California State University, Monterey Bay

Digital Commons @ CSUMB

Capstone Projects and Master's Theses

5-2023

Social and Emotional Effects of Distance Learning on Elementary School Students During and After COVID-19

Kelsey Clark

Social and Emotional Effects of Distance Learning on Elementary School Students During and

After COVID-19

Kelsey E. Clark

Spring 2023

Senior Capstone

California State University Monterey Bay

Abstract

Currently, there is a major shift in the modality of instructions as a consequence of the
COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it has affected the way education is viewed and the
relationship between schooling and the lifestyle of the students. By reflecting on the last couple
of years since COVID-19 to the present, many students are still hindered due to the effects of
the world going around them, starting from school lockdown to the return of face-to-face
instructions. This senior capstone examines the social and emotional effects of distance learning
on elementary school students through the use of a literature review, class observations of first
grades through fifth grades, and interviews with six teachers in two school districts. The result
findings indicate that students found it hard to adapt to the modality of distance learning due to
their disconnection from their peers and teachers and back again to in-person instructions.

Keywords: distance learning, covid-19, social-emotional needs, early childhood education
(K-12), advantages, disadvantages, relationships in education, connectedness, remote learning,
online learning, technology use, in-person learning, children, teachers, students, teaching
environment, and CRPE (center reinventing public education).

Introduction and Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we view education and the relationship between schooling and lifestyle. One of the most notable changes for schools was the instant move from in-person instruction to online/distance learning, which at the same time disrupted the academic, social, and emotional instruction and development that is vital for elementary school students (Zieher et al, 2021). Child development encompasses the physical, cognitive, and social-emotional change that occurs throughout one's lifetime. Physical development is the growth of the child's body, muscles, and senses; Cognitive development is how children think, explore, and problem-solve; Social-Emotional development is the child's awareness of self, how the child feels about themself, expression of feelings, and how they regulate emotion. These three domains of development are interlinked so that a child's progress in one domain influences the progress in other domains of development. Each one of these domains has been affected in some way due to the COVID-19 pandemic but one domain specifically has been significantly impacted, which is the Social Emotional development of elementary school students. Distanced learning has become the quintessential topic for education during the Pandemic as we were prevented from participating in close quarters. The whiplash is intense and it has thrown many teachers, students, and parents for a spin. Among some of the hardest hit groups from this change in the education structure are the students who can benefit most from the in-person interaction.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic education was already making a hard left into the future as technology continues to grow and be incorporated into education, reaching into every classroom and in every pair of little hands. Based on personal observation, data collection, and research, the needs of early childhood students did not take into account the effect of distance learning on not only students' social-emotional needs but the caring relationships between them

and their teachers. Students' social-emotional learning, well-being, and relationships that they make with their teachers have always been an important topic and concern even before the pandemic. However, due to the current circumstances, both students and teachers find a way to start working through the already existing challenges that are distance learning and the post effects as students and teachers return to in-person education.

Children have a much harder time learning and developing in isolation than when they are part of a web of relationships that make up a child's social chain. This being said In one study done by Stanley Harris (2020), distance learning has been proven to be a valid alternative method of learning in comparison to traditional learning and offers several different benefits, but that is not to say that it doesn't still come with its disadvantages. If distance learning is to be most effective, Teachers in K-12 in online settings need to be more involved in the online learning environment as it is vital to building community in classrooms. We also have to start thinking about equal access for all students when it comes to the Internet as an educational tool and more than ever as an education medium. Educators' understanding of both the advantages and disadvantages of online learning is important because it can not only help students and teachers make the big decision on what's best for their education, but with the growth of online interactions today we have to start thinking, will this soon be our new normal?

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process of developing self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are vital skills for our students to be developing. My interest in this topic developed from my LS300 class when I first researched the effects of distance learning on children in early childhood education during COVID-19. I wanted to further my research as SEL is what children and adults need in their development to learn how to understand and manage emotions, set goals, show empathy for others, establish positive

relationships, and make responsible decisions (DeArmond et al, 2021). The importance of embedding SEL in school practices is that it can facilitate the development of supportive, caring, cooperative, and safe learning environments. I believe that now more than ever it's important to understand how to support the social-emotional development of Elementary students. Specifically, what they need to develop is their Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Self-Management, relationship skills, as well as, what it is that affects their learning (Chen, 2022). Help/support, guidance, and scaffolding need to be provided for students to develop their social-emotional skills. The research I have conducted provides information on the developmental influences that were disrupted or may have affected Elementary students and what is being done to support their development and learning.

The primary question I propose to answer in my research is: How does distance learning affect the social and emotional development of Elementary students during and after COVID-19? My related secondary research questions include: My secondary or related research questions are: Are there social and emotional effects on Elementary Students' development after COVID-19? How have the effects of COVID-19 affected students' social and emotional development in their learning? What does the research say about social and emotional effects on Elementary Students' development during and after COVID-19? According to in-service teachers, has the shift from distance to in-person learning affected Elementary Students' social and emotional development? What will the future hold for distance learning for in-person instructions on Elementary Students' after COVID-19? Given the importance of distance learning, what are the necessary resources that schools could do to bring technology to be part of the integral tool to support students' development in learning? To answer these questions, I will start with a review of the current academic literature.

Literature Review

Distance learning has been and still is being implemented into the education system as technology advances, but it has not had any real developments in the way of distance learning since the implementation of computers in schools and the distribution of loaned laptops. The COVID-19 pandemic has shined a light on distance learning and has become the most relevant and important topic for educators. The past two years were focused on the implementation of a systematic change of education in the United States in order to keep classes running while the COVID-19 pandemic raged on throughout the world. In doing so, there was an incredible amount of research developed into the effectiveness and side effects of distance learning. Although being able to stay home from school can be refreshing, it has shown to be widely negative for a variety of students.

Social-Emotional Development Through Distance Learning During COVID-19

Social-emotional learning and development are important for all children, especially for those facing a crisis. Social-emotional development for students also includes learning how to cope with trauma-sensitive events through trauma-sensitive practices. One of the results of this trauma as highlighted by Harris (2020), "Digital equity was a concern before the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic has highlighted the disparities in access and use of technology in society" (p.2), but the pandemic put technology access at a higher risk. Harris (2020) commented on how the infrastructure of and ability to access the internet in the United States is far below what would be needed for the kind of scale of usage needed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, over 6.5 million people identified Internet-related costs as an obstacle. When the pandemic happened there was a lack of universal access, children are going through unprecedented

problems with retention of information and social activity and they are being cut short at the base by not having the tools to learn effectively.

Distinct learning has caused this long-term effect of trauma on students as they did not have the proper opportunities to develop the needed SEL development causing emotional trauma in how to regulate emotions. This type of SEL Trauma often causes unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, and strained relationships, which can lead to toxic stress (Hermman, 2021). Trauma became the response to the event that is distance learning as it is deeply distressing/disturbed and overwhelms many students to have the inability to cope and causes feelings of helplessness, diminishing students' sense of self and their ability to feel a full range of emotions and experiences. Harris (2020) is among many researchers who have been intensely looking at different aspects of the reaction to distance learning to understand how to better shape our education system. If we can identify the best practices and effective strategies for remote learning or in separate learning environments, we can better understand our classrooms and be able to raise the neglected standard for education, instead of dealing with disconnected lives through connected screens.

One study/research conducted by Michael DeArmond tracked remote learning trends in school districts across the country during COVID-19. DeArmond et al (2021) at the Center Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) specifically looked into how school districts addressed students' social and emotional needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and more. The CRPE looked/went into school districts around the country to analyze how different areas dealt with students' social-emotional learning and well-being as they dealt with this remote disconnect. DeArmond et al (2021) stated, "In light of these challenges, we wanted to see whether districts' remote learning and school reopening plans mentioned social-emotional learning and, if so, in

6

what ways" (p.2). As part of their study, the CRPE went to school districts to find out how
important students' social-emotional development is to the community, and how often schools
are teaching social-emotional skills. After conducting their survey, the CRPE shows that one in
two students identified depression, stress, and anxiety as obstacles to remote learning
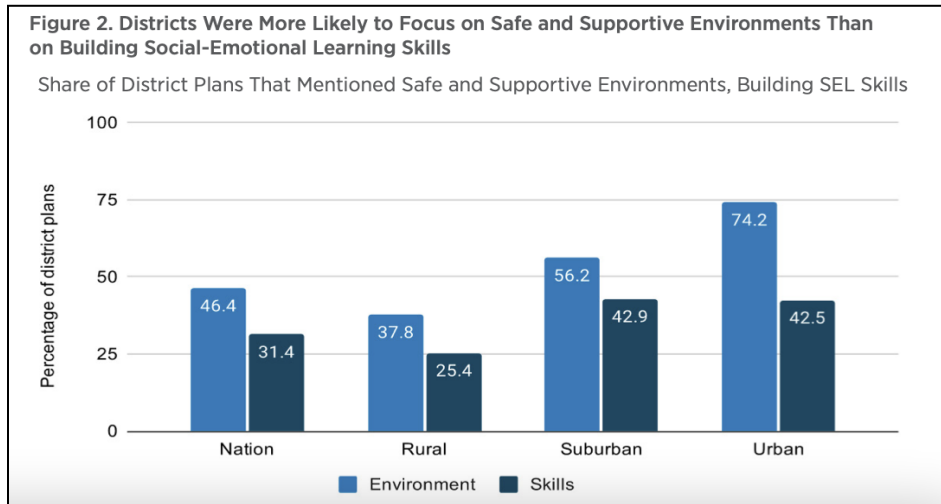(DeArmond et al, 2021) (See Figure 1).

Figure 1
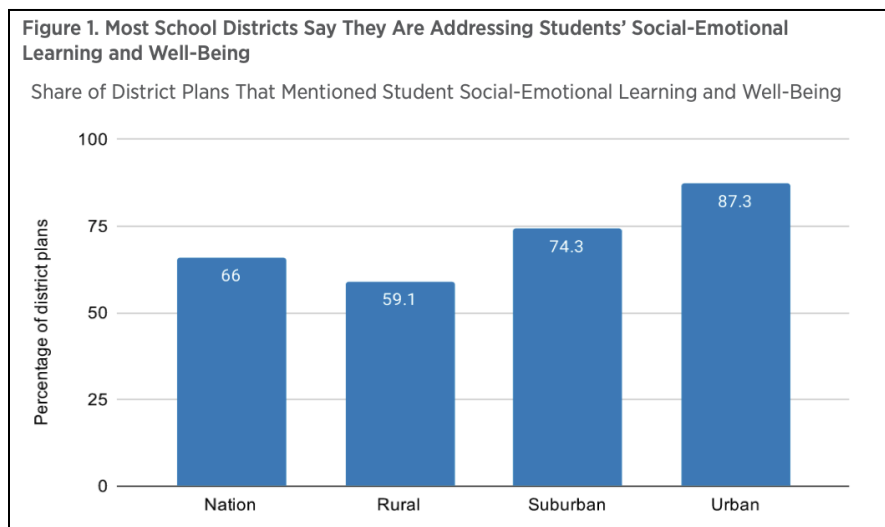
Source: DeArmond et al. (2021). How are school districts addressing student social-emotional
needs during the pandemic? Center on Reinventing Public Education. Retrieved April 6, 2023,
from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED610612.pdf

One of the interesting things that the CRPE found is that districts that are located in urban
and suburban districts tend to speak more frequently about social-emotional learning and
well-being than rural districts. Whether it is considered easier or more cost-effective to rely on
supportive environmental factors, it was across the board more popular when in contrast with
teaching social-emotional skills (DeArmond et al, 2021) (See Figure 2). SEL development was
important before the pandemic but what this table shows is that the pandemic has shed more light

and awareness into what is and what needs to be looked into more now than ever for Elementary

school students' SEL development.

Figure 2

Figure 2. Districts Were More Likely to Focus on Safe and Supportive Environments Than on Building Social-Emotional Learning Skills

Source: DeArmond et al. (2021). How are school districts addressing student social-emotional needs during the pandemic? Center on Reinventing Public Education (pp. 1-3). Retrieved April 6, 2023, from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED610612.pdf

The CRPE has committed to this study to identify the best methods, and efficient

pathways and to learn the advantages and disadvantages of these methods that can only help

educators in schools better teach. And with remote learning not going anywhere soon, these

methods will/could soon be invaluable and industrial standard. When looking at Figure 1, there

was a realization that hybrid learning models were more likely than in-person models to mention

social-emotional learning, especially in urban and suburban districts. What this tells us is that

educators and parents were more proactive to address students' needs and that they took a more

intentional approach than in-person systems to social-emotional learning and well-being. That

being said, the real implementation was much more passive and dealt with reassuring and

comforting students as can be seen in Figure 2. What was also shown was that building skills to

build their emotional intelligence and maintain their social-emotional well-being was less of a

focus. This helps inform us on what is and what isn't working when it comes to the schools and their teachers and in what they are doing to help their students with their needs and specifically their social and emotional needs.

Teachers play a huge role in a young child/student's life in early educational settings. Teachers are the ones that build direct communication and relationships with these children/students. Through my Data collecting and research teachers in K-5th online settings similarly perceive that active involvement in the remote/online learning enviornment is vital in building a strong school community (Miller, 2021). Since the remote learning environment caused an effect on the relationship between teacher and students, the relationship approach that almost all students use one way or another had to be altered/developed so that students and teachers can maintain current relationships as well as build new ones. Supportive teachers–student relationships are of central importance for student well-being, academic achievement, and social and emotional learning (Hermman, 2021). As a result of this relationship, teachers can help students learn to self-regulate emotions (Social and emotional), create a foundational experience that influences the student's development of trust and supports healthy interaction. This results in the student's ability to continue making secure relationships throughout their life. Being able to support this relationship online the teachers also had to think about the attitudes and practices that not only teachers but students have towards computers and other technologies that may affect teaching and learning. These are important to realize because one's relationship with technology can also affect a child's SEL development.

Kara and Cagiltay (2017) did a study in Turkey on technology and technology use in early education settings by investigating in-service preschool teachers, specifically on their thoughts about this topic (technology and technology use in early education settings). In today's

world children are faced with incoming new technologies, such as laptops, tablets, phones, and more, so understanding the views and approaches that preschool teachers have towards technology and technology use can help understand what works, what can be integrated, and what role technology has in an early educational setting. Through this research and other studies Kara and Cagiltay, (2017) state "That preschool teachers are in favor of introducing computers into early educational settings...More specifically, teachers use computers in accordance with children's personal skills, styles, and social demands to help them learn" (p.119). This information helps us come to the conclusion that teachers who practice and work in implementing computers in early educational settings are crucial to support their student's learning and can lead to better-supporting students' social-emotional development.

The data that was collected from this article captures educators' experiences as they transition to distance learning. Regardless of the fact that this article is based on a study conducted in Turkey, every aspect is extremely important to know as well as for the educational system to have knowledge of/or about. Having knowledge or information from another country and what their education system is like can be a great insight into what we could start including in our education system in the near future. But, what much of this boils down to is the classroom environment and how technology was and is currently already being implemented in schools before and during the pandemic. As mentioned in "Creating Cultures of Thinking" (Ritchhart, 2021), states, "The physical environment of a school or classroom will influence how individuals interact, their behaviors, and their performance. The physical space can inhibit or inspire the work of the group and the individual"(p.227). In order to really understand technology implementation and what is right in a classroom, looking at what already works can help in implementing what might also work through distance learning can make us one step closer to

understanding what future educators and administrators can do to make distance learning an effective alternative to in-person schooling.

In another study done by Jennifer J. Chen, she looks at the traditional strategies, unconventional opportunities, and novel challenges in scaffolding young children's social and emotional learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic. In her research on scaffolding young children's SEL during remote learning, she looks to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and teacher scaffolding. According to his theory, learning is considered a social event that occurs most effectively in a classroom/enviornment setting that facilitates interaction and learning among children, through proper scaffolding or assistance, and where teachers serve as socializers of SEL in young children (Chen, 2022). The framework for teaching SEL to grow development has to include a curriculum and strategies that support the five core competencies of SEL, which Include: Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Some ways in which teachers can scaffold a student's SEL development is through using visuals, reading/or having the students read(depending on age), board games/or playing games, modeling prosocial behaviors, physical activity, and singing/or poetry (Chen, 2022). During COVID-19 it was a clean slate as all elementary School Teachers and students were faced with a brand new world figuring out how to keep teaching effective and how to continue to support students' human development.

Social-Emotional Development Through In-Person Learning After COVID-19

Social-emotional learning and development is a necessary focus for schools looking to best serve students during post-COVID-19 education. The immediate trauma and the many learning needs created through online learning have led teachers/educators, administrators, and

parents to recognize the need to focus on SEL development (Bhatnagar, 2022). This caused immediate attempts by school administrators and teachers to come up with ways to focus and continue to build relationships with students while at the same time continuing student to student relationships. During the pandemic and now after, teachers knew that they had to continue to focus on building relationships with the students, their parents/family, and the community despite the challenges posed by distance learning. They focused their instruction to support the five aspects of SEL development, Which include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. With this said teachers attempted to support these aspects by focusing on creating a safe virtual learning enviornment, building trust with peers/students, and continuing to include students' expression of self/identity (Bhatnagar, 2022). Students needed this more than ever and these same supports rolled over to returning back to in-person instruction as many students' Social Emotional development although attempted to be supported during a time of crisis was still stunted because of the effects distance learning instruction and the academic trauma had on elementary school students.

Overall, there is a strong correlation between the decrease in SEL competencies of students and the large school shutdowns that isolated youth during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mox, 2023). As students returned to in-person instruction, teachers immediately had to assess and prepare to repair what the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted. The Pandemic affected educational outcomes for elementary school students due to the trauma and stress it caused. When students returned to in-person development it was apparent that students were struggling to self-regulate their emotions and were still healing from the loss of learning, and socialization. Part of the repair was looking at the trauma effects that it had on elementary school students' social-emotional development and skills, such as their ability to identify, express, and manage

emotions (Hermman, 2021). Some students have been acting out more in school since being back in person and this is due to not understanding that self-control, behavior, and other interpersonal skills are essential to them understanding what behavior is okay at school compared to at home. Toxic stress occurs as a result of prolonged exposure to excessive stress and adversities. If children are exposed to safe and predictable environments, such as schools, homes, and community resources, positive, nurturing relationships can be built with key adults, decreasing the amount of toxic stress experienced. It's time to start looking at what kind of strategies and teaching techniques are working as states, districts, and schools have begun considering Elementary school students' SEL development and what action is best for educators to take, Post COVID-19.

Based on the current research about distance learning during COVID 19 it was learned that caring is the central component for both virtual and in-person instruction, as well as, understanding what role teachers and parents have in their children's/student's schooling post-pandemic (Lochridge, 2021). It is also important to note that not all strategies used in the past are going to be as equally effective as before (Rosanbalm, 2021). At this point it is more than just creating a supportive curriculum, it is about teachers not only teaching and supporting SEL development, but teachers and parents demonstrating/modeling and practicing SEL development themselves. In order for students to excel in their SEL development teachers need to know/or be informed and taught about how to deal with the newly formed struggles of students' SEL development. This includes learning new relationship building activities and tools, incorporating morning meetings (used as check-ins with the students), coaching SEL skills throughout the school day, allowing brain breaks, having a calm-down space, etc. (Rosanbalm, 2021). After conducting extensive research there is still much to learn from the effects of

distance learning, however, the implementation of distance learning will from here on out become more and more meshed with everyday physical classroom time, leading to a new age of SEL research.

After conducting extensive research and looking at multiple studies it is clear that students in elementary school have been negatively affected in their overall learning and social emotional development due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the enviornment distance learning. But it has also revealed that distance learning and technology do have their advantages when it comes to finding an alternative to in-person that still allows students to learn and be educated. It's just how to make it applicable with each domain of human development, such as cognitive, physical, and social emotional development. The current research, academic findings, and data collected led the way for the methods and procedures to help come to such a conclusion.

Methods and Procedures

At the beginning of this semester, I already had a capstone topic to research based on past research conducted, but I knew that I wanted to refine my research and take it one step further by developing my past research idea. With the completion of my research prospectus paper (See researching the prospectus section of the Capstone Binder) and meeting with my capstone professor Paoze Thao, I was able to develop my original focus on my topic, overall setting the foundation for my research. In order to seek the answers to my primary research questions, as well as, secondary research questions, I found many peer-reviewed scholarly research and journal articles. The peer-reviewed scholarly research and journal articles were found through current literature that is related to my research questions through library research done at California State Monterey Bay (CSUMB). I did run into a few minor bumps along the road when

it came to obtaining information pertaining to the post-effects of Distance learning during

COVID-19 on Elementary students' social-emotional development. However, after continued

research, I had no issues finding information on the effects of distance learning during

COVID-19, but after meeting with the CSUMB Librarian and continuing my research, I was

pointed in the right direction and was able to obtain the research I needed for my senior capstone

project.

In order to find out more information on the post-effects of distance learning during

COVID-19, specifically with the transition from online to in-person instruction and the effect it

had on students' social-emotional development, I knew I had to get professional opinions from

elementary school teachers themselves. Last semester I did my service learning for LS398 at San

Lorenzo Valley Elementary School in a kindergarten class and then did my service learning for

KIN 374/374L at Brook Knoll Elementary School in a third-grade class. Service learning at these

two different schools gave me the perfect opportunity to ask each of the teachers if they would

participate in an interview for my school's Senior Capstone project. I reached out to both

teachers and they both participated in my interview and also connected me to other teachers from

the school including the second and first-grade teachers that I ended up interviewing. I was able

to email the principal of Brook Knoll Elementary School to see if they could help me get in

contact with a third, fourth, and fifth-grade class. In the end, both the teachers and principal

responded immediately and I was able to meet with the second, third, fourth, and fifth-grade

teachers from Brook Knoll Elementary School each on a different day of the week between

March 20th-24th to ask them my secondary research questions in an interview form. Also

between March 20th-24th I also met with a Kindergarten and first-grade teacher from San

Lorenzo Valley Elementary School. Each of the teachers answered honestly and gave me some great detailed information needed for my Senior Capstone Research Project (See Appendix 1-5).

The interviews with five different teachers from two different schools and districts also gave me the opportunity to observe each class/student, which allowed me to observe the conversational techniques and coping strategies that the teachers are using to support their social-emotional learning and development that was hindered during the Pandemic/distance learning. This also provided me with more information on how students are behaving in a classroom setting after COVID-19. Specifically, it allowed me to see how students in Kinder-fifth grade are communicating with peers/fellow students, how they communicate with teachers, how their moods change depending on what they are doing in class, and seeing how they recognize and manage their own emotions. I am grateful to have had a pre-existing relationship with both principles of the schools as well as with two of the teachers, as it provided me with the interviews and observations I needed. The one thing I was unable to complete due to time limitation, was to create a student survey for the K-5th grade classes to get the viewpoint from the students and see how the change from distance learning to back to in-person has affected them personally and educationally. But this was substituted with the observation of students I was able to experience with each interview I did and completed.

All in all, I strongly feel that my approaches/these methods and procedures helped me to not only finish my analysis and academic research, but at the same time helped me thoroughly answer all of my primary and secondary research questions. The data I needed and received provided me with the findings and results of how during distance learning and after COVID-19 there has been both negative and positively affected elementary school students (Kinder-5th grade).

Results, Findings, and Discussion

What does the research say about social and emotional effects on Elementary Students' development during and after COVID-19? Through my research, my results indicate that elementary school students' learning and development has and still is being affected by the distance learning enviornment and that is evident in classrooms as students return to in-person. The results of the research and studies also indicate that students' social-emotional learning and development has especially effective connection to community, as well as, teachers' and students' relationship/connection. As mentioned before, teachers play key roles in young children's early education, specifically in relation to their early educational setting as it helps build direct communication between teacher and student. Through a conducted interview that I put together with a kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers all mentioned that one of the biggest disadvantages they faced during the intense switch to remote learning was how different the environment was for both themselves as teachers and for their students.

*According to in-service teachers, has the shift from distance to in-person learning affected Elementary Students' social and emotional development?*Yes, as it was unanimous in my interview as each teacher (K-5th Grade) explained how this in-person disconnect has affected many students' social emotional learning and development. Specifically, they have seen their students not as well versed in efficient communication or problem solving, have difficulty transitioning from lesson to lesson/activity, and have difficulty sharing or taking turns (See Appendix 1-5, Question #3). These are just a few developmental skills that were disrupted during the pandemic and it is now more than ever that in-service teachers are working to recover and

repair what was lost over the past two years. Overall students are having to relearn the norm of in-person instruction and teachers are having to reteach the social-emotional skills that were not addressed or could not be implemented due to the virtual learning enviornment.

What are the social and emotional effects on Elementary Students' development after COVID-19? The Kindergarten teacher from San Lorenzo Valley Elementary School stated, "There were so many things that were challenging during distance learning…The human connection was partially lost. Also, it was hard not being able to "read" the classroom and on Zoom, you could not tell what students were doing or not doing. Many students opted out either partially or completely" (Appendix 1). The 1st-5th grade teachers' responses are in agreement with the Kindergarten teachers' response including how it also explained that the classroom enviornment influenced the students being able to interact confidently with the teacher as well as hold strong discussions with peers. The other side of this enviornment switch is it causes traumatic stress in many students. Environment in education plays an important role in the classroom and if you do not have a healthy environment it can be harmful. Psychologically, this was a lot to handle for teachers and students, but since the return to in-person learning teachers have begun to heal the damage that distance learning caused and brought to both these teachers' classrooms and their student's social-emotional development. Humans are social beings, and the biggest effect that distance learning caused was straining that part away between teacher and student, as well as, between the students and their fellow classmates.

How have these affected your student's social and emotional development in their in-person learning? The first grade teacher stated in an interview I conducted, "After this past year remote learning has harmed students' social and emotional well-being, especially at a young age. They did not get to socialize like they would have if we were in person. They missed out on

a lot of social skills that young children need" (Teacher A, personal communication, April 1, 2023, See Appendix 2). It is also clear from the student observations I experienced in each class that students are especially experiencing behavioral issues, separation anxiety, up to cases of agoraphobia. Many students and choosing to make poor behavior choices in grades 3rd-5th and there has been more separation anxiety this year for grades K-2nd as students who go through traumatic situations display amplified behaviors in school and at home (See Appendix #1 & #3). This has a huge relation to why we need to take into account the effect of distance learning on students' social and emotional needs, as well as, the caring relationships between them and their teacher(s) and between school and home enviornment.

What will the future hold for distance learning for in-person instructions on Elementary Students' after COVID-19? Due to the limited research information and there being more research conducted currently, it's hard to say for sure where distance learning stands for in-person instruction specifically for elementary school students. Through the research on the current effect of distance learning there are significant disadvantages. But distance learning does have some advantages when it comes to there needing to be an alternative to in-person instruction if something like the pandemic was ever to occur again.

> "Technology is an integral teaching tool no matter what way you slice the cake. When considering it as a resource for social-emotional learning it can be a useful supplemental tool, but there is nothing that replaces the personal feel and meaning of in-person interaction. That being said, when we were in distance learning, it was our only means of achieving any kind of connection - the next best thing to it… and so for that reason alone it will always need to be a part of the 'backup plan'" (See Appendix #5).

From my observations in K-5th grade classes, it is clear that students are struggling to self-regulate their own emotions and there is this need to be more hands-on with students due to this switch from distance to in-person. Children do not learn and develop in isolation but are

embedded in a web of relationships that make up a social field. The quality of these relationships determines children's learning, development, and well-being.

Given the importance of distance learning, what are the necessary resources that schools could do to bring technology to be part of the integral tool to support students' development in learning? First and foremost schools need to be prepared to support access to technology and make internet services/equitable internet and computer access for all students. Technology can be helpful, but only when integrated properly and used correctly (See Appendix #2). Technology is great for millions of reasons, however, students need to feel connected to the adults in their lives as well as with their peers, as students long for that personal connection. But based on my observation and interview responses some teachers understand the importance of technology but also see how it can socially affect students. And then there's the other teachers who are wholeheartedly against technology and "thinks teaching them how to express their feelings and connect with others without technology is more beneficial" (See Appendix #3). It is clear that we can not escape the grasp that technology has, so for it to work and continue those connections for students we need school computer programs and technology integration in classroom environments. Overall Social-emotional development/learning is strongly influenced and furthered by human contact and social interaction/play, but it is the combination of the overuse of technology and the traumatic stress of distance learning that is creating so many social and emotional problems in young students. However, it is necessary that teachers continue to teach and integrate technology into their classrooms as it is not going anywhere anytime soon.

Problems and Limitations

When It came to the research process, overall I was able to obtain the information to answer my primary and secondary research questions. However, due to the limitation of current

research on the COVID-19 effects on elementary school students SEL developmentI was unable to answer one of my secondary research questions: What will the future hold for distance learning for in-person instructions on Elementary Students' after COVID-19? With this said I did run into a few minor roadblocks along the way, although they did not inhibit me from obtaining the information that I needed. Specifically, I ran into there not enough current research studies and/or literature on the topic of what current social-emotional development is being affected after COVID'post COVID-19 as learning has gone back to in-person. But because I have picked a current topic my resources are current as well as they include information studied in the past three to four years. I do have a few sources that are at least seven years old, as well as, included data from outside the United States. But I feel that even though those sources are old, and include school data from Turkey they still provide more perspectives including important background knowledge and information about technology integration and social-emotional learning before COVID-19. All in all, the process of this project and the time spent on it went very well.

When it came to collecting data It became difficult in the beginning to find a second, fourth, and fifth-grade class to observe and interview teachers because I didn't personally know any teacher with those grades. However, I was able to contact the principal at the school where I have served before, and where I currently work as a teacher through a before and after-school program called Champions. Through Champions I was able to Interview and observe a second, fourth, and fifth-grade class. Even though I got confirmation from all teachers that I could interview them I had to wait two weeks before I could interview them in person because I had to work with five teachers that all had five different schedules, including having to work around my school and work schedule. I believe that if I had a little more time in my schedule and if I had

more time with each teacher and class I might have been able to collect more data from teachers and students that are from different school districts. I believe it would have also been great to create a survey/or interview for the principals of each school to answer as they are equally involved in the student's life and attend to students' academic and social-emotional well-being.

Now as I am finishing this research and project, I feel there could have been other ways I could have gone about conducting my research, and/or re-design my project approach if time was not of the essence. If I would have had more time directed towards this project I could have interviewed more teachers and conducted a survey for students in Kindergarten-Fifth grade on how they feel about distance learning and being back to in-person learning. One thing for sure is that upon completion of this project, I feel that as a future educator, I am now aware of the importance of social-emotional development, specifically in knowing how to implement a learning enviornment that fully supports students' social-emotional development.

Recommendations

Therefore, I recommend that it is essential for teachers/educators today to be provided with the knowledge and tools to not only identify students' social-emotional learning (SEL) but respond to students' SEL during COVID-19 and beyond. This includes first thinking about how to create an open learning space for all students, building a caring classroom enviornment/school community, and partnering/including families and the community in their SEL learning and development (Stevenson, 2023). It's also about providing elementary students a space for open conversation (e.g. positive self-talk), expressing kindness towards others, creating coping strategies, and goal setting. Other resources that are encouraged include "being as responsive as possible by making small adjustments like adding a soft start, incorporating extra play time, reviewing rules and procedures more frequently, building in more opportunities for student

interaction, more regular learning breaks, etc." (See Appendix #1). There are several other strategies but these specific practices and tools can be the start of creating a positive school enviornment that encourages and supports the social and emotional needs of elementary school students' development and overall learning.

Conclusion

Even though the world is rounding a corner with COVID-19, the SEL impacts will be long-lasting and some even permanent. Whether it is student retention, drop-outs, or an overall decline in mental health, the ramifications of the pandemic are significant and need to be supported as such. Whether you are addressing stress levels, feelings about the unknown, communication of feelings, students needing support, impulse control, or students experiencing negative emotions, it's important to look back at what caused these issues in students SEL development. It is clear that after researching, conducting my own interviews, experiencing student observations, and the collection of data, distance learning has affected students during and still is affecting students after the COVID-19 Pandemic. But one positive thing to come out of this is the tremendous growth in the awareness of students social emotional development. It also brings to light that distance learning will never be a permanent solution, only ever an alternative/backup to in-person schooling. There are many ways of dealing with distance learning, but if not done properly and strategically it can be eventually harmful if not done with tremendous support, discipline, and management.

From my research, it is clear that during the pandemic it was not possible to theorize, design, construct, implement, and study in depth about methods and resources, over the course of two years, to gain the best practices. But now that we have returned to in-person learning we can start to design, construct, implement, and minimize the negative effects that distance learning has

had on elementary school students SEL. The researchers all share points on distance learning, and its effect on the mind, body, and lifestyle. They all come to the same conclusion that the negative effects that distance learning has on students are troublesome for their education and their SEL development. They all also explain different advantages that can be developed further to help resolve the problems/disadvantages that are associated with distance learning. This includes, reteaching the norms of social interaction, promoting social play/communicating, frequent check-ins, teaching lessons that support SEL development and more.

After the past couple of years, it has been clear that although technology has and still continues to grow and adapt, as it is part of everyone's daily lives, it's important to continue teaching how to use technology correctly, but it is also important to think what the future will hold for distance learning and for in-person instructions on Elementary Students' for the perceivable future. And to ensure that the current and future generations of students are supported in their overall education and human development (Cognitive and Physical), but most importantly in their Social emotional development and learning.

References

Bhatnagar, R., & Many, J. (2022). Teachers using social-emotional learning: Meeting student needs during COVID-19. *International Journal of Technology in Education (IJTE)*, *5*(3), 518-534.

Chen, J. J., & Adams, C. B. (2022). Drawing from and expanding their toolboxes: Preschool teachers' traditional strategies, unconventional opportunities, and novel challenges in scaffolding young children's social and emotional learning during remote instruction amidst COVID-19. *Early Childhood Education Journal*.

DeArmond, M., Chu, L., Gundapaneni, P., & Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). (2021). How are school districts addressing student social-emotional needs during the pandemic? *Center on Reinventing Public Education*.

Fording, R. E. (n.d.). *What teacher educators should have learned from 2020*. AACE. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350131501_What_teacher_educators_should_have_learned_from_2020/link/6052c2e5299bf173674e1385/download.

Harris, S. O. (2020). Implementing innovative technology to support K-12 public school learning during covid-19 (Order No. 28148239). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: *The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection*. (2451425902).

Herrmann, L., Nielsen, B. L., & Aguilar-Raab, C. (2021, April 16). The impact of covid-19 on interpersonal aspects in elementary school. *Frontiers*.

Kara, N., & Cagiltay, K. (2017). In-Service preschool teachers' thoughts about technology and technology use in early educational settings. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, *8*(2), 119–141.

Light-Stevenson, M., & Elder, B. (2023). Identifying and Responding to Students'

    Social-emotional Learning Needs Related to COVID-19. *International Journal of Whole*

    Schooling.

Miller, K. E. (2021). A light in students' lives: K-12 teachers' experiences (Re)building caring

    relationships during remote learning. *Online Learning*, *25*(1), 115–134.

Mox, Mitch, "Explicit Social and Emotional Learning in Elementary Education in the

    Post-COVID-19 Era" (2023). *Culminating Experience Projects*. 253.

    https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gradprojects/253

Najamuddin, N., Sahrip, S., Siahaan, K. W. A., Yunita, W., & Ananda, R. (2022). The impact of

    the dissemination of the covid-19 epidemic on social development in early childhood.

    International Journal of Elementary Education, *6*(2), 232–238.

Ritchhart, R. (2021). The Purpose and Promise of Schools. In *Creating cultures of thinking: The*

    8 forces we must master to truly transform our schools (pp.13-35). Jossey-Bass.

Rosanbalm, K. (2021, January 31). Social and emotional learning during COVID-19 and beyond

    Why it matters and how to support it. *Hunt Institute*.

Valverde-Berrocoso, J., Fernández-Sánchez, M. R., Revuelta Dominguez, F. I., & Sosa-Díaz, M.

    J. (2021). The educational integration of digital technologies provide-19: Lessons for

    teacher education. *PLOS ONE*, *16*(8).

Zieher, A. K., Cipriano, C., Meyer, J. L., & Strambler, M. J. (2021). Educators' implementation

    and use of social and emotional learning early in the COVID-19 pandemic. *School*

    Psychology, 36(5), 388–39.

Mrs. H Kindergarten Grade Teacher Interview Questions/answers

1) Do you think that there are social and emotional effects on Elementary Students'
   development after COVID-19? If yes, what are they?

   *Yes. Some level of internalization of toxic stress due to being a part of the greater COVID
   experience. Parents have varied levels of trauma and that can trickle down and impact
   parenting approaches during and after COVID. Families were forced to adjust the way
   they functioned during COVID and they are still transitioning out of that.*

2) How have these affected your student's social and emotional development in their
   in-person learning?

   *More separation anxiety this year than I have experienced in any year previously (it is
   day 130 and kids still complain of missing mommy). Students that were living in
   traumatic situations may display amplified behaviors at school. Students seem needier.
   Many students are coming to school with little or no preschool experience. Longing to
   connect with other children. Increased need for developmental play.*

3) Has the shift from distance to in-person learning affected your Students' social and
   emotional learning?

   *This is hard to speak directly to because the students I currently teach never did online
   learning. I would say, yes, because of the lack of preschool on a grander scale than ever
   before. This has resulted in a cohort of little people who are less experienced being
   around other kids and so they are not as well versed in efficient communication and
   problem-solving.*

4) What are some resources that you use in your classroom to help support your student's social and emotional development after covid-19?

We have a social/emotional curriculum called Second Step, but this predates COVID. Teachers in our district were encouraged to be as responsive as possible by making small adjustments like adding a soft start, incorporating extra play time, reviewing rules and procedures more frequently, building in more opportunities for student interaction, more regular learning breaks, etc. In kindergarten, our work is already so focused on social-emotional learning and communication skills that it's kind of like we are doing the same work, just more of it.

5) Given the importance of distance learning during the time of covid, do you think that technology will become an integral tool to support your student's social and emotional development? What could your school do to make this a reality?

There were so many things that were challenging during distance learning…The human connection was partially lost. Also, it was hard not being able to "read" the classroom. On Zoom, you could not tell what students were doing or not doing. Many students opted out either partially or completely. Technology is an integral teaching tool no matter what way you slice the cake. When considering it as a resource for social-emotional learning it can be a useful supplemental tool, but there is nothing that replaces the personal feel and meaning of in-person interaction. That being said, when we were in distance learning, it was our only means of achieving any kind of connection - the next best thing to it… and so for that reason alone it will always need to be a part of the "backup plan". Schools need to be prepared to support access to technology and internet services - equitable internet and computer access for all students.

Mrs. G First Grade Teacher Interview Questions/answers

1) Do you think that there are social and emotional effects on Elementary Students'
   development after COVID-19? If yes, what are they?

   *Yes, I think there are social and emotional effects on Elementary Students' development. I
   taught online, hybrid, and now fully in-person. In all 3 phases of teaching, I have seen
   students especially struggle with self-management, emotional regulation, anger,
   self-awareness, and relationship skills. After this past year remote learning has harmed
   students' social and emotional well-being, especially at a young age. They did not get to
   socialize like they would have if we were in person. They missed out on a lot of social
   skills that young children need*

2) How have these affected your student's social and emotional development in their
   in-person learning?

   *In-person, this has created an abundance of conflict between students, distractions,
   disruptions to instruction, and behaviors that affect other students. I feel as if they are at
   least a year behind in social-emotional development.*

3) Has the shift from distance to in-person learning affected your Students' social and
   emotional learning?

   *The cohort I am with now was not necessarily affected by the transition of distance to
   in-person because they had kindergarten in-person, but some that didn't have in person
   instruction do have a hard time with transitions into different lessons/activities.*

4) What are some resources that you use in your classroom to help support your student's
   social and emotional development after covid-19?

Whole body, heart-centered affirmations. Morning meetings for emotional check-ins. Afternoon meetings where students can self-reflect and celebrate each other. Sanford Harmony Connection Cards. Big Life Journal resources. Acting out character traits like respect, responsibility, empathy, etc. I do an "award show" before Winter Break and at the end of the year. These are heart-centered awards that complement their character traits. I got them on Teachers Pay Teachers. Affirmation mirror. Feelings chart for students who want to point and cannot express with words how they are feeling

5) Given the importance of distance learning during the time of covid, do you think that technology will become an integral tool to support your student's social and emotional development? What could your school do to make this a reality?

   I think technology can be helpful, but ultimately, I've found that students are simply longing for connection. Technology is great for millions of reasons, however, students need to feel connected to the adults in their lives as well as with their peers. Technology can be a great resource for older students who would rather communicate with their teacher through email or some other form of check-in. With the younger grades, I think teaching them how to express their feelings and connect with others without technology is more beneficial. I think providing that piece of technology for all students would be beneficial.

Appendix 3

Mrs. R Second Grade Teacher Interview Questions/answers

1) Do you think that there are social and emotional effects on Elementary Students' development after COVID-19? If yes, what are they?

Yes, students are very emotional. They have trouble talking about their feelings. They were left to a lot of screen time during covid which made it difficult for students to sit in a group for 25 min.

2) How have these affected your student's social and emotional development in their in-person learning?

Students feel very entitled to say NO. They told their parents no during Covid and parents let students get away with it. Students finished very little work and now it shows. Many students have also been acting out due to this their behavior has been more negative than positive.

3) Has the shift from distance to in-person learning affected your Students' social and emotional learning?

Yes. Students at home did not have to share or take turns. They didn't have to sit with other students. Now that they are back in class they have to relearn the norms.

4) What are some resources that you use in your classroom to help support your student's social and emotional development after covid-19?

We use a program called Harmony. It is great.

5) Given the importance of distance learning during the time of covid, do you think that technology will become an integral tool to support your student's social and emotional development? What could your school do to make this a reality?

I do not think technology will support my students' social and emotional development. That needs to be in person.

Appendix 4

Mr. M Third Grade Teacher Interview Questions/answers

1) Do you think that there are social and emotional effects on Elementary Students' development after COVID-19? If yes, what are they?

Of course! Missing a year and a half of in-person education created a void in the social development of most students. The normal routines of education, lining up, raising your hand, not blurting, focusing and attention, etc were absent in their development. Instead, the habits they developed being at home and online, lack of attendance, being off task, no accountability, is what we see in class.

2) How have these affected your student's social and emotional development in their in-person learning?

When we have to take extra time out of Direct Instruction time to attend to the myriad of poor behavior choices students make, that then becomes the focus of the classroom. For some students, the bad choice is sometimes the easiest.

3) Has the shift from distance to in-person learning affected your Students' social and emotional learning?

In time, given the support we need to properly deal with behaviors we see, teachers will be able to instill in students the focus and discipline it takes to be successful in education. We are making headway, coming back from online, but it will take a concerted effort from the school and parents.

4) What are some resources that you use in your classroom to help support your student's social and emotional development after covid-19?

There are many resources available to us… the one we are currently implementing is PBIS, a positive behavior reinforcement strategy. We also use our counseling program to

attend to specific student needs and monthly we highlight a positive attribute with our

counselor going into each classroom and spending time speaking with our students.

5) Given the importance of distance learning during the time of covid, do you think that

technology will become an integral tool to support your student's social and emotional

development? What could your school do to make this a reality?

Actually, I don't. Social-emotional development is furthered by human contact and

interaction. In my opinion, it's our overuse of technology that is creating so many social

and emotional problems. The kid's screen time is off the charts. No real-world

decision-making, no communication, no outside-the-box thinking, and poor behavior

choices. Technology is outpacing our morality!

Appendix 5

<u>**Mrs. J Fourth & Fifth Grade Teacher Interview Questions/Answers**</u>

1) Do you think that there are social and emotional effects on Elementary Students'

development after COVID-19? If yes, what are they?

Yes, specifically in the development of my older students. They missed out on the end of

grade 1, all of grade 2, and part of grade 3. During this time, they are learning how to

interact and work with children their age over the course of those grades, so not having

that time has caused issues in working with each other. They have a harder time

expressing their feelings and being able to find solutions to problems without adult

guidance.

2) How have these affected your student's social and emotional development in their

in-person learning?

Students are much more impulsive in their actions, and at times if something is not abundantly clear, they will move on to the next topic. My students will even try everything to not do a specific task if it makes them frustrated or if it is deemed too hard in their perspective.

3) Has the shift from distance to in-person learning affected your Students' social and emotional learning?

Yes. Students at home did not have to share or take turns. They didn't have to sit with other students. Now that they are back in class they have to relearn the norms.

4) What are some resources that you use in your classroom to help support your student's social and emotional development after covid-19?

In my classroom, we have a quiet corner where students can go to deregulate. For other students, giving them other tasks to work on and coming back later has proven to be helpful as well. One student has designated areas they are allowed to go to if their emotions become too big and they need extra space. It has also been helpful to use school resources like the school counselor to give students space and another adult to voice their feelings too. Validating the student's feelings has also proven to be quite successful.

5) Given the importance of distance learning during the time of covid, do you think that technology will become an integral tool to support your student's social and emotional development? What could your school do to make this a reality?

Yes, specifically in finding programs that students can access outside of school and that parents can utilize. Being able to take advantage of current tools like YouTube to find videos will also be an integral tool. The school could make this a reality by helping find

programs and continuing to pay for support programs. They could even designate

specific training to allow teachers to be stronger support for their students.