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Morgan Horn
California State University, Monterey Bay

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How Can Social Emotional Learning Be Improved During Distance Learning?

Morgan B. Horn

California State University Monterey Bay

LS 400: Senior Capstone

Dr. Patty Whang

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Abstract

Social emotional learning (SEL) is an important aspect of school that does not get enough attention. Many teachers are currently focused on academics instead of how their students are handling the stress of COVID-19 and distance learning. The focus issue addressed in this capstone project is SEL in the online classroom during COVID-19. An argument is made that distance learning causes a higher rate of mental health problems in students in all grade levels. Considerations of the issue should include the perspectives of teachers, parents, and students. The three action options that emerged from an analysis of the data included: teacher teams meet regularly to share findings and brainstorming other ways to connect with students; daily/weekly check ins; and implementation of Second Step. Daily check-ins is argued to be the most effective way to achieve the goals of SEL during this difficult time of distance learning.

Keywords: Mental health, distance learning

How Can Social Emotional Learning Be Improved During Distance Learning?

Bahnson et al. (2020) explains, “Social emotional learning (SEL) refers to learning how ‘to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one’s life.’” (p. 29). Children are more at risk for mental health issues because they are still learning what it means to have emotions, and how to handle their emotions. Since coronavirus this issue has escalated due to the fact that all students and teachers were forced to switch from in class teaching to online teaching. This increased students’ mental health “issues”; more anxiety, more depression, loneliness, and feeling disconnected to their peers. The only way to help improve this situation is by implementing curriculums that focus on SEL, and performing daily or weekly check-ins with each student. SEL in the online classroom is a major problem nowadays, but with the help of teachers, parents, students, and the community, it can get better as COVID-19 keeps pushing forward.

What is the problem?

Social emotional learning is a key aspect in our mental health lifestyle; however since coronavirus, countless cases of mental health issues have increased at an astonishing rate especially in school aged children. Since March 2020, the majority of schools have been closed due to COVID-19. A study confirmed, “...20% to 35% of respondents report anxiety, 20% to 30% report depressive symptoms...10% to 30% report severe stress” (Hamza et al., 2020 p. 2). This statistic might not seem outrageous, but when we are looking at children, it has a significantly different meaning. Children are at a higher risk for mental health disorders because they are not fully aware of how to address their feelings.

Distance learning has made a significant impact on all teachers and students’ lives in the

past seven months. A combined study involving Italy and Spain proved that young students' mental health has become distinguishably worse due to the known fact of being quarantined, and having to do school online (Caffo et al., 2020 p. 167). Both of these factors make it difficult for students to fully interact with their classmates. Distance learning not only affects students' social emotional learning, but it also affects their engagement in school. Caffo et al. (2020) specifies, "...difficulties in concentration, boredom, irritability, and loneliness" (p. 167). When children are forced to do their education online at home, they have to have determination in order to concentrate, and find a way to accept that they are working by themselves majority of the time. Sadly, none of these are easy tasks to do for any age child. COVID-19 has made this issue quite difficult for the majority of teachers and students to handle on their own.

Why Is It An Issue?

SEL in the virtual classroom is a major issue in today's society because there are a variety of consequences that have been discovered. The primary disadvantage of online learning is the amount of time children actually get to be a child; playing, experimenting, and making friends. Avila et al. (2020) clarifies, "Play is an essential part of children's physical and social development; however, during isolation and social distancing, the world is relying on technology to learn, live, and stay connected" (p. 10). Since everything moved to online, children are suffering in multiple aspects of their life. They are not getting to interact with their friends or their teachers. As a result, teachers are getting significant pressure put on them to help students with their social emotional health. Not only are they trying to make sure the students are understanding the information that is being given to them, but they are also trying to make sure their students' mental health is being managed properly. Avila et al. (2020) distinguishes that,

“...children might find it difficult to understand what they are seeing online...they are vulnerable to anxiety, stress, and sadness” (p. 10). The students are struggling with how to cope with their mental health during these different times.

Another significant disadvantage is that SEL is being correlated with poor state testing scores. More times than not when teachers want to teach SEL, they have to take time away from the major subjects. Hart et al. (2020) goes into detail, “...teaching SEL requires replacing time that would otherwise be spent on a different type of instruction or activity” (p. 6). In this situation, it is important to consider which is more important; state testing scores or students’ mental health. Martinsone (2016) argues, “A combination of academic and social emotional learning is crucial for achieving the educational goals of the 21st century” (p. 57). In order for any person to be successful in today’s society, there needs to be an equal balance between academic learning and SEL. This can be a difficult task, because some teachers might believe that academic learning is more important than social emotional learning.

A final disadvantage is the longer that students stay in quarantine, the worse their mental health gets. When students are forced to do their schooling online for months at a time, it affects their ability to have control over their mental health. Fatini et al. (2020) emphasizes, “...children experiencing isolation and quarantine have shown an increased risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, grief, and adjustment disorder” (p. 2). It is hard to find an equal balance between COVID-19 and students’ social emotional health. However, since schools have no way to change the current situation, teachers are going to have to do the best they can with SEL in their classrooms.

What Should Be Done?

There is an assortment of actions that can be taken to improve SEL in the online classroom. The first thing that can be done is implementing the Second Step into the school curriculum. Moy et al. (2018) described the Second Step Program as, "...a universal social-emotional learning program designed to decrease antisocial behaviors, increase prosocial behaviors..." (p. 333). By implementing this program in schools, teachers will be able to balance academic learning and social emotional learning. In the grand scheme of education and SEL, teachers are important factors to childrens' mental health. Teachers are with students for at least six hours a day; therefore, they have a better sense of their student's mental health. Larsen & Samdal specify, "...teachers are increasingly important in the process of emotional regulation, through their ability to help children label, manage, and express emotions they experience in the classroom" (p. 633). Parents can help the regulation of their child's mental health, but they are not with their child for eight hours a day at school; therefore, it is put on the teachers to help students acknowledge and understand their emotions. Moy et al. (2018) goes on to state, "Five core competencies have been established within the framework of SEL: Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making" (p. 337). By teaching these five elements to students, their mental health will increase with each lesson learned. Not only are the students getting taught from a well designed curriculum, they are also getting taught from teachers that are trained in this material. Four different schools got the opportunity to be selected as a case for the Second Step trial before it officially came out. Figure 1 shows the four cases, how each case implemented the program, what grade the staff member taught, formal education, the amount of training received, and how many years they used Second Step. Each school was told that the program was either mandatory or voluntary, and if it had to

be a whole school effort or only single teachers had to incorporate the program. As a result, there were no significant differences between the mandatory and voluntary schools, or the whole school effort or single teachers only. All four cases had used Second Step from three to five years. Second Step allows teachers to have training that will better prepare them for teaching their students about social emotional learning.

Figure 1

Summary of characteristics of the teachers' sample

Cases	Implementation	Teaching (grade)	Formal education	Amount of training received	Used Second Step for (years)
School A	Mandatory and implemented as a whole school effort	3rd grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	3 years
		5th grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	5 years
		3rd grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	3 years
		2nd grade	Preschool teacher	1 day course	5 years
		5th grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	2 years
School B	Voluntary use and used only by single teachers	3rd grade	Elementary teacher	none	3 years
		3rd grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	2 years
		1st grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	2 years
		3rd grade	Preschool teacher	1 day course	3 years
		2nd grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	3 years (twice)
School C	Mandatory and implemented as a whole school effort	1st grade	Preschool teacher	1 day course	5 years
		5th grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	5 years
		4th grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	3 years
		3rd grade	Preschool teacher	1 day course	4 years
		2nd grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	4 years
School D	Voluntary use and used only by single teachers	2nd grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	4 years
		7th grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	4 years
		4th grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	3 years
		4th grade	Elementary teacher	1 day course	3 years

Another program that was created for SEL was Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL). This program is focused on two game types; Circle Time games and Therapeutic board games (Hromek 2009). These two types of game ideas are completely opposite of one another. Hromek (2009) explains, “Circle Time uses games to engage all children within a preventative model to promote positive relations and caring classroom ethos, whereas therapeutic board games target students who need extra guided practice in relationships

in a smaller groups setting” (p. 627). Even though these are opposites, they still have the potential to engage students in learning about social emotional learning. This type of SEL is also known as experience based learning. Hromek (2019) describes experience-based learning as “... interactive and relational and uses instruction technologies such as simulation, games, role-plays, case studies, scenarios, multimedia presentations, and encounter groups” (p. 633). When teachers use experience-based learning in their classrooms, they are giving the students an opportunity to understand how to deal with their emotions outside of a school environment. By implementing this type of program in schools, there is a chance that the mental health in children can decrease at a significant rate.

Conclusion

There are many critical aspects to social emotional learning, and it is important that students are able to understand these concepts in their day to day lives. Even though it is a greater challenge to teach SEL in the classroom, teachers should still teach SEL lessons, and have weekly check-ins with their students to make sure they are doing okay. Hromek (2009) makes a clear realization that all teachers and parents should consider, “... SEL is not just about individual well-being but also about the development of healthy relationships and caring communities” (p. 628). This could not be said any better; it makes teachers and parents understand that it isn't all about what is in your child's head, but it is also about how they interact with other people in their community. In the end, teaching social emotional learning is a key factor to having a successful life.

Method

SEL is an important subject matter that needs to be addressed in school. However, it is argued that teachers are skimming over SEL in order to focus on the more important subjects. Teachers need to designate a greater amount of time to teach SEL, because it is an important aspect of life that involves a person's mental health.

Context

This research took place in the south side of the Bay Area. STEAM School is located in the middle of several high tech companies including; Ebay, Adobe, Cisco, and Paypal. The city also offers a variety of restaurants and hiking, biking, and walking trails. STEAM school reopened in August of 2016. The classrooms all have high level technology including remote control lights, window covers, and AC units. This is the first STEAM school in the district; and it offers grades Kindergarten through eighth grade. A significant part of the campus is inclusive; from parents to staff members to students to the community.

Participants and Participant Selection

I invited two groups of participants to participate in my study; eleven teachers and four community members. I heard back from seven teachers at STEAM School, plus four of my family members that are teachers. As for the community members, four participants completed my survey. I knew that I wanted teachers to participate because they are seeing firsthand how students are dealing with SEL. I chose to have community members participate because the majority of these participants were parents, and parents also have a firsthand experience of how their child deals with their mental health.

Emily Gilmore: A kindergarten through fifth grade intervention teacher. Emily assists students in reading, writing, and math outside of the general education classroom. She has been in the education career for more than twenty-five years.

Sookie St. James: A female kindergarten teacher. Sookie was a sixth grade teacher for three years before she became a kindergarten teacher. She has been in the teaching career for six years.

Lane Kim: A first year female kindergarten teacher at STEAM School.

Rory Gilmore: A third grade teacher at STEAM School. Before teaching at STEAM School, she was a first grade teacher at a different school. Rory has taught every elementary grade except second grade. She has been teaching for more than thirty years.

Babette Dell: A second grade teacher at STEAM School.

Michel Gerard: An eighth grade teacher at STEAM School. Before teaching at STEAM School, he taught sixth grade at the local middle school.

Paris Geller: A kindergarten teacher at STEAM School. Before she taught at STEAM School, she was a kindergarten teacher at another elementary school in the same school district.

Luke Danes: The kindergarten through eighth grade physical education teacher at STEAM School.

Lorelai Gilmore: An intern sixth grade teacher at the middle school in the same school district as STEAM School. Before pursuing a teaching career, she was a property manager in Sonoma County.

Kirk Gleason: A community member who is a teacher in the same district as STEAM School.

Taylor Doose: A kindergarten teacher in Santa Cruz county.

Max Medina: A community member that has a student in fourth grade and a student in sixth grade.

Logan Huntzberger: A community member who is a college student at the local university. He is pursuing an elementary school teaching career.

Researcher

SEL is important to me because I have personally struggled with anxiety and depression for the past twelve years. I strongly believe that every student has the right to get the specific mental health support they need to succeed in school. As a result of my personal experiences, I want to come up with an action to this problem that will give students the right support they need to succeed in their educational journey. Students who suffer mental health issues have to deal with a variety of abuse (physical, verbal, and mental). Oppression has a significant impact on my research because the majority of the students who have to deal with severe mental health obstacles are being bullied by teachers, students, and family members. As a future educator, I want my students to know that they will always have someone there to help them with their mental health. No student should have to figure out their mental health issues by themselves.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

1. What grade do you teach?
2. What are you most concerned about when it comes to SEL in the online classroom?

3. What is currently being done to improve SEL?
4. Who is improving SEL in the online classroom?
5. Do you think this improvement is good, bad, or indifferent? Why?
6. What do you think should be done about SEL in the online classroom?
7. What do you think are the obstacles/drawbacks/disadvantages to changing SEL in the online classroom?
8. Do you have any suggestions that provide an action towards SEL in elementary school online classrooms?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to say about SEL and/or the improvement of SEL in the online classroom?
10. What is your name?
11. What would you identify yourself as?
12. What do you see as the problem with SEL in the online classroom?
13. What is currently being done by the teacher or by you to improve SEL?

Procedure

All interviews were done individually online due to COVID-19. All participants were invited to complete a Google Form Survey containing the interview questions. The survey took about five to ten minutes to complete. If any of the participants had questions, comments, or concerns they were allowed to email me.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this capstone project, teachers and community members were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve SEL in the online classroom. This is important because mental health in children is often glanced over by teachers and parents; which leaves children unaware of how to deal with their emotions. 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: effectiveness; resources; and time. Effectiveness is key when looking at SEL, because if the plan you are trying to implement is not effective, then it needs to be revised. Resources are another important aspect because if teachers do not have the right resources, they will more than likely not be able to carry out their plan. The last significant element is time; all teachers need to consider the amount of time it takes to complete a specific task. This does not mean that if a task takes up a large amount of time a teacher will not choose to go forward with their plan; teachers will just need to figure out a way to achieve their goal while having effective time management. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Effectiveness	Resources	Time
Incorporate SEL activities into class schedules	Medium	Medium	Medium

Daily/Weekly check ins	High	Low	Low
Second Step	High	Low	Medium

SEL Incorporation

Through one of the online interviews I acquired, a community member declared, “Teachers need to make sure they are making the time in the day for Social Emotional learning opportunities for kids” (S. St. James, personal communication, September 27, 2020). In order to improve SEL during these difficult times, teachers need to have a specific amount of time that is devoted to SEL incorporated into their class schedule. There are a variety of ways that teachers can implement SEL into their schedule: reading books about SEL, playing games, telling jokes, practicing mindfulness, or having break out rooms. A teacher at STEAM School suggested, “Reading books on empathy, making mistakes, and problem solving” (R. Gilmore, personal communication, September 28, 2020). The result of reading books to students about certain SEL topics allows them to accept the fact that it is okay to make mistakes throughout life. It is important to teach students that we all make mistakes, and that nobody is perfect in life. Another interacting SEL tool is for teachers to tell jokes or play games. A middle school teacher at STEAM School confirmed, “I think teachers need to carve out time daily to give them SEL support, even if it's playing a Kahoot game or laughing about jokes so that they remember that we are all in this together and it's not just about academics all the time” (M. Gerard, personal communication, September 29, 2020). This teacher strongly believes that it is important to give students a break from the constant academic overload. If teachers keep pushing the large amount

of academic stress on students, the end result will not be good. One teacher stresses the importance of practicing mindfulness, “Kids and their parents probably feel isolated which raises everyone's emotional state, exacerbating situations...We do mindfulness time on various topics surrounding SEL...” (L. Danes, personal communication. October 4, 2020). We need to ensure students that it is okay to take a break, and do something they enjoy. If we do not actively share this important task, students will fall behind and struggle in school. Hromek (2009) addresses the positive outcome of implementing SEL into the classroom; “...when SEL activities are coordinated with and integrated into the regular curriculum, they are more likely to have lasting effects” (p. 629). The realization that most teachers do not want to waste their academic time on teaching SEL is upsetting; but in the long run, it will help the majority of the students that come into their classroom. All school teachers, regardless of the grade they teach, should spend some quality time teaching their students about SEL. A resource teacher outlined that it can be as simple as having the students go into breakout rooms, and discuss a topic that does not involve school. (E. Gilmore, personal communication, September 27, 2020). Teachers do not have to spend a large amount of time on SEL. If they are really struggling to implement SEL into their classrooms, they could do breakout rooms for a couple minutes a day. Either way implementing SEL into the classroom will help all students physically and mentally in the end.

Checking In, Instead of Checking Out

During this pandemic, it is hard for teachers to get a feel for how students are doing mentally. One teacher reveals how she is anxious about her student's mental health, “It is concerning that I never really know how a student is doing. When we are together in a classroom it is easier to see if a student needs a check-in” (L. Gilmore, personal communication, October 5,

2020). A solution to this problem is to have either daily or weekly check-ins with each of their students. A kindergarten teacher at STEAM School describes how she implements daily check-ins with her students; “We do a daily feelings check and talk about how its important to feel all our feelings and name them” (L. Kim, personal communication, September 28, 2020). Teaching students about their emotions and how to handle their emotions at a young age, will help them in the long run. As children get older, they can discover which techniques work best for them.

When children are in school, they rely on teachers to give them a variety of concrete methods that will work for them; while outside of school, they rely on adults to advise them on how to handle their mental health. One interviewee expresses the seriousness of how we each handle our mental health, “I think we need to remember that each of us approaches our mental health in different ways. So I think we need to make it a priority to add techniques to learn how to manage our SEL” (P. Geller, personal communication, September 29, 2020). There are an assortment of ways that can help a person deal with their mental health. Teachers need to shine a light on how important it is to try one of these various concepts when a student is struggling mentally. Instead of adults thinking about themselves first, they need to put younger people’s well being first.

Caffo et al. (2020) goes further into detail, “It is fundamental to keep young people’s needs at the core...in terms of providing them with some strategies to heal and deal with this stressful and potentially traumatic situation” (p. 168). It does not matter if you are a parent, a guardian, a family member, or a community worker, because it is always important to see how a person is doing mentally. A community member strongly suggested incorporating small group activities that dealt with SEL inside the classroom (M. Medina, personal communication, September 27, 2020). Small group activities can ensure that students have hands-on experience with SEL. By

allowing them hands-on experience, they have a better idea of what SEL truly looks and feels like. When students do not have this interaction, there is a higher chance that they will struggle with their own mental health. Through one of the online interviews I acquired, a community member clarified:

Students aren't socializing very much with each other and when they are it feels very structured. I spent a week with my little cousin and I saw what his class schedule consisted of. He hardly seemed interested in learning because he felt no connection to his teacher or his classmates. (L. Huntzberger, personal communication, September 28, 2020)

When discussing how his cousin struggled with the overall connection, it was made clear that distance learning has a significant impact on student interaction. Based on this personal experience, it is important to allow students to have time to talk to their classmates about other topics besides academics. When teachers give their students this opportunity, they are allowing their students to get to know each other better, and to form connections that will help create a positive mindset. Another strongly advised idea came from a teacher, "Have counselors come in and observe via zoom or present lessons to kids" (K. Gleason, personal communication, September 27, 2020). If teachers and counselors were to implement this plan, the students would get a good quality lesson about SEL and/or they would have someone looking out for their mental health. All of these creative ideas are great ways to decrease the stress and anxiety of distance learning. Sometimes all a student needs is for someone to ask them how they are doing; it is just that simple.

Second Step

During an interview I conducted at STEAM School, a teacher declared, “We have a program, Second Step, that we are implementing weekly, and we are trying to build a positive class culture” (B. Dell, personal communication, September 28, 2020). However, in another online interview I directed, a teacher from Santa Cruz openly admitted, “There currently is not an organized plan when it comes to SEL” (T. Doose, personal communication, September 28, 2020). A possible solution for this issue is to integrate Second Step into schools that are not already using the curriculum. Second Step is defined as “...a prominent, manualized, universal SEL program” (Moy et al., 2018, p. 336). With a program that has a main focus point on SEL, there is a greater chance for students to be able to have a better understanding of how to deal with their mental health. Not only does this program help students, but it also improves the overall amount of parent involvement. Larsen & Samdal (2011) confirmed, “...had a positive influence on their collaboration with parents, and was perceived to be an important tool for addressing and discussing students’ social behaviour with the parents” (p. 642). Parent involvement is an important factor when it comes to student mental health. If a child does not feel comfortable enough to share how they are mentally doing, then the child is going to be at a greater risk for serious mental health problems. The PE teacher at STEAM School goes on to discuss the importance of Second Step; “In addition, we have writing prompts where they have to evaluate ways to improve their classroom environment based on how they treat each other” (L. Danes, personal communication, October 4, 2020). There are an abundance of great qualities that Second Step offers, and more schools should be willing to try to implement this program into their school curriculum. Moy et al. (2018) clarifies, “...social emotional competence is a key factor for children’s success in school and in life” (p. 334). SEL should be a top priority in

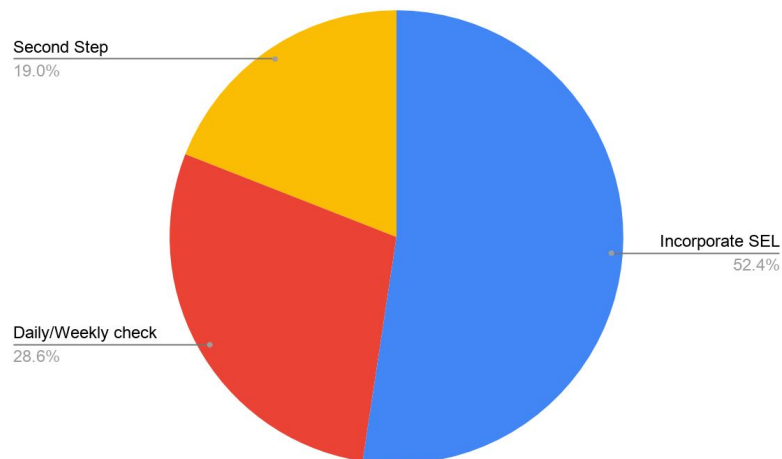
everybody's life, because it can lead you to living a happy life. Second Step can be a great opportunity to teach students about SEL, and it can also prepare them for their future.

Conclusion

When looking at all three options, it is important to consider what is best for the students. In the end, I believe that implementing SEL activities in the classroom would be the most beneficial solution. I am confident that this is the best solution for the current situation we are dealing with, because it has a stronger impact on the children. Not only is it more beneficial for the students, but Figure 2 shows that this option has a higher percentage compared to the other two options.

Figure 2

Participants Who Agree With This Option



Concessions. The other two options were close runner ups; however I feel like if a teacher were to just implement those two options by themselves, they would not have as great of an outcome. The second option, daily or weekly check-ins, is a fantastic idea to understand how each student is doing. On the bright side, you can easily combine this option with the first option.

Another important aspect to look at is money; doing daily check-ins with students does not have to cost very much. Whereas the Second Step curriculum cost quite a bit more; the curriculum can range from one thousand dollars to nine thousand dollars (Second, 2020). Some schools might not have the money to implement this program.

Limitations. Even though the first option is the best choice, there are still some limitations that come with it. Effectiveness might be a limitation; there is always that small chance that some students do not work well with the activities, but that should not stop the teachers from pursuing the activities. Resources might also be a limitation, but it is easy to get around that limitation by creating your own activities; you do not have to spend a bunch of money in order to create a good activity. The final limitation would be time, because it all depends on how much time a teacher wants to spend on SEL activities. In an online interview with an eighth grade teacher from STEAM School it is determined that, “The big obstacle for a lot of teachers is the time, that feeling of being rushed to fit all of their lessons into every session and make sure they are taking advantage of all of their instructional time” (M. Gerard, personal communication, September 29, 2020). Too many teachers are not wanting to step away from the normal academic curriculum to engage in SEL. If SEL is going to work, teachers need to put aside some time to teach their students about the topic.

Potential negative outcomes. When considering any option, there are always going to be potential negative outcomes to consider; in this case the negative outcomes are very minimal. It is possible that a student does not work well with the specific activities that the teacher is having the class do. A way to fix this, would be to get student input about the activities. Another possible outcome would be lack of creativeness. Some teachers are not that creative, so they feel

like they will not be able to come up with a spectacular SEL activity. Luckily activities do not need to be outstanding; they can be simple and still have a powerful meaning. No matter what option people choose, there are going to be ramifications, but that should not scare them away from trying something new.

Conclusion. Even when looking at the concessions, the limitations, and the potential negative outcomes, I still strongly believe that implementing SEL activities into a classroom schedule is best for students of any age. By enforcing SEL activities into the classroom, we are giving students an exceptional opportunity to learn how to manage their mental health in a positive way. Not only would this impact students' mental health in a positive way, it would also allow for a safe classroom environment. All classrooms should feel like a safe environment, because this can also reduce the mental health problems. A teacher commented, "I feel students need to feel that their environment is safe so they can share, work together with peers, and feel safe to make mistakes as they try to problem solve" (R. Gilmore, personal communication, September 28, 2020). It is essential that students feel like the classroom is a safe environment because this is where they are spending the majority of their day. When teachers teach about SEL, it is acknowledged that the classroom environment will be a positive environment for all students.

Action Documentation and Critical Reflection

The main focus for this issue is social emotional learning in the online classroom. For this project, I interviewed eleven teachers and four community members. After completing my interviews and research, three options stuck out to me: incorporating SEL activities into class schedule, daily or weekly check-ins with each student, and using Second Step. After doing more

research on each option, the one I decided to implement was incorporating SEL activities into class schedules. I picked this option, because it had the best results when talking with different teachers, and it has a stronger impact on students.

Action Research Project Documentation and Reflection

For the action portion of my project, I encouraged teachers to implement daily check-ins with their students since STEAM School already has a SEL curriculum in place. I gave the teachers an idea on how to implement daily or weekly check-ins; my suggestion to them was to use the polling feature on Zoom to convene their check-ins. See *Image 1*. I performed this action by sending an email to the principal, who then forwarded my letter to all the teachers at STEAM School. By doing check-ins this way, this allows the students to stay anonymous, and students do not have to feel embarrassed about how they are feeling. The one thing that surprised me was the feedback I got from my letter; quite a few teachers said they would try implementing daily check-ins with their students. As I was writing my letter, I realized that some teachers might not know how to create a poll on zoom. In order to make sure that all teachers knew how to create a poll, I created step by step instructions; see *Image 1*. When looking back at how far I have come from the start of my capstone project, I wish I had been able to go to the campus and observe how the teachers implemented Second Step into their classrooms with students at school. The important next steps are to keep spreading awareness about social emotional learning. I feel the more awareness about SEL there is, the greater chance for positive outcomes in life. One major aspect I learned about myself is that I am a follower, I do not like making changes. This project was completely out of my comfort zone, but I am glad that I got the opportunity to try something

new. Even though it scared me to implement a change in a place where most people do not know who I am.

Synthesis and Integration

When looking at all five of California State University Monterey Bay's Liberal Studies MLOs, I accurately saw three MLO's that impacted my professional development; MLO 3, MLO 4, and MLO 5. These three MLO's have inspired me to look at all aspects of teaching and learning that are sometimes hidden in plain sight. MLO 3 is based on being an innovative technology practitioner; I had a great opportunity to integrate MLO 3 in a variety of ways into my senior capstone project. At the beginning of my project, I had to use technology to acquire specific information on the social emotional learning topic. Once I had clear knowledge about SEL, I established a plan that I followed through until the end of my project. This plan required composing interviews with teachers and community members, continuing my research about SEL, and identifying three solutions that would help improve the SEL in the online classroom. Since we are in a pandemic, MLO 3 fits in with two of the three solutions. There are a variety of videos and activities that teachers can do online to incorporate SEL into their lessons; and by using the "Poll" setting in Zoom, teachers can accurately see how students are doing mentally.

MLO 4 has taught me to be a social justice collaborator. By this I mean that I will stand up for what I believe in, and I will make sure that my students are put on the right path to have a successful educational experience. After seeing how teachers are implementing SEL into their classrooms, I was a little surprised to know that some teachers do not implement SEL at all. This project gave me the opportunity to talk one-on-one with the principal at STEAM School about altering how much SEL is being incorporated into each classroom. We established that there

needs to be more SEL activities, and consistent daily check-ins with the students. This impacted my professional development by making me realize that I want to make sure that my students feel like their emotions are important, and by doing this, I will be able to have a greater positive SEL impact in my classroom.

MLO 5 is an important aspect to my professional development because I got the chance to take a clear look at what schools are doing with social emotional learning during online learning. The results of seeing what other teachers are doing with SEL in their classrooms, gave me a better understanding of how I want to incorporate this subject into my own classroom one day. In order to have a successful classroom education, teachers need to make sure that students feel like the classroom is a safe place for their mental health and for their emotions. By teaching students about social emotional learning, you are telling the students that this is a safe place, and to not feel ashamed or embarrassed for how they feel. When students feel like the classroom is a safe place, they are more likely to have a positive educational experience.

When thinking about the next steps I need to take in order to become a great teacher, I have quite a few in mind. The first being that I need to keep an open mind about students. This being said, I realize that not every student is the same, and each one of them learns in their own way. I need to make sure that I adapt to how they best learn in order to give them the best learning experience they deserve. Another thing is that I want to be aware of how my students are doing mentally in school and at home. If they are mentally struggling in their day to day lives, they are going to struggle in school. I know this from personal experience, and I want to share with my students that they are not alone when it comes to their mental health. The final step that I need to take is to be open to new ideas in the classroom; for instant student feedback

and feedback from my peers. Throughout the majority of my life I have been a people pleaser. When I get feedback from my peers, I generally take it as I am not doing a great job. Which then makes me doubt everything I do from that point on; one thing I need to work on is not doubting myself. By doing all of those steps, I feel like I will have a better chance of becoming a well rounded teacher and staff member. If I am able to become a successful teacher, I will be completely happy with myself. I understand that a teaching career is not easy all the time, but I want to try to be the best teacher I can be.

Image 1. Screenshot of the letter I asked the principal to forward to her staff. The letter indicates a solution to incorporating SEL into the class schedule, and step-by-step instructions on how to create a poll using Zoom.

Dear Steindorf Staff,

My name is Morgan Horn; earlier in the school year I asked your principal to send out a survey in regards to social emotional learning in your classroom. Thank you to the participants that completed my survey. I got some interesting feedback and was able to use that feedback in my senior project. After viewing all the survey responses I got and doing quite a bit of research on the topic, I would like to encourage each one of you to implement daily or weekly check-ins with your students. Everyone is going through a difficult time right now due to the pandemic; however, students are struggling with sharing their emotions. Some students are scared to share how they feel via Zoom, and others do not know how to handle what they are feeling. I feel that teachers need to convene daily or weekly check-ins along with the Second Step curriculum. One way to create a check-in for your students is by doing a poll through Zoom; that way students won't judge their classmates for how they are feeling, and students won't feel anxious to publicly share their emotions. Some teachers may already know how to create the poll through Zoom; but if you do not know how to do it, I have included step by step instructions to help you. Please do not hesitate to send me an email if you have any other questions regarding social emotional learning.

Thank you,
Morgan Horn
mhorn@csumb.edu

Step By Step Instructions for Creating a Poll on Zoom

- Step 1: Sign into your Zoom account
- Step 2: Click on "Account Settings"
- Step 3: Scroll down the page until you see "Polling"
 - Make sure the white circle is on the right hand side
 - This means that you have enabled the polling setting
- Step 4: Now you are going to go back into Zoom
- Step 5: Click on "Meetings"
- Step 6: Select the meeting you want to add polling to
- Step 7: Scroll down to the bottom of the page to where it says "You have not created any poll yet"
 - At this point you need to click on "Add"
- Step 8: A new window will pop up called "Add A Poll"
 - This is where you will name your poll and decide if you want the answers to be anonymous or not
- Step 9: Next you are going to type your question
 - You can choose if you want it to be multiple choice

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