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AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY JOURNEY: SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN A POST-COVID CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY JOURNEY: SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN A

POST-COVID CLASSROOM

(December 2023)

April Edwards Bachelor of Science

Graduate Thesis Chair: Rebekah Piper

In this autoethnography journey, we explore the question*, "What resources are available for teachers to use to guide SEL instruction, and how effective are those resources post-pandemic?"* Post-COVID-19 pandemic, we noticed that our students needed more social interaction time in the classroom. Student behaviors increased alongside teacher frustration. Districts immediately began to see this struggle in the school systems and the growing concern from parents and teachers. Our children were not taught how to respectfully express their social and emotional needs due to the lack of opportunity to practice with others. During this study, we found that teachers are reaching around for any access to resources to help guide this instruction. The question of the resource's validity and reliability. This particular study does utilize district-given resources for the lessons. After the research, we found that implementing SEL with fidelity and purpose allowed our students to find their voice in a safe and comfortable culture alongside their teachers in the classroom. The lack of support and resources could make our students suffer later.

DEDICATION

This research is for all of my fellow teachers in the world. May you continue to shine in this classroom social and emotional learning journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my chair, my mentor, and my professor, Dr. Rebekah Piper, I sincerely thank you from the bottom of my heart for your guidance and patience throughout this entire writing process. You helped me make my vision come alive, and I am forever grateful to you.

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Lastly, I would like to thank the fantastic Edwards crew. This has been a journey that I am so grateful you all have been a part of with me. Without your support and God's guidance, I would not be here.

I love you all!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the last three years, our society has been impacted in various areas, requiring us to adjust our lives. Healthcare professionals were affected with medical centers filled and understaffed, hospitality and tourism were brought to a halt, corporate employers struggled to meet the needs of communities, and superintendents were required to make decisions about what was best for students and families across multiple academic years. While changes have become widely accepted across various fields, unbeknownst to school administrators, life in a PK-12 classroom has been forever changed. Teachers transitioned to online teaching during the pandemic, and most children were expected to learn in a virtual format. Likewise, families became facilitators of learning while maintaining their jobs, many in a virtual setting. Life during the pandemic was anything but average on many levels. For children, the little they knew about normalcy became more confusing as they dealt with the immediate changes due to the pandemic.

The education arena has become attuned to the basic needs that students lack post-pandemic, and educators have had to reevaluate how they are meeting the needs of students in their classrooms. One area that has been highly addressed post-pandemic is social and emotional learning (SEL). Educators have found a connection with SEL-taught students and the future outcomes of these students (Jones et al., 2015).

The topic is familiar to education because SEL has been a hot topic in early childhood education for many years (CASEL, 2017)**.** However, educators across PK-12 classrooms have actively sought ways to address SEL since students have returned to the classrooms. To illustrate this more clearly, consider the following vignette:

> *Welcome to Mrs. Ark's class; you have just entered a traditional second-grade*
>
> *classroom. It is August 2022, and students return to school after being online for 18*

months. Emotions are high as students enter their classrooms, there is high uncertainty around what education will "look" like, and teachers are pressured to ensure students meet grade-level standards.

Committed to the work, Mrs. Ark was ready to get to work. However, post-pandemic, she noted she had to constantly stop instruction to address behavior observed, including hitting, name-calling, disruptions of learning, invasion of personal space, and students using unkind words. Mrs. Ark has stated her concerns to the administration, and she has spoken with school counselors, parents, and other teachers in hopes of gaining support to address these concerns. However, the message is consistent across individuals in that they all see similar classroom behavior. Mrs. Ark pondered where to go from here. What resources and materials should she implement with her students to help address the issues? How can she build a toolbox of resources to support this work? Mrs. Ark went straight to the basics and began to review YouTube videos, books, and role-playing to gain more knowledge, all of which had little to no impact on the students' behaviors. Mrs. Ark was familiar with various districts that have approached this work by implementing an SEL department with trained staff to assist teachers experiencing behavior issues. However, she remained with one valid and concerning question: where do teachers begin? This short reflection from Mrs. Ark is the driving force behind this project.

Purpose of the Study

As a country, we have seen a tremendous impact in many different ways due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with the many challenges we continue to face, one that suggests we need our attention almost immediately is the SEL of our children. Teachers have been even more exhausted when addressing behavior, they see from their students in the classroom post-pandemic. Teachers ask for direction in integrating SEL in the classroom (Taylor et al., 2017). Our students need to be more in touch with handling their emotions. Teachers nationwide began to see an increase in students willing to challenge some of the rules in place. We then noticed our students' need for more manners, courtesy, respect, and patience. As a result, educators and districts have noticed an increase in discipline reports, absences, counselor visits, and more within our schools. Teachers are now scrambling and desire to find direction in addressing these behaviors, but where can they get their resources from? How do teachers know if they are using "appropriate materials"? Can teacher-made lessons have some impact on our students' SEL and academic needs?

Consider Mrs. Ark in the above passage when considering the following research question. *What tools and strategies are teachers using to address SEL in K-5 classrooms post-pandemic, and how are those tools and strategies selected based on an individual teacher's approach?*

Educators worldwide have cultivated the ability to change and adjust instruction and approach as needed. Many teachers have returned to the classroom resilient and ready to press forward past the COVID-19 pandemic. They have gained some perspective on things that begin to change around them, including children's and adults' social and emotional needs. During the first few months of the pandemic, families were forced to isolate and refrain from large gatherings to avoid the virus continuing to spread. Once students returned to school, teachers and

districts began seeing increased behavior issues. Teachers and parents are trying to pick up the pieces of SEL that fell unnoticed over the years. A study conducted in 2018 showed that 55% percent of parents were on board with SEL being used in the classroom. As of 2021, more parents agreed, increasing to 62% (Hill, 2021). Additionally, the report stated that teacher burnout is associated with higher cortisone levels in students (Kim et al., 2022). With this information, teachers continue to wonder how they can find valuable resources to help our students and teachers.

This autoethnography aims to explore - through action research - how one educator approaches SEL within the classroom to support overall academic success for students. Specifically, three main areas will be assessed: *explicit instruction, integration of SEL into academic instruction, and a supportive classroom environment*. Further details will be discussed throughout the methodology section of this work.

Positionality

As an educator, I have experienced some tricky classroom situations. I've been unsure how to address specific issues I have recently observed in the classroom. For example, students have been very unkind to one another. They cannot show empathy or sympathy for others. Patience is scarce to see in a student during these times. Through continuous observation, I realized that both students and teachers displayed these behaviors. As part of my reflective process, I recognize a need for more instruction around SEL. As a parent, I understand the importance of children developing social and emotional characteristics. Considering this idea, I wish SEL was more of a priority in the classroom. It has been gratifying to support children through those difficult conversations. Being honest with children about their social and

emotional needs and encouraging them to express their feelings without fear of consequences is a critical component of being a responsible and productive teacher.

Furthermore, teachers should have access to materials and lessons that address the SEL needs of their students. The passion behind this work stems from the desire to properly support my students further in all areas, both academically and socially/emotionally. Through my teaching experiences, interactions with colleagues, and graduate studies, I have recognized that it is just as crucial for me to address my own bias and microaggressions. The students I work with in class thrive on our open conversations, and they enjoy the SEL lessons that I have started to implement in our weekly instruction. I aim to ensure that students are provided with high-quality academic instruction and a welcoming environment to continue developing their social and emotional needs based on where they are currently.

Finally, it is essential to note that social and emotional learning and SEL will be used interchangeably throughout this work.

Discussion of Significance

When students can process their emotions appropriately, it gives them an advantage in life with the ability to set boundaries early and understand their own emotions better to prepare to handle situations that trigger them. This entire process allows students to obtain a more proactive rather than a reactive mindset. Students need the opportunity to advocate for themselves and feel comfortable enough to share their feelings with a trusted adult or friend. By doing this, we teach students the ability of decision-making so they may feel the true impact of the consequences. To be productive citizens in society, individuals must genuinely know themselves. This notion encompasses many characteristics, including social and emotional stability and understanding learners with vital social and emotional needs. Educators who can

model this are courageous teachers, considering they must go against the grain. Schools are a prime context to consider how children are prepared to address social and emotional needs within the classroom.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

It is not easy to establish an accurate baseline regarding what each child should be able to do regarding their social and emotional development by a certain age. Koplow (2021) believes that by the time students reach kindergarten, they should be confident that they can say goodbye to their parents, engage with others, and ask their teacher for help when and if needed. Many factors must be considered when determining a student's social and emotional capability. Kim et al. (2022) suggests that knowing about the child's family trauma history is essential to building that connection. We also need to think about educators and how this impacts them. Half of our new teachers quit this profession within the first five years of their careers due to burnout from students' behavior and uncertainty about how to address those concerns (Kim et al., 2022).

Social and Emotional Development within the Brain

Understanding how the brain develops is crucial to fully understand what we should expect our children to know socially and emotionally and by what time frame. There is a vagus nerve in the body that has a significant impact on how we respond to certain situations. The vagus nerve regulates emotions by sweating, heart rate, and emotional coaching, which can trigger how students regulate their emotions (McClelland, 2001). It is important to note that the limbic system is closely associated with emotional response; the hippocampus relates to the memory and ways it is retained, and the thalamus relays information (McClelland, 2001). There is also a neurotransmitter in the brain called serotonin, and these levels can affect your mood, social behavior, sleep, and sexual desires (McClelland, 2001). One of the last parts of the brain to develop is the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for planning and future thinking (Robbins et al., 1996). One of the reasons we see children reacting more to emotion than logic is the development of the limbic system before the frontal cortex (Casey et al., 2008).

Factors to consider when addressing SEL

Research shows that children who feel "neglected" by others begin to withdraw from others, may become inattentive, and have low academics in school (Erickson & Egeland, 1996). Also, if a child has parents who have dealt with or are currently dealing with depression, then their child is more than likely to have adverse side effects, including delays in learning. Many additional factors can also contribute to how individuals may deal with specific issues, including anxiety and depression. There are forms of abuse that are also associated with issues later in life, including eating disorders, sexual experiences, and self-esteem (Mullen et al., 1996). When a person has to deal with anxiety and fear, there can be a negative impact on how the person functions and handles problems later in life, including high levels of irritability, tantrums, and outbursts (Perry 1998, 2006). While some of the decisions that children make can become frustrating and daunting for educators and parents, it is essential to remember that it is common for younger adolescents to use more of the limbic system to guide their decisions and initial reactions (Arain et al., 2013; Choudhury et al., 2006).

Stages of Development in SEL

At birth, babies have an instinct to survive and have their basic needs met. Crying and cooing are the most common ways infants communicate their needs. As these newborns continue to grow and develop, they will begin to learn to imitate facial expressions that are close enough to them to recognize (Meltzoff & Moore, 1983). A child's ability to decipher the different facial expressions improves and differs based on personal development (McClelland, 2001). Research shows that infants who have social and emotional environments early will later affect the individual's social and emotional functioning (Schore, 1994).

In the State of Michigan's "*Social & Emotional Milestones for Toddlers*", children should be doing the following things between the ages of 1-2. Toddlers begin to have a voice that they are not shy about using. This is about the age where temper tantrums are common. Parents need to begin to talk to their children and explain how they feel by modeling and using words. Ages 2-3 This is when we will see toddlers' independence expand. They continue to interact with their peers and are interested in interacting more with them. During this time, parents should begin talking with their children about what they are observing and try to interpret their peers' emotions in a safe environment with a trusted adult. 4-5 years Preschoolers begin to question the world around them. They are more aware of others' feelings, bonding with new friends, and exploring independence. Parents should begin to model and role-play, sharing and apologizing at this stage.

Just as Dacey et al. (2016) suggest, the following goals are what students should be able to do between the ages of six and ten. Our students should be able to assist your child in gaining control over her feelings when competing, encourage your child to notice the needs of others and to attempt to help others meet their respective needs, To teach your child the power that underlies giving someone a genuine compliment or acts of encouragement, To encourage your child to think about uniqueness, To teach your child about the many different qualities inherent in connections with others, To help your child recognize the many qualities of friendship that exist and how to strengthen bonds between people, To help your child recognize that many different feelings and attributes contribute to who we are. Between the ages of six and fifteen, our students should be able to reach a deep state of relaxation and emotional serenity To help your child know her abilities objectively. Between the ages of ten and fifteen, our students should be able to encourage your child to pay attention to and remember specific items. Between

the ages of ten and sixteen, our students should be able to Develop an unconscious method of calming the anxious mind, Develop an unconscious method of calming anxious mind. Between the ages of eleven and fifteen, our students should be able to release tension through visualizations, use the sensory experience to stifle negative thoughts, interrupt your child's anxious obsessions, and reduce their severity. Creating a fear scale allows you and your child to chart fearful episodes. Over time, this tends to help him recover. Encourage your child to notice the needs of others (Dacey et al., 2016).

Importance of SEL

SEL is a broad term that can include people's mental, behavioral, and self-control skills to express themselves (CASEL, 2017). Educators understand the importance of being able to assess students' learning. These assessments should include their social and emotional understanding. Teachers understand that data drives decisions. Having this information about students' emotional needs allows the teacher to scaffold students' learning based on what they can understand. If students desire structure and stability, what happens when teachers do not have the tools and resources to address these classroom difficulties? Many educators and parents worldwide are asking for the SEL curriculum to be added to the school curriculum and objectives. Parents have begun to take the initiative to learn more about their own child's emotions rather than continue to wait for schools (Hover-Reisner et al., 2018). Educators need to ensure that students can observe, recognize, and identify emotional cues from others to build on their SEL growth. Once students become aware of their own emotions and the emotions of others, they can apply new decision-making skills that allow them to approach social and academic situations with more of an understanding of how-to problem-solve or make appropriate

decisions (McKown et al., 2013). Students who practice SEL consistently have more of an academic and mental advantage in life once they leave school (CASEL, 2017).

Benefits of SEL

While there are some other resources available for educators to use to support their implementation of SEL, a therapeutic professional is an excellent insight for staff to have moments to self-reflect (Hinshelwood, 2009). Once someone sees that there can be multiple perspectives on one situation, it allows them to develop their mental capacity. Relationships made in school with students from support staff, educators, and more are vital in helping students form and regulate their emotions and other relationships in and out of school (Taylor, 2012). When multiple techniques are utilized to differentiate SEL practices, the teacher can reach multiple students at one time (White et al., 2022). Teachers should have the opportunity to receive training that can help equip them with the materials needed to foster students to have a more mentalizing, resilient, and thoughtful mindset (Kim et al., 2022). Communicating and interacting with others can sometimes be a complex thing to do. This is why we should have moments for adults to experience SEL growth (Hinshelwood, 2009; Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 2018; Youell, 2018). Research has shown that people who do not feel a purpose for their lives tend to become disconnected from the community around them (Katz et al., 2018). This is a prime opportunity for educators to use more SEL in the classroom to benefit our surrounding communities.

What is currently happening in the classroom

We should not assume what every class and child should be able to do and understand. We must assess every child individually to determine the class and individual needs. Teachers have multiple moments throughout the day to take advantage of SEL opportunities to implement

real-life conversations and continue to build on students' social and emotional growth

(McClelland, 2001). However, educators must consider the strategies that they plan to implement

in the classroom when teaching SEL. Teachers wear many hats while working and are now

encouraged to use more SEL in the classroom and be more emotionally available for their

students with little to no resources. Educators have been complaining for years about how

academics and test scores seem to drive education. Teachers are expected to meet students at

their level, yet most students are crying out for direction on handling their emotions, and

educators still need to be guided (Konstantinou & Miller, 2021). Educators worldwide are

beginning to see a push for social and emotional learning to be taught in the classroom. A fifth-

grade teacher spoke about how their school faced many challenges, including high poverty, new

teachers, and increased safety concerns. She states that through all of the issues they were facing

as a school, it baffled her that the principal continued to discuss and prioritize test scores at staff

meetings (Hoerr, 2020). Albert Einstein put it best when he said, "Not everything that can be

counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted. Some teachers adapt to the SEL

world naturally; as a result, we see more teachers enjoying the lessons and teaching about SEL

(Reyes et al., 2012). While programs are available to educators to help them build their

knowledge of SEL and its objectives, educators everywhere can share their experiences,

knowledge, and wisdom with their students daily (McClelland, 2001). Teachers tremendously

impact their students' social and emotional learning and growth. Educators have a particular

influence in providing children the opportunity to practice self-efficacy and resilience and

understand their importance (McClelland, 2001). Self-efficacy is the ability to believe oneself to

a capacity that enables one to perform the behaviors necessary to produce (Bandura, 1997). Our

behavior is naturally dictated by our expectations of ourselves in self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

What tools do we see being used?

Multiple tools can be used when beginning the process of SEL in the classrooms, but if this is not considered a priority for students, how do educators get the things they need? Educators wish both SEL and academic learning (AL) would take place in schools everywhere. However, with so many countries concentrating on teaching and measuring AL, this goal appears unlikely (Dacey et al., 2016). SEL can affect one's future confidence, social skills, and academics (DiPerna & Elliott, 2002; Payton et al., 2008). Teachers are beginning to do their active research with their students. They use intentional approaches and practices they can find (Baumann & Duffy, 2001). Educators believe that resources readily available to support the SEL curriculum can impact the students' outcomes (CASEL, 2017).

Teachers will identify with one of the following three types of responses to children's conflict resolution: avoidance, competition, or cooperation (Jenkins et al., 2008). We need to intentionally teach children social-emotional learning and the Formative Five success skills of empathy, self-control, integrity, embracing diversity, and grit so they can succeed in life (CASEL, 2017). We can help our students start recognizing their patterns and behavior, it could help them regulate themselves appropriately (Yang et al., 2021). While the teachers are a critical part of this learning, we also know that children are highly influenced by their parents, siblings, friends, and more (Goncu & Cannella, 1996). Teachers have been given resources such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), books, and professional developments that provide strategies to calm students. However, our students are still crying out for help. Educators report wanting to use SE competence assessments to guide SE instruction and measure student growth but need to figure out how (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019).

Next steps

Although there has been active research to establish evidence-based practice evaluating (EBP) of SEL programs worldwide, the quality of SEL intervention studies, which is an integral part of evaluating EBP, should have been investigated more. Many have argued that social–emotional factors are related to academic outcomes because schools are inherently social settings, and the learning process is inherently social (Zins et al., 2007). Well-developed social–emotional factors increase student availability to learn and engage with peers, promoting academic outcomes (Bear et al., 2015; Zins et al., 2007).

Teachers must maintain not only academic learning within their classroom but also a healthy and affirming environment. It is time for us to observe some of the curriculum based SEL lessons provided to educators and push for consistently using these materials. This literature review presents the literature in the areas of child development, social-emotional learning, and the brain, factors to consider, stages of development, current classroom practices, benefits of SEL, what tools we see being used, why social and emotional learning is needed, and the next steps.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The idea of research needs to be more explicit in the methodology. Researchers can identify the approach – or methodology – they choose to answer the given research question. In this case, I used the autoethnography methodology. Autoethnography is a genre of academic writing that analyzes or interprets the life and experience of the author and connects the researcher's insights to the area intended to be studied (Adams et al., 2015). Due to the context of this study, as a full-time teacher, the goal to identify what practices and strategies were being utilized within the classroom to address SEL was of high importance. Therefore, this work took the form of an action research approach. In this action research, I assessed my teaching, including SEL lessons. I also used two assessments from Casel: 10 indicators of Schoolwide SEL- Strengths and Needs Reflection & The TOOL: Educator Self-Assessment. These assessments encourage learning collaboration to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning an integral part of preschool through high school education. This allowed me to assess my strengths and areas of opportunity using these specific focus areas when considering our lessons. Explicit instruction, integration of SEL into academic instruction, and a supportive classroom climate were the main three areas used in the school survey and self-assessment. The ultimate goal was to see how accessible resources can be obtained for teachers to support SEL targeting their students' specific needs.

School Setting

This autoethnography study took place in a suburban elementary school in South Texas. Clemmons Elementary was opened as a brand-new school for the 2023-2024 school year. The classroom where the study takes place is a first-grade class. There are seventeen students in total, with ten males and seven females. These students were approximately three years old when the

COVID-19 pandemic hit our families. These students have delayed foundational social skills as a result of the pandemic.

Participant

In this autoethnography study, I am the sole participant. I am a thirty-four-year-old African American woman. I have been a certified teacher of record for four and a half years. I have taught second grade for three and a half years and fifth grade for one year. During my teaching career at a former elementary school, I earned the Teacher of the Year award (2020) and was nominated for other awards by my peers. I am married with three children, and we all reside within three miles of our home schools. I am now a teacher at Clemmons Elementary, where I started as a second-grade teacher and was moved to a first-grade class two weeks into the Fall 2023 school year.

Timeline

The timeline for this study is based on the beginning of the 2023 -2024 academic year. The traditional school year began as we welcomed students back on August 28, 2023. This project was implemented over 8 weeks during the fall semester of the 2023-2024 school year. The following timeline served as the research calendar. The timeline's purpose was to guide the study from beginning to end. The timeline includes the week, theme, and lesson topic:

Week 1: 08/28/2023   Theme: Community Building   Lesson Topic: Welcome/ Intro

Week 2: 09/01/2023   Theme: Teacher Pre-survey   Lesson Topic: TOOL: self-assessment

Week 3: 09/08/2023   Theme: Acceptance   Lesson Topic: Being a leader.

Week 4: 09/15/2023   Theme: 10 indicators reflection   Lesson Topic: NEW CLASS

Week 5: 09/22/2023   Theme: Community Building   Lesson Topic: New Self-Assessment

Week 6: 09/29/2023   Theme: Non-Violent Communication Lesson Topic: i-messages

Week 7: 10/06/2023   Theme: Respect   Lesson Topic: bullying

Week 8: 10/13/2023   Theme: Mgmt. emotions /Post-survey Lesson Topic: Turtle technique

Data Sources

This research includes the following data sources: a survey (pre and post), 10 indicators of schoolwide SEL reflection, mini-lessons, SEL resources, and personal reflections. These data sources played a critical role in the data collection process.

Pre-Survey

The pre-survey in Appendix A was used to measure the baseline understanding of implementing SEL materials within a class setting. The survey, designed by CASEL (n.d.), addresses the following components: Explicit instruction, integration of SEL into academic instruction, and a supportive classroom climate. The sole participant completed this survey before teaching the first mini-lesson on SEL in the second-grade classroom.

10 indicators of schoolwide SEL reflection

The 10 indicators of schoolwide SEL, located in Appendix B, were used to measure specific foundation structures that the school should put in place. This reflection allows the educator to assess these areas of the school to see where there are areas of opportunities as a campus to focus on. The 10 indicators of schoolwide SEL include descriptions of the following topics: SEL team, Communication plan, Foundational knowledge of SEL, Shared vision for SEL, Implementation plan, Professional learning, Evidence-based SEL programs and practices, SEL integrated instruction, Youth voice and engagement, Supportive school and classroom climates, and Focus on adult SEL Supportive discipline A continuum of integrated supports like the 10 indicators supports and addresses the educators needs from their school/ district.

Mini-Lessons: There were a total of three mini-lessons that were facilitated by me, the teacher participant. The i-messages, bullying, and turtle technique lessons were determined based on the needs of the classroom setting.

Resources: I used Panorama as a resource for lessons. The district also provided books to see what is available for educators. One of the books used in Week 7 included "*The Juice Box Bully*" (Sornson et al., 2019), and I used my best judgment when deciding appropriate topics to discuss with the class. There were times when I needed to use Google as a resource when specific materials were not available.

Reflections. Reflections were completed after each lesson. The reflections allowed me to document observed behaviors, findings, and personal connections. A journal with the reflections was kept, and the reflective process took place on the same day as the lesson.

Post Survey. After the last lesson, I completed another survey in Appendix A to see if there had been any visible changes in my approach to implementing SEL.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

As previously noted, data was collected through a pre-survey, mini lessons on SEL, critical reflection journal entries, reflections, and a post-survey. Through the data collected, I gained an in-depth understanding of the need for SEL in classrooms; key data points enabling this understanding focused on learning more about my impact on students as I implemented SEL activities through part of my regular instruction.

Due to the multiple data collection methods, including the pre-survey, mini-lessons on SEL, critical reflection journal entries, reflections, and the post-survey - triangulation was used in the data analysis process (Glesne, 2011). Employing triangulation was essential to ensure that the conclusions drawn from each data source were as accurate as possible and, thus, that the

overall conclusions that this autoethnography drew were likewise accurate. The use of multiple data sources enriched each source - providing the opportunity for the data collected in one area to shed light on the data collected in another (Cresswell, 2013). For example, using the critical reflection journal entries allowed me to thoughtfully process or debrief the mini-lesson and elaborate on a topic introduced during the SEL instruction.

I kept the study's research question in mind throughout the data analysis and interpretation process. The pre-survey was used as a baseline to measure my current practice in implementing SEL within the classroom. Additionally, the pre-survey helped when selecting the topics for the lesson and, ultimately, the effectiveness of the lessons. The mini-lessons were based on the needs of the class. The topics included feelings, decision-making, and respecting differences in others. As topics were introduced, I discussed the definition of the topics, students discussed their own experiences with the topic, and they identified appropriate ways that they should and should not respond. The data from the three lessons were used to show the impact that SEL lessons have on student behavior and interaction with one another. The lessons were also utilized as an area of self-analysis for the participant. The post-survey was completed and compared to the pre-survey to show the differences and notices between the two. This process helped to identify the growth, or lack thereof, in myself using social and emotional lessons to target student behavior and growth across the stages of development in SEL.

I used triangulation to compare my mini-lessons, reflections, and pre/post-survey as part of the analysis process. Because the journal entries provided the bulk of the data in this study, they were first analyzed through hand coding to identify emergent themes common in experiences across all lessons and interactions around SEL. During the process, I was able to reread through the journals, reflections, lessons, and surveys and highlighted terms that stood out

to me in the journal entries. For example, I wrote in one of my reflections, "I gave my students a chance to practice this with their classmates." I highlighted "student a chance to practice" and coded it as student voice. I listed all keywords and began to compare common themes. I crossed out all terms with no other mentions throughout the coding, or I could move some under the previously chosen terms. I chose the top six standard terms because they all had more than four times their terms occurring in the coding. I then noted these emerging themes in the findings, using them as examples. This analysis allowed me to visualize the connections between the data and group emergent themes across the data. Data from all sources was analyzed with these themes in mind.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

As discussed, the analysis process involved hand-coding the data to identify themes that emerged across the data sources and data patterns within the themes. The similarities across data sources are discussed under the following themes: Resources and Techniques, Emotions, School Culture and Connections, Student Voice, and Shared Knowledge Gained Through SEL Instruction.

Resources and Techniques

The Panorama playbook was provided to all district employees upon returning to the classroom for in-person learning. The playbook was designed to give a variety of resources for educators to address their students' social and emotional needs. Educators can look up resources based on the domain, focus area, curriculum partner, rating, developmental stage, curriculum/ framework alignment, tier, evaluation level, and resource features. This ensures that teachers can access multiple resources based on their decided filter(s). One example used as part of this particular study includes the i-message lesson given in week six. I searched "patience" in the panorama playbook, and it yielded no results. I decided to click on filters instead and selected SEL as one of the filters. As I scrolled through the lessons that showed up, I saw two interesting topics like my initial search. The first topic was "What I said…but I meant," the next topic I saw that caught my attention was "i-messages." When I selected the first topic, "What I said…but I meant", the effort and action levels were too advanced for first grade. I clicked on the second option, "I-messages," which was a perfect lesson for our class.

Additionally, an Amazon Calming Corner Poster hung in the classroom and shared multiple emotions for students to use as a guide to model or illustrate their feelings. We listened to the read-aloud "The Juice Box Bully" during our lesson on respecting others" (Sornson et al.,

2019). The Panorama playbook provides many techniques for teachers to implement based on their students' needs. For example, a filter and search engine within the playbook helps narrow down the specific topic. The topics include deep breaths, explaining, communicating feelings, and role-playing scenarios.

This tool suggests that social and emotional learning involves finding a technique that works for you and allows you to regulate and properly manage your emotions. This holds for my research as I leaned on the resources, I found in the Panorama playbook to design the mini-lessons. Furthermore, extending the learning through the lessons was possible by allowing the students to have dialogue with one another to see multiple perspectives. Additionally, students were provided opportunities to practice the techniques in a safe learning environment. Providing students with multiple scenarios around a specific topic allowed them to gain a deeper understanding and connection to how others feel. This practice gave students a vital social awareness when engaging with others. By exploring, explaining, and experiencing, I noticed firsthand how I allowed the students to connect in a deeper and more meaningful way.

Emotions

The data revealed that the mini-lessons allowed the students to reflect on their emotions. Through observations, it was evident that the students could identify their own emotions, consider others' emotions, and learn how to understand better how their emotions impacted their decision-making process. For example, reflecting on the bullying lesson on week seven, I noted, "I could easily select and engage students in deciding on our read-aloud story. We had a pre-selected list of read-aloud stories to choose from. We asked the students to help us decide on the story by voting. We asked the students what they thought bullying was, and we were able to

clear up any misconceptions and misunderstandings. We discussed who students can go to, when, and if they or someone they know is being bullied.

This example evidenced the notion that students were encouraged to explore emotions such as needs, desires, patience, empathy, honesty, and being aware of others' emotions using social cues in a safe and judgment-free environment.

School Culture, Connections, and Expectations

Children spend seven to eight hours a day in the school environment. Therefore, students need to be able to speak up for themselves. This theme emerged throughout the data as I considered how I continued to make connections between the classroom and the overall school environment. During one of the lessons, I shared with students how to safely report bullying. Details such as who to report to, the various types of bullying, and ways to stop bullying were discussed. Due to the school culture and expectations, it is clear that there is a solid commitment to ensuring bullying is not tolerated. Making this commitment as a school and having students agree to these rules sets a positive and affirming tone that means no one will tolerate bullying.

As a teacher, I hold high expectations for my students. This theme was evident through the reflections as I identified specific expectations, I had set for the students to engage in SEL learning during the lessons. For example, during one of the lessons, students experienced an emergency fire drill and were expected to move swiftly out of the classroom. While unplanned, it was perfect because it was unexpected, and the students began to use their learned techniques to calm themselves down due to the sudden change. In school, we say that repetition is essential to a child's learning; the same is true with social and emotional learning. Students need to see confident adults model managing emotions and communication among one another.

Student Voice

Throughout the data collection process, I observed students as they learned how to gain and use their voices. This was a necessary trait to learn during these lessons to minimize and prevent bullying in our classroom and school settings. For example, I had the opportunity to model for students what good communication looks like when frustrated or upset about a particular topic. This allowed students to see both sides of what that could feel like. Additionally, during one of our lessons, I allowed students to role-play how they would respond to certain situations. This process showed students how difficult it can be to express and receive someone else's emotions during a conversation. Allowing students to practice in a safe learning environment allows them to explore the unknown. Lastly, during the lesson on respect, collectively, as a class, we had to decide which story to read aloud. We decided to take a vote so that everyone had the opportunity to be a part of the decision. Students have to respect one another, and they enjoy having that autonomy that is safe and age appropriate.

Shared Knowledge Gained Through SEL Instruction

Having a shared knowledge of social and emotional learning can impact how teachers approach the topics with their students. The data revealed that students were able to gain an understanding of what emotions are. The students were given opportunities to understand how to deal with their emotions and other people's emotions and also learned the importance of setting boundaries. This was evidenced through observations during the lessons and documented in reflections. I was able to observe students throughout multiple lessons where they were actively listening to one another and valuing a different perspective. Modeling for students is critical as they develop new SEL practices.

The shared knowledge included the new learning by students and within myself as I developed my repertoire of skills to implement with students to increase their knowledge of the

social and emotional learning characteristics. An example of this shared knowledge is narrated in the final reflection, "Social and emotional learning requires patience and flexibility on the teacher's end when implementing lessons in the classroom. The support of the school, administration, and fellow educators is also a big factor in creating a safe and successful social and emotional implementation of lessons in the class."

Discussion and Implications for Further Research

According to Dacey et al. (2016) and based on the research, I found that students at this age are given age-appropriate lessons. As the classroom teacher, participant, and researcher, I addressed some of the mental, behavioral, and self-control skills and aspects of SEL when issues arise during a lesson. Students were encouraged to use the strategies they had been previously taught, and I would help facilitate those conversations with students. CASEL (2017) suggests that specific skills are needed for people to express themselves. There was evidence of this in all of the SEL lessons taught. I even had the opportunity to share some of my authentic emotions and past stories with my students. It gave us something to relate to, allowing my students to see me in a vulnerable light.

Once students become aware of their emotions and the emotions of others, they can apply decision-making skills that allow them to approach social and academic situations with more of an understanding of how-to problem-solve or make appropriate decisions (McKown et al., 2013). The students have slowly gained more autonomy in decision-making and seem more comfortable sharing their emotions with others. It is truly a joy to see my students handle conflict using their words, being kind, and using i-statements. The ability to observe the changes within my students while also acknowledging my development was impactful. Furthermore, the lessons allowed me to see my growth as a teacher and identify areas I still need to develop.

I must deal with less conflict in the classroom because the students can identify how to use their learned strategies to help express their emotions. This provides me more time with other students to focus on academic needs and less focus on behavioral issues.

The social and emotional learning component is critical for our students and families worldwide. When students can actively see safe and caring people around them, it allows them to feel comfortable being vulnerable. When the entire school is involved in developing its students' social and emotional needs, it brings a culture that creates a safe and comfortable environment for both students and faculty alike in the school and the classroom. When teachers are allowed to connect with their own social and emotional experiences and their students and the school as their support, it creates confidence in teachers that is needed and could truly slow down the rate of new teachers quitting. This study is unique due to its methodological approach. However, the pedagogical practices and implementation of SEL could be combined across other classroom environments with proper training and support for teachers to positively influence the development of SEL for all school-aged children. Various factors impact social and emotional learning, and additional research in the post-COVID era would provide teachers with further details about how to implement SEL to impact student learning and development.

Limitations

Limitations of this study relate primarily to the context, school setting, and enrollment.

Context

The Brookside school district provided the resources and materials to utilize when teaching SEL in the classroom. However, not all districts have access to the resources. This is a limitation as this study illustrates one example of SEL instruction in one elementary-level classroom.

School Setting

This elementary school is newly built and opened in the fall of 2023. The new environment allows for the leaders on campus to grow the school and classroom cultures in a positive direction.   The following steps would be to see how student behavior trends over time if social and emotional learning is a part of the school curriculum.

Enrollment

During the data collection phase, there was a change in grade levels due to enrollment. This occurred two weeks into the school year when community building was vital in elementary classrooms. As such, my original second-grade class was divided and dispersed amongst the other second-grade teachers, and I was placed in a new grade level and received first-graders from three other classes at the school. Due to the format of this study, it could have been conducted in any classroom and at any grade level. However, this change is a limitation.

Acknowledging these limitations across the study is essential as I am the teacher conducting action research to understand how to support my students best to ensure they gain the knowledge of SEL to prepare them better as they develop as learners and active members of society.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Teachers and educators continue to scramble and look for different tools and resources when implementing SEL. Some of the tools and strategies I found helpful during our lessons were the Panorama playbook and stories on YouTube. The Panorama playbook was a resource provided to staff by the district. YouTube is an online search engine that allows us to have stories like *"The Juice Box Bully"*(Sornson, 2011) to be read aloud to us. While teachers can attempt to implement SEL in their classrooms and are highly encouraged, it is essential to note the strong connection between the 10 indicators of schoolwide SEL reflection and the self-assessment used before and after the research. The support of the district having resources readily available to their teachers was very helpful. I found the filters and search engine to be extremely helpful. Schoolwide implementation of SEL throughout the school day allows teachers to have consistent expectations, students to obtain a voice, and administration to see a decrease in office referrals. Teachers should note that they need help finding a resource and constantly expect the lessons to work to the student's advantage. Understanding the why and finding an appropriate way to communicate your expectations to your students is learned in professional development. Many educators now have the option to sign up for many of their training courses.

Additionally, the district has mandated specific topics as required for all teachers. If we required our teachers to be trained in adequately implementing SEL in the classroom, we could see a decrease in behavior issues across the nation. Teachers need help. We need all the structure and resources for SEL, just like we receive for AL.

Planning and implementing age-appropriate and targeted lessons is the best and ideal way to be an effective teacher. Educators should be able to have access to all resources that are shown to be effective for students' growth in a positive way, regardless of the school or district

they work in. As we continue to help develop our students' metacognition and prepare them for how to be proactive solution-finders, teachers should continue to guide and be an example to students on how to deal with their social and emotional needs.

Let's think back to the vignette mentioned above about Mrs. Ark. As we look back to her complaints and frustrations about the lack of resources and where to begin, it seems she purposely kept a critical question at the forefront of her thinking. She continued to ask herself, "Where do teachers begin?" Research gives us the time to find out the answers to the questions we have. Mrs. Ark, it would help if you began with research, as our world is ever-changing. I am overjoyed to share that I am glad I began the research. I am Mrs. Ark.

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Appendix A: Pre & Post Survey

TOOL: SEL in the Classroom Self-Assessment

TEACHER/CLASSROOM: _____ DATE: _____

Use this self-assessment three to four times over the course of the year to assess your strengths and areas to develop as you promote SEL through explicit instruction, integration into academic instruction, and a supportive classroom climate. Place a check in the column that indicates the frequency of each indicator. For indicators that you rate as "sometimes" or "infrequently," consider what strategies, resources, or support you may want to use to deepen your SEL practice. For indicators you rate as "unsure," consider what additional information or feedback you want to gather.

Markers of SEL in the Classroom		Often	Sometimes	Infrequently	Unsure
Explicit Instruction	I use an evidence-based approach to teach social and emotional skills in a sequenced, active, focused, and explicit way and on a regular schedule.				
	I teach SEL in a way that is developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive for my students.				
	My students lead routines, share their perspectives, and reflect on their experiences during SEL instruction.				
Integration of SEL into Academic instruction	SEL standards/goals are embedded into my academic lessons (see sample lesson plans).				
	Students make connections between SEL and what we're learning and initiate reflection and discussion.				
	I foster academic mindsets by helping students set goals, commending academic risk-taking and incremental progress, showing students how to correct mistakes, and framing struggle as a key part of the process of learning.				
	I select content and plan instruction that links to students' lived experiences and frames of reference and by anticipating support that individuals may need to access content and participate fully.				
	I design learning activities that allow students to explore issues that are important to them and co-create solutions to improve the classroom, school, or community.				
	Class time is balanced with periods of teacher-led instruction, student talk and interaction, and time to work/reflect alone.				
	I prepare students to engage in classroom discussions by actively listening to their peers, affirming and respectfully challenging each other's ideas, and formulating questions.				
	I ask open-ended questions to surface student thinking and probe students to elaborate on their response.				
	I use collaborative structures that require students to communicate, cooperate, share responsibility, monitor that all ideas are heard, and problem-solve.				
	Students reflect on what made their collective work successful and/or challenging and plan for improvement.				

For more information, tools, and resources, visit schoolguide.casel.org.

TOOL: SEL in the Classroom Self-Assessment

Supportive Classroom Climate	My class has co-developed shared agreements for how we will treat one another, and we check in regularly about how we are living by our shared agreements.				
	Students know, follow, initiate, and provide input and feedback on our regular classroom routines and procedures.				
	I communicate that I appreciate each student as an individual and am interested in knowing them.				
	I check in and follow up with students about their perspectives and concerns.				
	I facilitate class meetings, circles, or other intentional community-building activities to cultivate a culture of personal connection, mutual support, and belonging.				
	I vary student grouping so that each student gets to know and work with everyone else.				
	My classroom environment, activities, and interactions affirm students' diverse identities and cultures. We share and learn about each other's lives and backgrounds.				
	I teach, model, and reinforce language and strategies that help students to express empathy, resolve conflicts, repair harm, self-reflect, and self-regulate.				
	When classroom agreements are breached, I respond in a way that is discreet, developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and restorative (such as using empathetic listening, "I" statements, and open-ended questions).				

Appendix B: 10 INDICATORS OF SCHOOLWIDE SEL – STRENGTHS AND

NEEDS REFLECTION

10 INDICATORS OF SCHOOLWIDE SEL – STRENGTHS AND NEEDS REFLECTION

Directions: When fully implemented, schoolwide SEL contributes to more successful and equitable outcomes for young people. In the table below, reflect on the programs, practices, and strategies that your school is already using to support the essential components of schoolwide SEL identified below. Then, reflect on how your school community can grow the most. This reflection can be a helpful step in establishing common ground among stakeholders about where the school should focus their learning and implementation efforts for SEL.

	Foundational Structures	Description	Assets that Already Support this Indicator	Areas for Growth
	SEL team	Schoolwide SEL is led by a team that is composed of individuals who are representative of the full school community.		
	Communication plan	Structures are in place to support consistent two-way SEL communications between the SEL team and all stakeholders (e.g., town hall meetings, open door policies, social media).		
	Foundational knowledge of SEL	Members of the school community, including families and community partners, can discuss SEL's importance and its impact on student outcomes and understand their own role in helping students develop social and emotional competencies.		
	Shared vision for SEL	A collaboratively developed shared vision for schoolwide SEL is regularly communicated to the entire school community, informs planning and implementation, and is revisited regularly.		
	Implementation plan	The SEL team has developed an SEL implementation plan. This plan is integrated into schoolwide planning documents and is referenced and revised regularly.		

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		A professional learning plan for SEL offers staff regular opportunities to cultivate adult SEL and learn how to promote SEL for students.		
	Professional learning			
	Indicator of Schoolwide SEL	**Description**	**Assets that Already Support this Indicator**	**Areas for Growth**
	Evidence-based SEL programs and practices	Time is dedicated regularly for all students to cultivate, practice, and reflect on social and emotional competencies in ways that are developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive.		
	SEL integrated instruction	SEL objectives are integrated into instructional content and teaching strategies for academics as well as music, art, and physical education.		
	Youth voice and engagement	Staff honor and elevate a broad range of student perspectives and experiences by engaging students as leaders, problem solvers, and decision-makers.		
	Supportive school and classroom climates	Schoolwide and classroom learning environments are supportive, culturally responsive, and focused on building relationships and community.		
	Focus on adult SEL	Staff have regular opportunities to cultivate their own social, emotional, and cultural competence, collaborate with one another, build relational trust, and maintain a strong community.		
	Supportive discipline	Discipline policies and practices are instructive, restorative, developmentally appropriate, and equitably enforced.		
	A continuum of integrated supports	SEL is seamlessly integrated into a continuum of academic and behavioral supports, which are available to ensure that all student needs are met.		
	Authentic family partnerships	Families and school staff have regular and meaningful opportunities to build relationships and collaborate to support students' social, emotional, and academic development.		

	Aligned community partnerships	School staff and community partners align on common language, strategies, and communication around all SEL-related efforts and initiatives, including out-of-school time.		
	Systems for continuous improvement	School and classroom-level data are collected and used to continuously improve all SEL-related systems, practices, and policies with a focus on equity.		

Collaborating closely with out-of-school time partners? See the OST-enhanced version of this tool. http://bit.ly/2W4JroE)

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Education

December 2019	BS Interdisciplinary Studies, Texas A&M University-San Antonio
December 2016	associate degree in science of arts, Northwest Vista

Professional

2019 - present	Teacher, Northside ISD

Scholarship

Edwards, A. Piper, R.E., and Kohler, K. (2023, February). Implementing Social and Emotional
    Learning Texts to Support Student Post-Pandemic. *Southwest Educational
    Research Association* (SERA) Annual Conference. San Antonio, TX.

Awards, Service, and Recognitions

2020	Teacher of The Year, Mireles Elementary: NISD
2020	Nominated and Recipient of Outstanding Senior for 2020
2014-2019	Member, Black Student Union member
2019	Graduated with honors (Summa Cum Laude), Dean's list, President's list, Provost List