

PROMOTING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN SCHOOL

Lee Moi Ching, Yeo Kee Jiar and Hadijah Jaffri

1. INTRODUCTION

A key challenge for twenty-first century schools involves serving socio-culturally diverse students with varied abilities and motivations for learning (Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2008; Learning First Alliance, 2001). Unfortunately, many students lack social-emotional competencies and become less connected to school as they progress from primary to institutions of higher learning, and this lack of connection negatively affects their academic performance, behavior, and health (Blum & Libbey, 2004).

According to National Health and Morbidity Survey (2011), mental health problems among adolescence and children of age 15 and below rose to 20 percent in year 2011. In Malaysia, so far there is no detailed data available for a representative national sample. However, the condition of mental health conditions in adolescents has been a growing concern. Mental health difficulties or problems are often a great burden to the individual, family, school and with friends. Physical symptoms such as behavior problem are a manifestation of psychological difficulties. Discipline problem is a common phenomenon in every school in Malaysia. detailed

epistemological data has been available for a representative national sample in Malaysia.

Thus, with the absence of social-emotional competencies and emotional literacy, when the students are facing challenges in life, they will involve in various types of serious breaches of school policy and negative activities, such as bullying, truancy, gangsterism, vandalism, juvenile delinquency, pornography, drug use and the list will go on and on. According to Former Deputy Minister of Education, Datuk Dr Wee Ka Siong, 111,484 students were caught for indiscipline and comprised of 72,557 or 65.08 percent from secondary schools and 38,927 or 34.92 percent from primary schools. This included 17,595 students (0.32%) who were involved in crime, truancy (19,545 or 0.36%), misbehavior (18,346 or 0.39%), pornography (3,031 or 0.06%) and vandalism (5,212 or 0.1%) (MySin Chew, 2010, December 27).

The phenomenon of aggression in students is escalating, and occurs among younger and younger children. Students who have difficulties in managing emotions, developing positive relationships with others, and unreadiness for the schooling process, are at increased risk for social and emotional problems (Zins, Weissberg, Bloodworth, & Walberg, 2004).

Nevertheless, there is no more important time than now to recognize students's personal needs. A broad and balanced education prepares students to master basic academic skills and also equip them to become responsible adults, so that they can be succeed in life (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007). Families, schools, and communities play a vital role to identify and promote children's social, emotional and academic engagement through research-based approaches. Researches indicates that social-emotional learning (SEL) programming for school students is a very promising approach in promoting positive adjustment, reducing problem behaviors and improving academic performance (Diekstra, 2008; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

2. DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING SEL

The term social and emotional learning was first introduced in 1994 as a conceptual framework for addressing both the needs of young people and the fragmentation that typically characterizes the response of schools to those needs (Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, & Elias, 2003). Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL] (2003) defined the concept of SEL is the process of acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions; developing caring and concern for others; making responsible decisions; forming positive relationships; and handling challenging situations capably. Students learn, practice, and apply SEL skills by engaging in positive activities in and out of the classroom, just similar to the way they learn academic skills (Zins et al., 2004).

SEL contains five core components in terms of social-emotional competence (SEC) (CASEL, 2007). SEC is the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development. It includes self-awareness, control of impulsivity, working cooperatively, and caring about oneself and others. Social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults develop the skills, attitudes, and values necessary to acquire social and emotional competence. Table 1 shows the five core components of SEC.

Interest in SEL sparked in the mid-1990s with the publication of Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* (1995) and Gardner's *Multiple Intelligence* (1993). In *Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman (1995) provides much evidence for social and emotional intelligence as the complex and multifaceted ability to be effective

in all the critical domains of life, including school. But Goleman (1995) also does us the favor of stating the key point simply: “It’s a different way of being smart.”

Table 1: Key Social-Emotional Competencies (CASEL, 2007)

| Core SEL | Description |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Self Awareness | Identifying and recognising emotions |
| | Accurate self-perception |
| | Recognising strengths, needs and values |
| | Self-efficacy |
| Social Awareness | Spirituality |
| | Perspective taking |
| | Empathy |
| | Appreciating diversity |
| Self Management | Respect for others |
| | Impulse control and stress management |
| | Self-motivation and discipline |
| Relationship Management | Goal setting and organizational skills |
| | Communication, social engagement and building |
| | Working cooperatively |
| Responsible Decision Making | Negotiation, refusal and conflict management |
| | Seeking and providing help |
| | Problem identification and situation analysis |
| | Problem solving |
| | Evaluation and reflection |
| | Personal, moral and ethical responsibility |

SEL program contains the context of caring, safe, well-managed, and participatory classroom, school and other learning

environments. All students including those who are at risk, those beginning to engage in negative behaviors, and those are at high risk with displaying significant problems, might benefit from SEL program and instruction. The focus of most SEL programs is universal promotion and prevention, which is aimed in preventing problem behaviors by promoting and enhancing social-emotional competencies.

SEL programming intended on enhancing the growth of all children, to help them develop positive behaviors, and to prevent them engaging in maladaptive and unhealthy behaviors. Some children with at risk symptoms may require moderate treatment that focuses on social-emotional competencies, they might benefit from SEL programs also.

SEL is perhaps more important than ever as an essential component of school reform (Zins et al., 2004). Researches revealed that these skills can be taught, and can be taught by regular classroom teachers in school of every type to students of every background through SEL program (CASEL, 2007). According to reliable research, schools are a highly effective setting for teaching SEL skills, and schools play an important role in raising healthy children by fostering their cognitive development and also their social-emotional development (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011).

3. IMPACTS OF SEL: WHY THE STUDENTS NEED IT?

The importance of the development of social and emotional competence in the school years cannot be overstated. Beyond the social framework of the family, school is the primary means by which children learn how to be effective in the social world (Babad, 2009). Developing SEC is essential and critically important to success in school and life. SEC affects how and what we learn, and that SEC can be taught in education (Zins & Elias,

2006). CASEL (2007) stated that the effectiveness of SEL is broad-based, with several hundred studies have documented the positive effects of SEL programming on students of diverse background from preschool through high school in a wide variety of settings (Greenberg et al., 2003). Hundreds researches were carried out to evaluate the impacts of universal, indicated and after school SEL program.

Durlak et al. (2011) completed a most recent and comprehensive analysis of the impact of universal SEL programs. Their research presents findings from a meta-analysis of 213 school-based and universal SEL programs, involving 270,034 students from kindergartens through high schools of different ages, from schools in urban, suburban, and rural settings, and from schools primarily serving ethnically and socio-economically diverse student bodies. Positive findings with statistically significant were obtained in all six outcome categories at post (CASEL, 2008). The students demonstrated positive impacts in more positive attitudes toward self and others such as self-concept, self-esteem, prosocial attitudes toward aggression, and comfortable feeling connected to school). Other positive impacts included increased social-emotional skills such self-control, decision-making, communication, and problem-solving skills; more positive social behaviors such as daily behaviors related to getting along with and cooperating with others; fewer conduct problems such as aggression, disruptiveness; lower levels of emotional distress such as anxiety, depressive symptoms; and significantly better academic performance in school grades and achievement test scores.

Durlak et al. (2011) concluded that SEL programs demonstrated significant improvement in social-emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, emotional stress and academic performance. Effect sizes were largest for social and emotional skills. Their findings support the growing empirical evidence for the positive impact of SEL programs.

Zins et al. (2004) make a convincing case for the benefits of SEL in schools, in their book *Building Academic Success on Social*

and Emotional Learning: What Does the Research Say?. The reviews of the scientific evidence in support of SEL were devoted in their 12 chapters. They concluded three primary areas into which these numerous outcomes fit included school attitudes, school behavior and school performance. School attitudes are the stronger sense of community, higher motivation, increased sense of coping, better attitude about school and better understanding of behavioral consequences. Benefits in school behavior included more prosocial behavior, fewer suspensions, higher engagement, reductions in aggressive behavior, fewer absences and more classroom participation. Meanwhile higher achievement in mathematics, language arts, and social studies; improvements in achievement test scores and use of higher-order thinking strategies, are included in school performance.

Another influential meta-analytic study is completed by Wilson, Gottfredson, and Najaka (2001), offering strong support of the potential effectiveness of SEL practices in schools. In their review of 165 separate studies of school-based SEL program, indicated many positive effects, particularly focusing on reductions in delinquency and substance abuse among students, reductions in school dropout and nonattendance, and increase in both cognitive and behavioral forms of self-control and social competence.

4. CONCLUSION

There are numerous researches available in quantitative form to support the value of SEL. SEL is such learning which has powerful impact on academic achievement and adult life of children (CASEL, 2007b; Justice & Espinoza, 2007). The numerous researches also tell us a truth that SEL in school has promising effects and positively affect students' affective, behavioral, and cognitive development. It promises a great deal in terms of improved academic, social and emotional outcomes for

students. SEL can serve as the organizing framework for a broad array of prevention and promotion efforts (Elias, Arnold & Hussey, 2003). Schools are such important central arena for health promotion and primary prevention, and SEL is a must addition to the education of students (Panju, 2008).

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Tajuk Bab/Chapter title