how long this action will last and sustain itself.

### **Increasing Resources for Students**

When students go through a traumatic experience, who can they turn to for help or support? Many public schools only have one counselor on duty. In California, the ratio of students per counselor averages 945 students to 1 counselor (California Department of Education, 2017). A common theme from all three teachers is that they suggested hiring more counselors who offer support services. One teacher said that at the school, the counselor is rarely available to attend to students because she performs administrative duties as well. With that being said, all three of the teachers expressed their concern that students are not receiving the support they desperately need.

Getting more counselors means that more children can seek help. Statistics from The *American Counseling Association* states that suicide is the third leading cause of death among

Americans in the U.S. It is said that 90% of suicides that take place are associated with mental illness. Our students' mental health matters, but if schools are not offering counseling services students will not get help. It is imperative to stress intervention before further implications of trauma arise. Also stated by the *American Counseling Association*, it is estimated that about 75% of children with emotional and behavioral disorders do not receive specialty mental health services. Furthermore implicating the reason why schools need more counselors and services.

Group counseling (ratio of 1:5) or support groups was another suggestion that a few teachers made to improve students' mental health and well-being. In a study done by Lee (1993), she researched how group counseling showed a positive link for academic achievement in fourth through sixth grade students. This is an option that would not only improve students' academic achievement but also behavioral problems. *The Citizen Commission on Academic Success for Boston Children* (2006) states that it is easy to misread traumatic symptoms, often times children will appear defiant and with the discipline policies in schools, children end up misunderstood. The cycle of disengagement from school continues and causes behavioral problems, which as a result leads to suspension and expulsion. This is why support services are important, to help students cope with a traumatic experience and support them in their academic success.

The action of providing more support services such as counselors in schools was ranked moderate in the time criteria. I believe that it would take some time to get more counselors. I ranked the criteria of cost as high because counselor training may be expensive, an added cost to paying counselors to work at the school. Lastly, the criteria of efficiency was ranked moderate. Students may feel uncomfortable or ashamed seeking help or being in group counseling, so that is why it might not impact a lot of students.



**SEL Program**

Gurwitch and Schonfeld (2011), estimate that 90 percent of students experience the death of a family member, relative or someone they cared about by the time they graduate high school. Understanding how trauma and loss affects students is the first step to knowing how to support them. From the surveys, the teachers suggested having some kind of program to guide teachers on how to help their students. The teachers also mentioned that more teacher training in this program should be mandatory. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (2017), describes how this option works in the classroom and school-wide. SEL programs can have a lot of benefits for all students, not just those who are affected by trauma. By integrating SEL into the academic curriculum, students can learn as a collective.

All three teachers expressed that the school is currently encouraging students to be more mindful of each other. However, one of the teachers interviewed believed it was not good enough; there needs to be something more concrete set in place. One of the teachers stated, “Even though, we encourage ‘mindfulness’, we still have students suffering in silence and it is hard to help those students.” Another teacher mentioned that an obstacle of integrating SEL, is that a SEL program will help the child at school, but not at home if it is not being reinforced. The teacher basically mentioned how there is a disconnect between school and home. This question of whether teachers can help bridge the gap between school and home leads to the next action option of building community.

This action of providing a SEL program seems promising, however there are limitations that may hinder the action from happening. Incorporating a SEL program will have a high impact on time because it will take some time to provide teacher training for the program and also

approving the program from the district board. The SEL program will have a moderate cost, depending on the materials needed and resources available. Furthermore, the efficiency of whether this program will sustain itself is ranked at high. With a SEL program, it can be taught from all grade levels and teachers can choose what concept or skill to emphasize more when needed.

### **Improving Teacher-Student Relationships**

The teachers that I interviewed mentioned the option of creating more opportunities to connect with students and families. All three teachers said that it is difficult to be in tune with their students well-being and needs given the curriculum they have to follow. One teacher wrote in her survey about how she created a response jar with the phrase “I wish my teacher knew...”, and after school she would empty the jar to read the responses. She expressed how it was eye-opening that a few of her students do not have time to eat breakfast in the morning. This gave an opportunity for her to know more about her students by keeping it anonymous.

I think by integrating more opportunities for students to talk about and share their backgrounds, skills, and knowledge in the classroom will help students connect with one another. One of the important roles SEL plays in the classroom is creating a safe and supportive classroom environment, for example how students form relationships with teachers, how students form relationships with each other and how conflict and discipline is addressed (CASEL, 2017). This option of building relationships can be beneficial for students who just need a friend to trust and talk to. SEL emphasizes that in order for social and emotional learning to be successful in the classroom, it has to be supported and reinforced by the entire school and community.

Bridging the gap between the community and school, was one thing that all three teachers had in common in their responses. One teacher said, “There is a lot of complex issues going on in the community and teachers need to be able to talk about these issues since it does affect the students lives” (personal communication, October 19, 2018). There are a number of ways that SEL can bridge the gap between the community and school. One way is through community service outreach, where students can serve in their community and another is by having more parent-teacher interactions. One teacher mentioned incorporating parent-teacher meetings for individualized learning plans, even if a student is academically doing well. This gives teachers an opportunity to connect with families and provide individualized learning plans for students.

This action option of creating more opportunities for teachers and students to connect is important to relationship building. The criteria of time was ranked low because it would not take teachers a lot of time to get to know their students and connect with them. The criteria of cost was ranked low as well, because the cost for getting to know your students will not require a lot of materials. The criteria of efficiency was ranked high because if a teacher is more intune to their students social and emotional well-being they may be more engaged in their own learning and personal growth.

This section will go over the action I recommend for increasing opportunities for SEL in the school/classroom. This section will also address the limitations, concessions and the potential negative outcomes of my recommendation.

### **Recommendation**

Of the three action options that came up from interviewing the teachers from Roadrunner elementary, I recommend that schools introduce and implement a multi-grade level SEL program.

### **Concessions**

The two other options are good options as well. Both options support students' needs and support students' social and emotional well-being. Increasing counselors at schools and support services will allow students to seek out the help if they have gone through a traumatic experience. Creating more opportunities for teachers to connect with family and students is promising because it bridges the communication barrier. Communities are a big influence in children's growth and development, thus it is important for teachers to connect with the community and provide partnership opportunities.

### **Limitations**

Implementing a multi-grade level SEL program may have a few limitations. One limitation is it may take a lot more work and money to implement a new program into the school. Furthermore, if implemented, who would keep track of how the students are doing and improving? Another limitation is incorporating teacher training. Teachers may not want to participate in the training or have little time to do so.

### **Potential Negative Outcomes**

A potential negative outcome is that teachers in the SEL program may not teach the material correctly. For example, teachers might skip through some topics or concepts because they feel it is not important. It is important that teachers be completely honest with their students and teach the material appropriately. If teachers do not disclose important information, students

may lose interest in the topic. Another potential outcome is that students may not be engaged in the program. Implementing a SEL program requires teachers and staff to create an environment that is supportive and engaging. Teachers are required to teach material in an engaging way and foster experiential learning for their students.

### **Conclusion**

I still feel confident that a SEL program offers schools an opportunity to grow and bring awareness to mental health and well-being. Despite the limitations and potential negative outcomes listed above, I think that a SEL program is necessary. A SEL program will not only help students who are going through trauma, but it can help all students. I believe that as long as a SEL program is implemented appropriately, it should provide a good foundation for change to occur in schools by changing the way we look at mental health in our students.

### **Action Documentation**

In Monterey County, as of 2015, it was reported that 29.4% of children have been physically abused. Another 44.3% of children experienced general neglect (kidsdata.org). When children go through traumatic experiences, it hinders their learning and their mental well-being. In this research paper, three elementary school teachers at Roadrunner Elementary School were interviewed. Based off the questions of how they viewed their students' mental well-being and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in the classroom, I was able to come up with three action options. The three action options were hiring more counselors on campus, integrating a SEL program in the school, and creating more opportunities to get to know students' and their families. At Roadrunner Elementary School, the three teachers and I emphasized the option of getting to know the students and their families. We thought that this option was low in cost and

time. We saw this action option as a quick way to build connections with the students. This action is also something that can be incorporated as a daily activity, where the entire class can participate. Even though, the three teachers would have liked to implement a SEL program, it was high in cost and time. Hopefully in the future, a SEL program will be implemented.

One activity that is a quick and easy way to get to know students is the *I Wish My Teacher Knew* activity. One of the teachers that I interviewed had already implemented this in her classroom. What this teacher did was get a jar and tell the students to write their responses to *I Wish My Teacher Knew...* At the end of each school day, she would read over the responses. The teacher told me that it was really eye-opening for her because one student expressed her situation at home with her mom and dad being separated. Also, many of her students did not have time to eat breakfast in the morning. This activity can be incorporated into any classroom. It gives students a voice and they can also choose to participate.

## #IWISHMYTEACHERKNEW

Sometimes it can be hard to talk about things we feel, things we need, or things that are going on in our lives.

1. Choose a sheet of paper.
2. Write or draw what you wish that I knew.
3. Decide if you want to write your name. You do NOT need to write your name unless you want me to know it's you.
4. Fold your paper in half and put it in the box.

**You've been heard. You are loved.**

**#NOWYOURTEACHERKNOWS**



Image 1: This is a template of what one teacher used to get to know her students. This activity is called “I Wish My Teacher Knew...”

One teacher shared a lesson about feelings and emotions. One of the key components of SEL is learning about those feelings and emotions, and what triggers those feelings. The lesson of learning about one’s feelings and emotions can be integrated into any grade level. This is important because young children often do not know why they are feeling a certain way, or they have trouble properly expressing those feelings. This lesson gives children the opportunity to say how they are feeling and express those feelings in an appropriate way. I think this lesson can be taught daily just to get a general consensus of how students are feeling. Not only is this activity all about learning feelings and emotions, but it gives students a positive outlet to express those feelings. This activity incorporates an art component in which students create a set of emotion faces to show how they are feeling. Furthermore, if teachers wanted to go broader, students could create a set faces for feelings as well.

## Getting Emotional: Learning About Feelings

 [Print](#)

EducationWorld is pleased to feature this K-6 language arts and communication lesson adapted from *School Volunteer Handbook: A Simple Guide for K-6 Teachers and Parents*, by Yael Calhoun and Elizabeth Q. Finlinson (Lila Press, 2011).

The lesson plan, shared with the permission of the authors, is a great example of a short activity with simple instructions that appeals to a diverse group of parent interests and teacher needs. The activity is an ideal one for implementation by classroom volunteers.

See other *School Volunteer Handbook* activities:  
[A Lesson in Character: Connect With Yourself](#)  
[Lesson to Celebrate Diversity: The Unity Necklace](#)  
[Just Add Water: Science Experiments With H<sub>2</sub>O](#)

**Subjects**

Health  
Language Arts (communication)  
Social Studies (group dynamics)  
Art

**Grade**

K-6

**Brief Description**

Through discussion, drama and art, students identify and express different feelings and emotions.

**Objectives**

Students will:

- Develop an ability to read other people's emotions
- Develop the ability to identify and to express one's own feelings or emotions.
- Receive permission to have a wide range of feelings.
- Build a vocabulary of words for naming feelings.

**Keywords**

Feelings, emotions, emotional, expressing, communicating, managing, identifying, naming

Image 2: This is a lesson of learning about feelings and emotions.

[https://www.educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/getting-emotional-learning-about-feelings.shtml](https://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/getting-emotional-learning-about-feelings.shtml)

From the three action options: 1) hiring more counselors; 2) Integrating a SEL program; 3) create more opportunities to know students, the three teachers and I thought that creating more opportunities to know students and their families was cost effective and took less time to implement. One teacher had already incorporated the *I wish my teacher knew* activity and the other two have started that activity in their classrooms as well. Another teacher shared with me a lesson that she planned on doing with her class for a morning routine. She shared with me the lesson of learning about feelings. It was interesting because I had never learned in school about



feelings or emotions. There were a few things that were unexpected and surprising. One teacher shared with me that a student was going through problems at home with her parents being separated, in other words a divorce. She also shared that many of her students do not get to eat breakfast in the mornings. Because of that, she has now been offering her students a snack before recess.

There were no major changes or modifications that I had to make. I made accommodations for all three teachers to have them complete a pencil-paper survey because the teachers had little time to sit down for an in-person interview. So far, I was not able to see the outcomes since it took time to talk about the action options and incorporate the actions in the class. However, students enjoyed doing the response jar, they were eager to share with their teacher about their problems and things that they were going through. I am not sure how the lesson went with learning about feelings and emotions. I can imagine that it was successful and students participated. I know now that traumatic events occur daily for many students. From doing research and also reading some of the responses from the response jar, I think that there needs to be universal action put forth by the government to address mental health in schools. Social and Emotional Learning shows a lot of positive results for schools that did integrate programs.

### **Critical Reflection**

Throughout this process of research, interviewing and reflection, I have learned that it truly does take a village to bring about change. I learned how to communicate the focus issue in a clear way for the teachers to understand. I also learned about how to collect data and analyze what I have found. It was a tough process for me specifically because I am a shy person. This

project had me get out of my comfort zone and made me utilize my skills and general knowledge to find results to the focus issue. MLO 1: Developing Educator, MLO 2: Diversity and Multicultural Scholar, and MLO 4: Social Justice Collaborator helped me gain the necessary experience to be able to conduct this research project. In MLO 1, I enjoyed using my pedagogical skills and gaining new perspectives from the teachers themselves. For MLO 2, I can use what I have learned about diversity and multiculturalism to engage my students in their own quest for self-discovery. MLO 4 really captures what I think every teacher needs to embody, which is being a Social Justice Collaborator. Like I said above, this project was difficult for me because I am not used to vocalizing an issue and having to find actions for that issue. However, I was able to use what I have learned throughout the years at Cal State Monterey Bay to gain a new perspective and learn more from teachers. Furthermore, the required coursework that I took also enhanced my ability to work with peers and develop a quest for life-long learning.

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