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The Impact of a Social Emotional Learning Integrated Curriculum on Student Social Emotional Competencies

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The Impact of a Social Emotional Learning Integrated Curriculum on Student Social Emotional
Competencies

A Mixed Method Research Methods Proposal

[Component of Thesis Proposal]

By

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Abstract

In recent years, education has been especially concerned with the rise in student mental health concerns. Issues such as low academic achievement, disturbing behaviors, conflicts amongst students, low self-esteem, and lack of social and emotional support amongst other concerns, have led to the notion that social emotional learning (SEL) needs to be incorporated into students' education in order to combat some of the serious issues students are facing while trying to navigate their education. This study makes the claim that SEL can be easily incorporated into the everyday curriculum already used by educators no matter their background in SEL and by doing so they will effectively increase students' social emotional competencies, leading to a positive effect on student mental health and the behaviors that result when students have not been exposed to social emotional learning. Evidence presented in the study suggests a positive correlation between a social emotional learning integrated curriculum and an increase in students' social emotional competencies.

Keywords: Social emotional learning, social emotional competencies, high school social emotional learning, student mental health, social emotional learning curriculum

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In recent years, education has been especially concerned with the rise in student mental health concerns. Issues such as low academic achievement, disturbing behaviors, conflicts amongst students, low self-esteem, and lack of social and emotional support amongst other concerns, have led to the notion that social emotional learning (SEL) needs to be incorporated into students' education in order to combat some of the serious issues students are facing while trying to navigate their education. While not incorporated yet into the researcher's districts' secondary level education, SEL is set to be of great importance as stated in the district's strategic plan for the future. The district recognizes that SEL is a beneficial part of a student's education that can set them up for success after school. The purpose of this study is to show that SEL can be incorporated into the everyday lessons at the secondary level and that it can be beneficial for student well-being and their sense of self and acceptance within the school without requiring teachers to change their everyday procedures and activities within the classroom. The researcher explored whether participation in classroom discussions paired with deep reflections of learning that occurred as a result of those discussions helped students increase their social emotional competencies. Social emotional competencies were defined as increases in the following areas: academic self-efficacy, belonging, growth mindset, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, self-advocacy, and self-regulation.

Brief Literature Review

The research that was consulted for this study about social emotional learning suggests that it is an appropriate strategy to employ throughout a student's education. It allows for students to develop many social emotional skills that will help increase their academic performance as well as help to predict their success in the future outside of school. The

recommendations from many pieces of research, that are most comprehensively summarized by Wang, et. al. (2012) are to create an integrated curriculum that would include,

Time management; class participation and note-taking; knowledge of one's own emotions and awareness of the emotions of others'; active learning; self-management—physical, emotional, and behavioral; critical thinking; relationship skills; appreciating difference and tolerance for disagreement; test-taking—both written and oral; perspective taking; and behavioral flexibility. (pg.2)

Through an integrated curriculum at the secondary level students should see an improvement in their social emotional competencies which will allow them to meet the social and emotional demands from the environment (Low, et. al., 2015).

Statement of the Problem

With student mental health issues on the rise, the research problem is measuring the growth of social emotional competencies of students in the classroom through use of an SEL integrated curriculum with a focus on discussion and reflection practices. Students who do not have their fundamental needs of physical safety, belonging/love, and self-esteem are going to struggle in school. They are likely to be anxious and tense and unable to focus on higher level capacities (Lindsay, 2013). Students' today are faced with an alarming amount of stress and if they do not have the supports in place at home or at school they are likely to struggle with the necessary social emotional competencies needed to succeed in school and outside of school. The study will incorporate a social emotional learning integrated curriculum that focuses on emotional management, empathy, setting goals, problem solving, and effective and developmentally appropriate communication at the secondary level. The researcher will be using

discussion and reflection techniques meant to boost classroom community and individual student well-being with the hope that it will increase students' social emotional competencies.

Purpose of the Study

The effects of poor student mental health has created negative effects on students and the districts they attend. Student's poor mental health was exacerbated with the recent COVID-19 pandemic and has left its mark on students' social emotional and academic abilities. There is evidence from the literature that it would be beneficial to reset and relearn how to effectively communicate with one another to help solve problems while working towards community and personal goals and to help regulate our own emotions and learn to talk to each other in an appropriate way with empathy (Ash, et. al, 2005; Bond, et. al, 2021; Jones, et. al, 2009; Konishi, & Park, 2017; Lindsay, 2013; Low, et. al, 2019; Wang et. al, 2011). If the issues of student social emotional learning and the clear deficits that are apparent are not addressed, it is possible k-12 schools will continue to see students struggling in the classroom. Student apathy will continue to rise and graduation rates will decline. It's likely that violence and high risk behaviors will climb across the nation. Schools across the nation are aware of these issues and SEL provides a promising framework to help address these issues. It does not need to be an entire separate class. It can be incorporated into all levels, subject matter, and grades with the proper implementation without a sacrifice of time towards academics. The benefits are worth investing in to help students navigate this increasingly difficult time in their lives. It is important to show them that they matter and that they can be a part of the community and contribute effectively while being valued. The purpose of this study is to show that SEL can be incorporated into existing curriculum and still have positive effects on student social emotional competencies.

Research Question(s)

How can a social emotional learning integrated curriculum with a focus on discussion and reflection techniques increase students' social emotional competencies?

Definition of Variables

The following are the variables of the study:

- Variable A: The independent variable for this study will be the topical discussions. This will be measured through the use of a rubric that students will get that will measure the social emotional competencies demonstrated throughout the discussion.
- Variable B: Another independent variable will be the reflections students will complete after discussions. Students will follow a template informed by Ash, et. al's study (2005) about the use of articulated learning in student reflections. They will be asked: what did I learn? How did I learn it? Why does this learning matter, or why is it important? In what ways will I use this learning with what I have learned in order to improve myself, the quality of learning or the quality of my future experience?
- Variable C: The dependent variable will be students' social emotional competencies. They will first take a survey to show their baseline competencies informed by The Widener Emotional Learning Scale (WELS), which is a self-administered survey to assess emotional competence (Wang, 2011). This would be taken at the beginning of the study and then at the end of the study to evaluate the student's growth in social emotional competencies over time. Because the WELS was not available to the researcher, they chose to use the Student Success

Network's SEL Survey by Competency. This survey, like the WELS, measures baseline SEL competencies.

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study is evident in the growing amount of studies and research that is showing an increase in student mental health needs, growing diversity, and the clear “need for school's to serve students by helping them engage in learning, behave positively, and perform academically. Social emotional learning provides the foundation for safe and positive learning, and enhances students' ability to succeed in schools, careers, and life” (Weissberg, 2016). My study will help educators understand the ways in which they can incorporate SEL in their classrooms to elicit positive results for themselves and their students. My goal for this study was to see growth in my students' social emotional competencies as well as a more positive view of school and their education. I also want to build on the research already conducted and possibly inspire more research in the area of SEL in the secondary classroom.

Research Ethics

Permission and IRB Approval.

In order to conduct this study, the researcher will seek MSUM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix C) to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects (Mills & Gay, 2019). Likewise, authorization to conduct this study will be sought from the school district where the research project will take place.

Informed Consent.

Protection of human subjects participating in research will be assured. Participant minors will be informed of the purpose of the study via the Method of Assent that the researcher will

read to participants before the beginning of the study. Participants will be aware that this study is conducted as part of the researcher's Master Degree Program and that it will benefit her teaching practice. Informed consent means that the parents of participants have been fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study for which consent is sought and that parents understand and agree, in writing, to their child participating in the study (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014).

Confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., Student 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time will be outlined both, verbally and in writing.

Limitations.

There are some limitations to the study to be noted. The sample size was small with only twenty-nine participants and not truly representative of the United States high school population demographics. Out of the twenty-nine students twenty-four were Caucasian students with similar backgrounds. One student was African-American and four students were Hispanic. Students in the classroom were not in attendance for all of the activities which led to difficulties in data analysis. Of the twenty-nine participants, only nine were in attendance for the complete duration of the study which led to many missed opportunities to work on SEL skills in the classroom. The study also focused on one teacher's classroom and her methods, therefore the results may not seamlessly translate to other classrooms.

Conclusion

The negative effects of student mental health decline in the United States has increased the need for the school systems to address students' social emotional competencies. There has been significant and positive evidence that shows incorporating SEL into the everyday curriculum of general education teachers has positive impacts on students' social emotional

competencies. With that being shown, it is important for educators to explore SEL in their own curriculum. The objective of this chapter was to address issues that arise around student mental health and low social emotional competencies, see briefly the literature that explains the issues, and finally to explain why it is important to explore. In the following chapter I will provide literature about this topic and the important theoretical framework that supports this study and its relevance.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

Social emotional learning (SEL) is not a new concept. However, much of the findings are in the context of primary school settings and not at the secondary level. Research has shown that a focus on mental health for adolescents (ages 10-19) is incredibly important because it is one of the most unstable points of young students' lives (Lerner et. al, 2018). According to Lindsay (2013), "Adolescence and secondary education is a critical stage for social and emotional skill building to increase learning capacity and also address heightened adolescent concerns regarding purpose and place in society" (pg. 19). While the focus on the primary level makes sense, it is important to continue their SEL education throughout their school career, because it is important for students to have SEL skills to help them through the many curveballs life will throw at them. In fact, during adolescence students often struggle to control their emotions and mentally work through the sometimes painful realities of their life. It is exacerbated if they grow up in a dysfunctional home, or if they don't fit in at school. Quite simply, "if students' fundamental needs are not being met -physical, safety, belonging/love, and self-esteem- they will feel anxious, tense, and unable to focus on higher level capacities" (Lindsay, 2013, pg.21). There are several studies that prove that students who have developed emotional skills will have an increased level of social competence, good mental health and positive academic performance (Ahmed, et. al., 2020; Billy, 2021; Datu, & Restubog., 2020; Deli, et. al., 2021; Durlak, et. al., 2011; Fairless, et. al., 2021; Galvin, 2022; Konishi, & Park, 2017; Lindsay, 2013; Low, et. al., 2015; Peterson, 2021; Walker, & Martin, 2020; Wang, et. al., 2012). Those who do not have developed emotional competencies are more likely to have poorer mental health, engage in destructive relationships and are more likely to be associated with drugs and alcohol (Konishi &

Park, 2017). With this information it is worth discovering how SEL can be incorporated more fully into the secondary education schools as they exist right now.

Literature on Increasing Student Social Emotional Competencies

Context- Student Social Emotional Competencies. Concerns about mental health in students are on the rise in the United States. There are several contributing factors that cause traumas for students and therefore negatively impact their mental health and their ability to cope with environmental demands and pressures (Galvin, 2022). Social-emotional learning is meant to help students navigate the increasingly complicated social emotional demands of their life. The goal of SEL is for students to be able to manage emotions, have empathy for others, set goals, problem solve, and participate in effective and developmentally appropriate communication (Galvin, 2022). According to Konishi and Park (2017), “individuals competent in SEL are expected to be able to recognize and manage emotions, establish healthy relationships, set positive goals, meet personal and social needs, and make responsible and ethical decisions” (p. 247). In order to see that growth, students need to feel a sense of autonomy, belonging, and competence. They must also be able to take initiative, be responsible for their own learning, and have interpersonal bonds with school, school staff and peers. Success in SEL is determined by their competencies. It is important to note that these social and emotional competencies can be learned and developed over time in the place of educational settings (Wang, et. al., 2012). Ways in which social emotional competencies can be improved is to allow for reflections on their learning (Ash et. al. 2005) and allowing for topical discussions to express their own individuality but also create strong connections in the classroom through understanding and positive communication strategies (Bond et. al. 2021).

Discussion as a Tool To Promote Social Emotional Competencies.

Academic and topical discussions give students the chance to express themselves and learn how to foster respectful intrapersonal relationships with those around them (Blumberg, 2022; Elias et. al. 2021). In order to help students improve their social emotional competencies it is important for students to understand how to have meaningful conversations that show social etiquette, clarity of communication, reciprocation, showing interest and engagement, perspective taking and inclusion, and finding common ground (Elias, 2021). SEL interventions can be incorporated into the daily routine and typical educational practices that are found in everyday classroom settings (Durlack et.al., 2011). It was important then, to look at the way the researcher's classroom typically functions on a day to day basis. Educators often use discussion as a means to learning in the classroom, but it is something that can be used to focus more on SEL outcomes. With refining, discussion can be a powerful tool that will create many opportunities for students to increase their social emotional competencies within the classroom (Bond et. al., 2021; Galvin, 2022; Lindsay. 2013).

Reflection as a Tool to Promote Social Emotional Competencies.

While discussion is a powerful tool in the classroom it is also important to reflect on the conversations to help actual learning to occur. Sometimes students need to really think about what they discussed and what it actually meant to them and their learning. Therefore, it is an important step to take in order to make the discussion meaningful to individual students (Ash, et. al., 2005, Coleman 2021, Konishi, 2017, Lindsay, 2013, and Peterson 2021). Reflection is also beneficial for students who are more introverted and need more time to feel comfortable in the classroom discussion (Konishi, 2017). All students need to feel comfortable in the process of

learning and giving more options and opportunities for students to express themselves can be beneficial.

Theoretical Framework

Students' social emotional competencies should improve over time with practice and reflections. Elias (2021) found that discussion rubrics based on SEL competencies help to measure the levels of SEL growth over time. Rubrics will focus on social etiquette, clarity of communication, reciprocation, showing interest and engagement, perspective taking and inclusion, and finding common ground. In order to measure SEL competencies it is also important to look at student reflections of the process. Articulated learning is a process by which students can reflect on their discussion in the classroom by answering the following questions: What did I learn? How specifically did I learn it? Why does this learning matter? In what ways will I use this learning or what goals shall I set in accordance with what I have learned in order to improve myself, the quality of learning, or the quality of my future experience (Ash et. al., 2005). This high level of reflection takes student learning to the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Students must synthesize what they learned in order to answer the questions and show actual understanding and growth.

Research Question

How can using topical discussions and personalized reflections increase students' social emotional competencies in the classroom?

Conclusions

The research on social emotional learning proves that SEL is not only effective at all levels of education, but it is also necessary for students. According to Durlak (2011), "Over time, mastering SEL competencies results in developmental progression that leads to a shift from

being predominantly controlled by external factors to acting increasingly in accord with internalized beliefs and values, caring and concern for others, making good decisions, and taking responsibility for one's own choices and behaviors" (pg.410). SEL is a positive strategy in the classroom and more needs to be done to find out what strategies work at the secondary level. Through the research the hope was to answer the question of whether student SEL competencies can be improved through routine classroom practices such as discussions and reflection to make a case for including SEL in the classroom at the secondary level in every day curriculum. In the following chapter the methods of research will be outlined to describe in detail how the study was set up and used in the classroom setting.

Chapter 3 Methods

Introduction

This study is assessing the impact of group discussions and individual reflection on students' social-emotional competencies. The study was conducted using probability sampling of the students in the researcher's 10-12th grade Abnormal Psychology classes. The education world and more specifically, the district in which the researcher is located, have been specifically interested in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and the impact it has on students' social emotional competencies. Studying specific instructional strategies helps identify strategies that work to improve students' social emotional competencies without hindering the overall progress of the classroom. In this chapter, the researcher will elaborate on the methods used to conduct the study, as well as the methods of analysis used to interpret the results that will apply to the future use of SEL informed instruction in the future.

Research Question(s)

How can using topical discussions and personalized reflections increase students' social emotional competencies in the classroom?

Research Design

The researcher chose to use a mixed methods research design for this study. The researcher was looking for the effect of an independent variable (i.e., classroom group discussions and individual reflections) on a dependent variable (i.e., social emotional competencies) to see whether participation in SEL focused discussions and reflections improve student's social emotional competencies. Groups were organized by class period in a high school classroom setting based on probability sampling. Groups consisted of both male and female

students in a 10-12th grade Abnormal Psychology class which covers the age range of 15-18 years old.

Setting

This study was conducted in a rural Southwest Minnesota community school. The county where this school is located has an estimated population of 9,990 and is best known for farming and manufacturing. The divorce rate in the county is 40% and so many students are managing various custody and living/family arrangements. The school in which the study was conducted has a total PK-12 population of 1,139 with 52% male and 48% female enrollment that is relatively homogenous in terms of race with 93% of the school population being white, 1% Black, 3%, Hispanic or Latino, and 3% Asian. 23.9% of the schools population are economically disadvantaged and qualify for free or reduced lunch. 1% of the students are English language learners. The classroom where the study took place contained a heterogeneous mixture of the above mentioned groups with up to 29 students in each class period.

Participants

The students in this mixed methods study are largely homogeneous with respect to their race with 93% being white. They are however quite diverse in their socio-economic status and educational abilities. All students are between the ages of 15 and 18 years old and are in the elective 10-12th grade Abnormal Psychology class across two class periods.

Sampling. The study will consist of 10-12th grade students who elect to take Abnormal Psychology class. The students will be based on probability sampling, because of the fact that students elect to take this class based on their interest or availability, and the school researcher has no say in who takes the course. The researcher will have no input in how the classes are arranged, but will always have 10-12th grade students in those classes. Surveys, observations, and

individual student reflections will be used to assess the impact of SEL instructional strategies on individual students' social emotional competencies. There are twenty-nine students in the study across two class periods. Twenty-four are Caucasian, one African-American, and four Hispanic.

Instrumentation

The instrument that will be used for data collection is based on the Widener Emotional Learning Scale (WELS) in a self-administered survey that students will take to assess their social emotional competence at the beginning of the study. The WELS consists of 39 items to assess five components of emotional competence: Awareness of Emotions in Self and Others, Tolerance of Difference or Conflict, Interpersonal Relationship Skills, Flexibility in Perspective-Taking and Behavior and Self-Management Skills. For each item, students responded to a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*rarely*) to 5 (*very often*) (Wang et. al., 2011). The researcher did not receive permission to use the WELS so instead opted to use Student Success Network's SEL Survey By Competency (Appendix B) as it measures similar categories. The SEL survey consists of 39 items to assess seven categories of SEL competencies: academic self-efficacy, belonging, growth mindset, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, self-advocacy, and self-regulation. The SEL survey also uses various point Likert scales to measure positive or negative responses. The researcher felt that these categories closely resemble the competencies of the WELS. In addition to the WELS and researcher notes, student reflections will be used to gauge social emotional competencies in individual students. The researcher will create questions based on the practice of Articulated Learning as discussed by Ash et. al. The same four questions (Appendix A) will be used after each discussion in an individual journal kept by the student and turned into the teacher after each discussion. A rubric will be used to help students focus on their answers and what to consider when writing to try and avoid basic answers that lack thought and

consideration. In addition to the survey and reflections, teacher observations will be used to observe students' behaviors and social emotional competencies in the classroom during discussions.

Data Collection

Baseline data will be collected on paper with the Student Success Network SEL Survey before the SEL practices of discussion and reflection are implemented in the classroom. Once the baseline data has been established, the study will begin with students being given the SEL discussion skills through direct instruction which will help students focus on positive SEL discussion strategies. The class will practice these skills in discussions during class while the researcher records their observations of the class. After each discussion students will then be asked to reflect on the process using the articulated learning format described in Appendix A. All of this information will be stored by the researcher in their online Schoology classroom which automatically makes a class folder on Google Drive. At the conclusion of the study, students will take the SEL survey again to assess any growth in their social emotional competencies.

Data Analysis

After data has been collected, results from the initial SEL survey will be compared to the final SEL survey taken at the end of the study. The overall percentage of positive and negative responses of the class will be calculated for both the first survey and the last survey. A graph will be created to present the data in a more visual form to compare the social emotional competencies of all Abnormal Psychology students before social emotional learning interventions and then compare it directly with the social emotional competencies of Abnormal Psychology students after they have received social emotional learning interventions. To simplify, rather than providing all individual responses to the survey questions the average of all

the responses in each category will be displayed to show if there was overall improvement in the classroom setting amongst Abnormal Psychology students.

Research Question(s) and System Alignment

The table below (i.e., Table 3.1) provides a description of the alignment between the research question and the methods used in this study to ensure that all variables of study have been accounted for adequately.

Table 3.1.

Research Question(s) Alignment

Research Question	Variables	Design	Instrument	Validity & Reliability	Technique (e.g., interview)	Source
How can using topical discussions and individual reflections increase students' social emotional competencies in the classroom?	IV: Topical discussions and individual reflections DV: Social Emotional Competencies	Mixed Methods	Student Success Network SEL Survey by Competency Student Reflections Researcher Observations		survey	High Schools Students: 10-12th Grade

Procedures

The study will take place over a four to six-week period with the goal being at least one discussion and reflection each week. The initial survey will take place on day one and will establish the baseline data for students' social emotional competency levels. The SEL survey should be the initial survey that takes place on day one to establish the baseline for where students' social emotional competencies are on day one. Immediately on the second day of the study students will be given direct instruction on SEL discussion skills to be used in classroom discussions. Students will then be given one social studies related discussion prompt per week to

research and prepare for while also having the rubric to help inform their practice. For the first discussion it is likely that the researcher will have to interject and model the process at times so students can practice the process. With time, the researcher should be able to sit and actively listen and take notes while the students actively discuss topics on their own without interference from the researcher. At the very end of the study students will take their final SEL survey and the researcher will analyze the data to see if there was any change in students' social emotional competencies.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent letters were sent to the parents of each individual student in the classrooms participating in the study. Names of the participants were not released and students were told they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Data will be kept for one year after publication of this study. After one year that data will be ethically destroyed.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was for the reader to better understand the methods of how this study was conducted. The chapter describes the demographics of and the settings in which the participants were involved. It also explains the instruments that were used and how the data was collected and interpreted. In the next chapter, the overall results and findings from the study will be discussed.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation

Student mental health is in decline and educators throughout the United States are attempting to address those issues with Social Emotional Learning in schools. The purpose of this study was to explore the integration of social emotional learning (SEL) into an existing curriculum in a public high school. The study used an action research approach to identify best practices and strategies for integrating SEL in the classroom. Data was collected through surveys, observations, and reflections written by students on a bi-weekly basis over six weeks. The data was analyzed using mixed methods.

Data Collection

Surveys were used to collect qualitative data on student's social emotional competencies. These were defined as increases in the following areas: academic self-efficacy, belonging, growth mindset, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, self-advocacy, and self-regulation. Observations and student reflections were used to collect qualitative data on the implementation of SEL strategies and their impact on student's social emotional competencies. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis on the reflections and surveys of 29 students.

Quantitative Data Results

RQ 1: How can a social emotional learning integrated curriculum with a focus on discussion and reflection techniques increase students' social emotional competencies?

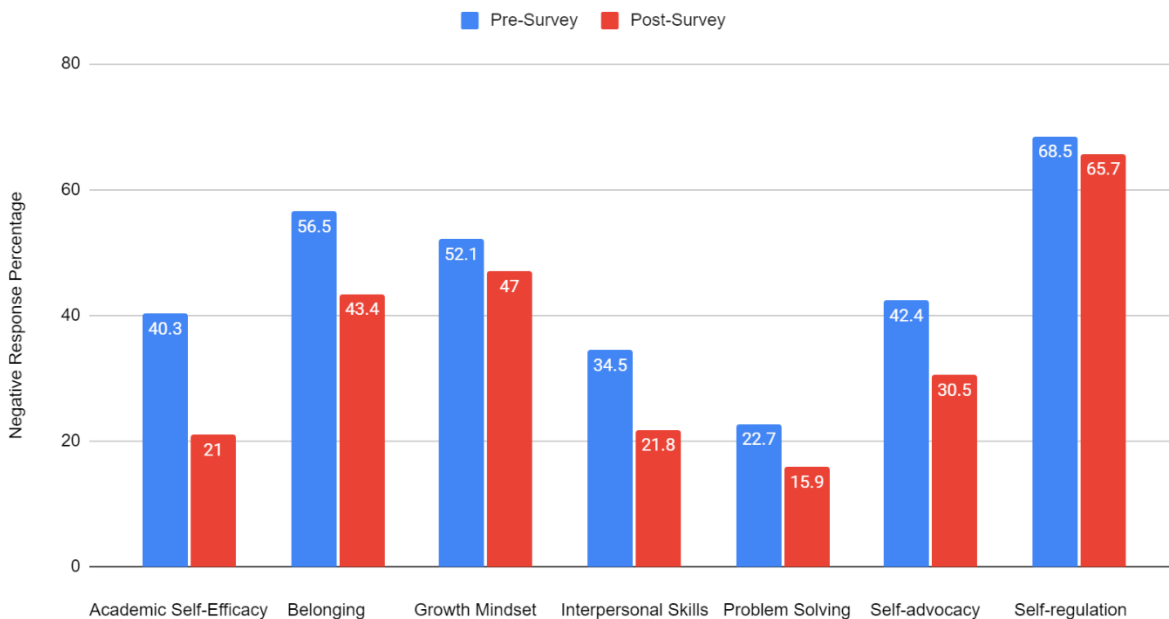
The results (see Figure 1) of the pre- and post-surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The survey used (Appendix B) was created by the Student Success Network to measure student's SEL competencies. The pre-survey showed that in the category of academic self-efficacy which measures student's beliefs in their ability to succeed in academic situations or accomplish academic tasks, four questions were asked. For each question, a positive response

is indicated by a score of 3 or higher on a 4-point Likert scale. Precisely, 40.3% responded in the pre-survey that they did not believe they had the ability to succeed in academic situations while the post-survey showed 21% of students with that belief. In the category of belonging, which measures students feeling of being accepted as part of a group, six questions were asked. For each question, a positive response is indicated by a score of 4 or higher on a 5-point Likert Scale. In this category, 56.5% of students responded in the pre-survey that they did not feel like they belong, while the post-survey data showed 43.4% of students feeling as if they did not belong. For the category that measured student's growth mindset, which is defined as a student's belief that their intellectual ability is not fixed and they can develop through hard work and practice, four questions were asked. A positive response was indicated by a 4 or higher on a 5-point Likert scale. 52.1% of students indicated a negative view of having a growth mindset in the pre-survey, while in the post-survey 47% of students indicated a negative view of growth mindset. In the category of interpersonal skills, which measured one's ability to clearly communicate one's thoughts and interact with others in a positive manner, six questions were asked. A positive response was indicated by a response of 4 or higher on a 6-point Likert scale. In this category, 34.5% of responses indicated a negative self-evaluation of interpersonal skills in the pre-survey, whereas in the post-survey 21.8% of responses indicated a negative self-evaluation of interpersonal skills. In the category of problem-solving which seeks to measure a student's ability to identify a problem and resolve it, six questions were asked. A positive response was indicated by a 3 or higher on a 4-point Likert scale. On the pre-survey, 22.7% of responses indicated a negative perception of their problem-solving abilities, whereas in the post-survey 15.9% of responses indicated a negative perception of their problem-solving abilities. In the self-advocacy category, which measures student's self-awareness and their agency, seven questions

were asked. A positive response was indicated by a response of 3 or higher on a 4-point Likert scale. In this category, 42.4% of responses indicated a negative self-evaluation of their self-advocacy skills whereas in the post-survey 30.5% indicated a negative self-evaluation. In the category of self-regulation, which measures a student’s ability to manage their behaviors in academic situations, five questions were asked. A positive response was indicated by a response of 4 or higher on a 5-point Likert scale. On the pre-survey, 68.5% of responses indicated a negative self-evaluation of self-regulation. On the post-survey, 65.7% of responses indicated a negative self-evaluation of self-regulation.

Figure 1

Percent of Negative Responses to SEL Competencies Survey



Qualitative Data Results

RQ 1: How can a social emotional learning integrated curriculum with a focus on discussion and reflection techniques increase students’ social emotional competencies?

The analysis of the observations and student reflections revealed several themes related to the integration of SEL into the curriculum. Two major themes emerged. One theme was the importance of interpersonal skills when interacting with others in the classroom. Students indicated in their responses across several reflections that they were surprised how many of them had similar experiences. The observations indicated that students were uncomfortable talking at first, because they felt that they had little in common with students they were unfamiliar with. Over time, it was observed that students began to get more comfortable with each other and realized that they were all more similar than different. They began to understand the impact of strong interpersonal skills on those around them so they can feel comfortable sharing and not feel judged in a classroom of their peers. One student reflection indicates the importance of interpersonal skills,

“This learning matters because it helps me understand how to relate to others, be there for others, and how to handle it. It helps us to experience what life is like for other people. It matters because it shows us there are people we can relate to and trust and share our feelings and know we’re not alone.”

Another responded with,

“I was unaware that so many people in my school had similar experiences to me. It was interesting to see that so many other of my classmates agreed with me and thought the same things I did. It was also good to see that we could disagree and still be ok with each other.”

Another indicator of students realizing the importance of interpersonal skills was the following example, “I realize I need to try to understand different aspects of an individual’s life. I want to

use discussion to work better with others, talk more and be more open to certain topics. I want to listen carefully and learn more from my groups.”

The second theme was related to their sense of belonging in the classroom. Early in the process students indicated that they were uncomfortable talking to students they didn't know. Observations of the classroom confirmed this. Students struggled to talk to one another and did not talk much beyond what was written on discussion guides for them. The researcher directly observed students not making eye contact and struggling to expand on their point of view, often giving short one-word answers. One student reflection at the beginning indicated they were uncomfortable, but they also indicated a desire to improve.

“I think I should try to talk more in school. It would be fun to show who I really am here in school. Like my mom wishes I did, she says I'll have more friends if I do. I also think it'll help my learning because when I do talk I get my mind going and I take in the information better instead of being like a zombie. That could help my grades and social experiences here.”

As time went on there were indicators of several students feeling as though they belonged in the classroom with the people in that room.

“Everyone talked in the group today! I felt more connected and like I wasn't the one who had to do everything. We had interesting conversations about mental health and I enjoyed talking to everyone.”

Another student wanted to spread that sense of belonging elsewhere,

“I want everyone to feel included. We watched that video and it was so obvious that we need to do better, we need to tell our peers to stop making unnecessary comments and

making fun of people. Everyone is going through things and we just need more empathy.”

The comments being made in the students’ reflections indicated that they had begun to see the importance of connections and that they could relate to their peers, which is a significant factor in improving SEL competencies.

Data Analysis

The results of this study suggest that the integration of SEL into an existing curriculum can have a positive impact on student social-emotional competencies. In addition, the study highlights the importance of student engagement and ownership in the integration of SEL into the curriculum. Teachers should involve students in the process of identifying their own social-emotional strengths and weaknesses, and should provide opportunities for students to practice and apply SEL skills in real-world situations.

By focusing on SEL integration into the curriculum, the research suggests that students should improve in the areas of emotional management, empathy, problem-solving, goal setting, and developmentally appropriate communication (Galvin, M., 2022). This study, although done with a small group of students over a short time, does indicate an improvement across all categories of social emotional competencies after focusing on SEL skills in the classroom. With each activity that focused on SEL integration, students showed improvement socially amongst their peers. They began to talk more and expand upon what was asked. They were comfortable and made more eye contact, when in the beginning students physically sank in their seat and avoided eye contact when trying to talk to someone they did not know. As the study by Konishi and Park (2017), indicated, “as individuals become more competent in SEL they will see improvement in the abilities to recognize and manage emotions, establish healthy relationships, set positive goals, meet personal

and social needs, and make responsible and ethical decisions” so too did students in this classroom improve.

There were several issues during data collection that could have skewed the results. Attendance was a major issue. Some students were not attending class regularly and would miss important discussion days where they would practice many of the SEL skills that were introduced. Attendance for eight of the 29 students was as low as coming for one single discussion day, which would have exempted them from building the relationships the rest of the class had in that amount of time. There were also several weather related school-closings that shortened the time of the study by almost two weeks leaving less time to work on SEL skills during the time of the study. I believe that had those issues been removed a much more positive result would have incurred because of how the existing data was trending.

The SEL survey was a valuable tool in measuring the overall improvement of student’s SEL competencies over the course of the study. The reflection tool should have been modified to ask more specific questions about SEL competencies. I would have adjusted the reflection prompts to have students indicate how the SEL skills they learned helped them improve certain SEL competency goals in the classroom. For some surveys, students were more content specific in what they learned and didn’t mention the SEL competencies I was measuring which made it difficult to analyze how they were being impacted by the SEL exercises we were doing in class.

Overall, this study suggests that the integration of SEL into an existing curriculum can be a successful approach to improving student social emotional competencies in public schools.

Chapter 5: Implications for Practice

In order to improve student's social emotional competencies without increasing the workload of teachers in the classroom by adding extra classes, SEL needs to be intertwined into the daily curriculum of the classroom. This study sought to discover if SEL could be integrated into an existing high school curriculum and still improve the social emotional competencies of the students involved.

Action Plan

The findings of this action research study have significant implications for educators and school administrators seeking to integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) into existing curricula. Based on the results, the following recommendations are suggested;

1. Provide professional development opportunities: In order to gain a deep understanding of SEL, teachers need quality professional development that trains and supports them in the implementation of SEL into their curriculum. Professional development could include workshops, peer coaching, or online resources.
2. Develop a comprehensive SEL curriculum: For teachers to successfully implement SEL into their classrooms a foundational curriculum must be created that is flexible across all grade levels and abilities. It should be researched based and align with SEL objectives, as well as include several engaging activities that can be adapted for various settings.
3. Adopt a school-wide culture of SEL: The school culture must prioritize social-emotional learning. School leaders and teachers must continue to communicate the importance and proven benefits of SEL to families and communities. SEL should be actively integrated into all aspects of school life so that it becomes a norm within the school community.

4. Monitor and evaluate the implementation of SEL: To ensure that SEL is being effectively implemented into the curriculum, regular monitoring and evaluation must be done. Various methods could be used such as teacher and student surveys, teacher self-reflection and classroom observations by school leadership.
5. Engage families and communities in SEL: It is important that families and communities support the efforts to implement SEL into the school culture and curriculum. To help gain the necessary support from families and the community, schools should consider providing community events at the school to increase awareness of the benefits of SEL in the schools.

In conclusion, the integration of SEL into an existing curriculum requires a concerted effort from educators, school leaders, families, and communities. By following these recommendations, schools can create a comprehensive and effective approach to SEL that will benefit students in both their academic and personal lives.

Plan for Sharing

The information from this study will be used for discussions in my district to share information about how SEL can be incorporated into the classroom without purchasing expensive programs meant to add more work to the teacher's existing work load. While this study is small, it is worth sharing the information so that administration can consider alternatives to SEL integration at the high school. This will also be used personally for my own use in order to improve upon my teaching practices as well as the classroom culture. I have witnessed positive growth in my students, and while it may be a small study it has helped to inform my own teaching philosophy and my plans to build students social emotional competencies moving forward.

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Appendix A

Questions Used for Student Reflections

1. What did I learn?
2. How specifically did I learn it?
3. Why does this learning matter?
4. In what ways will I use this learning or what goals shall I set in accordance with what I have learned in order to improve myself, the quality of learning, or the quality of my future experience

Appendix B

Student Success Network SEL Survey By Competency

2019-20 STUDENT SUCCESS NETWORK SEL SURVEY BY COMPETENCY

ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY

Belief in one's ability to succeed in academic situations or accomplish academic tasks

Please tell us how often you do some things or feel a certain way.

- 3 I'm confident I can do a great job on assignments and tests.
- 7 I'm sure I can understand the hardest information in readings.
- 8 I'm sure I can understand the most complicated information presented by the teacher.
- 9 I'm sure I can learn the skills taught in school

RESPONSES

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1 Almost never | 3 or higher is considered a positive response. |
| 2 Sometimes | |
| 3 Often | <i>Adapted from Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale, Marsh et al (2006)</i> |
| 4 Almost Always | |

BELONGING

Feeling of being taken in and accepted as part of a group

Please tell us how true each of these statements are for you.

- 28 There's at least one adult in this program I can talk to if I have a problem.
- 29 Adults in this program respect me.
- 30 Other students in this program take my opinions seriously.
- 31 I can really be myself in this program.
- 32 Students in this program are friendly to me.
- 33 Other students in this program like me the way I am.

RESPONSES

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1 Not at all true | 4 or higher is considered a positive response. |
| 2 A little true | |
| 3 Somewhat true | <i>Adapted from Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM), Goodenow (1993)</i> |
| 4 Very true | |
| 5 Completely true | |

GROWTH MINDSET

Belief that intellectual ability is not fixed and can develop through hard work and practice

Please tell us how true each of these statements are for you.

- 34 My intelligence is something that I can't change very much.
- 35 Challenging myself won't make me any smarter.
- 36 There are some things I am not capable of learning.
- 37 If I am not naturally smart in a subject, I will never do well in it.

RESPONSES (Reversed)

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 5 Not at all true | 4 or higher is considered a positive response. |
| 4 A little true | <i>Adapted from Measuring MESH: Student and Teacher Surveys Curated for the CORE Districts, Transforming Education (2016)</i> |
| 3 Somewhat true | |
| 2 Very true | |
| 1 Completely true | |

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Ability to clearly communicate one's thoughts, be aware of one's own communication style and those of others, and be empathetic

Please tell us how confident you are at doing each of the things below.

- 14 I can be a good group leader.
- 15 I can appreciate opinions that are different from mine.
- 16 I can work well with others.
- 17 I can solve problems with other students without being aggressive.
- 18 I often think about the feelings of other students.
- 19 I usually work well with other students without being told to.

RESPONSES

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1 False | 4 or higher is considered a positive response. |
| 2 Somewhat false | |
| 3 A little false | <i>Adapted from Teamwork Scale, American Camping Association (2007) and Social Competence Scale, ChildTrends (2014)</i> |
| 4 A little true | |
| 5 Somewhat true | |
| 6 True | |

2019-20 STUDENT SUCCESS NETWORK SEL SURVEY BY COMPETENCY

PROBLEM-SOLVING

Ability to identify a problem, analyze possible plans to resolve the problem, select and implement a plan, and evaluate the outcome

Please tell us how often you do some things or feel a certain way.

- 1 I compare different solutions to find the best one to solve my problem.
- 2 I look at a problem from many different viewpoints (my own, my friends', my family's, etc.).
- 4 When solving a problem, I look at all possible solutions.
- 5 I try to get all the facts before I try to solve a problem.
- 6 I try to think about the long-term results of each possible solution.

RESPONSES

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| 1 Almost never | 3 or higher is considered a positive response. |
| 2 Sometimes | <i>Adapted from Solving Problems, Barkman et al (2002)</i> |
| 3 Often | |
| 4 Almost Always | |

SELF-REGULATION

Ability to successfully manage one's behaviors in academic situations — effectively managing impulses and motivating oneself to work towards academic goals

Please tell us how confident you are at doing each of the things below.

- 23 Get teachers to help me when I get stuck on schoolwork.
- 24 Finish my homework on time.
- 25 Get myself to study when there are other interesting things to do.
- 26 Organize my schoolwork.
- 27 Get myself to do schoolwork.

RESPONSES

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1 Not confident at all | 4 or higher is considered a positive response. |
| 2 Slightly Confident | |
| 3 Moderately Confident | |
| 4 Very Confident | <i>Adapted from Children's Self-Efficacy Scale, Bandura (2006)</i> |
| 5 Extremely Confident | |

SELF-ADVOCACY

(1) Self-Awareness: Conscious knowledge of one's strengths, weaknesses, and needs (2) Agency: Ability and tendency to speak up for oneself and gather appropriate resources

Please tell us how confident you are at doing each of the things below.

- 10 I think about how to become a better person.
- 11 I stop to think about my day.
- 12 I check with someone (advisor, teacher) to see how I'm doing.
- 13 I set goals for myself.
- 20 I tell teachers / adults what I need.
- 21 When I disagree with teachers / adults, I tell them.
- 22 When things get hard, I can deal with them.

RESPONSES

- | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|---|
| 1 Almost never | 1 Strongly Disagree | 3 or higher is considered a positive response. |
| 2 Sometimes | 2 Sort of disagree | <i>Student Success Network / Research Alliance (2015)</i> |
| 3 Often | 3 Sort of agree | |
| 4 Almost always | 4 Strongly agree | |

Appendix C

IRB Approval Letter

Institutional Review Board



DATE: January 31, 2023

TO: Karrah Lucht, Principal Investigator

FROM: Dr. Robert Nava, Chair
Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB

ACTION: **APPROVED**

PROJECT TITLE: [2013505-1] The Impact of a Social Emotional Learning Integrated Curriculum on Student Social Emotional Competencies

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

APPROVAL DATE: January 31, 2023

EXPIRATION DATE:

REVIEW TYPE: Exempt Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Exempt Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB.

This project has been determined to be a project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of .