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Social-Emotional Learning in English Language Education:
Mapping the Landscape and Reflecting on the Way Forward

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Afterword: Building on Global Perspectives to Move Forward with SEL

Social-emotional learning (SEL) helps develop a growth mindset within and among individuals. It can also help lower stress and improve attitudes toward school, helping with academic success (Durlak et al. 2011). Various SEL frameworks have overlapping competencies and skills, such as the CASEL framework, the Clover model, and LEGO's skills for holistic development.

Integrating SEL into classroom instruction, (throughout) school activities and events, and (in) family and community initiatives can create a solid foundation for students to flourish in a positive way, building their academic skills alongside their social-emotional skills, which are necessary to get through school, careers, and life in general (Weissberg 2016). The values emphasized through SEL help students feel safe, so they are ready to learn (Texthelp 2024). In addition, we now know that when students learn about and with SEL, they are less likely to quit school. What is more, employers are seeking employees with SEL skills, which demonstrates how emotional intelligence can help beyond the academic setting (Committee for Children 2024).

When kids don't know math, we teach them math – we don't punish them for not knowing how to do math, ... But when kids don't know how to regulate themselves, we punish them for misbehavior. (Souza 2023, para. 4)

Recognizing the critical role that SEL plays in educational settings and throughout life, moving from awareness to action is essential. With a clear understanding of how SEL enhances students' safety, engagement, and future employability, the next step is practical implementation. To bridge the gap between theory and practice, here are some actionable ways to incorporate SEL into everyday learning environments. Some ways to build SEL are to:

- establish rapport with students and their families
- work together to establish goals of interest with families, such as what happens once students graduate from high school
- provide workshops for parents and caregivers about how to develop SEL at home and recognize the SEL skills they use in their cultures
- show families how they can make a difference in their children's lives as stakeholders in the community who can create and/or change policies (Walker 2023).

SEL not only helps students and their families, it can also help educators ease stress, which is many times what leads to teachers quitting their jobs. For example, according to the National Education Association in the United States, one of their surveys indicated that 55% of teachers were planning on quitting due to stress. The teachers shared that they were burned out (Walker 2023). The following scenario, shared by a colleague, is just one example of why educators might need support:

[i]magine you are in a toxic working environment where your principal does not seem to value your work. You join all of the meetings requested, even though it leaves you without enough time to plan your lessons, grade papers, etc. Despite the long hours you put in, you feel like you are not acknowledged for your creativity or the rapport you have established with your students and their families. In addition, there seems to be no team spirit amongst your peers. As a result, you feel continually exhausted. You feel like you are failing and have reached the point where you have shut down and just want to stay in bed. Is this what burnout is? (Colleague, personal communication)

For teachers, burnout can come from different stressors, such as your supervisor, your colleagues, your students/families, the resources you need, and the policies in place that provide you with support (if any) (Pentón Herrera et al. 2023). Administrators need SEL to know about the importance of working on ways to provide the time and space for a work-life balance to build SEL in their communities. They can help teachers want to stay in the field to make a difference (Walker 2023). The next scenario shows what the same situation could look like if SEL were in place:

[i]magine you are in a working environment where your principal wants to get to know you and your work, to build a strong relationship with you. They value your knowledge, respect it, and they are a great listener. You put in long hours, but your principal reminds you to go home. They even provide time during the workday for teachers to regroup in the team-building room that has been created to help develop relationships and networking. They also make sure to address your concerns. They remove projects from your workload when they know the projects have all become too

much based on your comments (listening to your self-awareness and self-management requests). They actively listen to your concerns and make changes to make sure you do not get burned out. They also make an effort to note your work and celebrate it in meetings or newsletters. As a result, each day, you wake up enthusiastic about your work and look forward to meeting with your colleagues.

In this ideal case, an educator could feel valued and respected. Their concerns are listened to, and changes are made to ensure they can be successful in their work. Outcomes are positive. This scenario could be a goal to work toward. The importance of SEL and wellness for educators needs to come from supervisors and policies. It should not be on the educators to ensure they are provided with a work environment to help them succeed (Mercer and Gregersen 2020; Pentón Herrera and Darragh 2024).

It is also important to note that SEL is being critiqued by some groups that believe that SEL opens the door for educators to talk about race, gender identity, and critical race theory. These are myths. Psychologists emphasize that instead, SEL is important for students' well-being, relationship skills, and success in school, in addition to helping with risk factors such as anxiety. Psychologists believe there is a need to talk to parents about what SEL really is to help clarify the myths brought up in some media channels. Moreover, teachers can explain how SEL does not take away from instructional time and instead helps it be more successful, for example, by helping students focus (Abrams 2023). If a teacher has a parent come into their classroom saying that they do not want their child to be included in SEL, the teacher can explain what they do. They can share how a lesson with SEL looks, as shown here:

[I]et me take a moment to explain what SEL looks like in the classroom. When students walk into the classroom, I make sure to say hello to each student and ask them how they are doing. Then, I always do a check-in with the whole class, asking them to answer a question, such as “How can I help you be successful today?” This helps build their self-awareness and our relationship skills. We then start a writing lesson about how to write a narrative essay, where I go through the writing process, and show them an example of what is expected. I give them time to talk to their peers to brainstorm ideas, which also helps build relationship skills. By having strong relationships in the classroom, students are more likely to ask questions and seek help with their work. Once they are writing for a while, I give them breaks where we stand up and stretch, helping them learn to self-manage how they feel when they need a break. I also give them tips about taking time to just look away from their paper or computer screen to breathe so they can regroup. This helps with their responsible decision-making in terms of learning how to take time when needed, so they can continue with their work afterward to successfully complete it. I also give them time to talk to their neighbors after

they have written for a chunk of time, to get feedback and to see what their peers are writing about, helping with social awareness. Once they are done writing their first draft, I go over what the goal for the writing was once again, to provide closure and a reminder about the concepts they need to remember. (English teacher, personal communication)

By sharing this simple scenario with a parent, they can see how the SEL environment is one where the teacher takes the time to check in to give students the support they need.

Despite the criticisms, the majority of educators understand the need for SEL and are using it around the world, as demonstrated by this Thematic Issue. Educators discussing different contexts, including Australia (Siobhan O' Brien, Mark Vicars and Jordan González), Hungary (Anna Pereszlényi and Rita Divéki), Morocco (Mohammed Elmeski and Adil Bentahar), Palestine (Wafa Hiwari, Anwar Abdel Razeq and Luis Javier Pentón Herrera), Spain (Edward Rutledge and Marni Manegre), and the United States (Kathleen R. McGovern and Vahdat Yeganeh as well as Fares J. Karam and Eleni Oikonomidou), have gathered to share their experiences related to SEL. These articles address interesting and engaging topics, from pre-service and in-service teachers' needs for social-emotional learning. Using drama, encompassing emotions, resettlement of refugee families, and how to use an ecolinguistic approach are other areas that are covered while integrating SEL for success. This takes SEL information currently available to another level because of the unique ideas presented based on the different environments each of the authors works in. This Thematic Issue will bring readers perspectives and ideas to use in their settings, and for those in locations where SEL is being critiqued, it can help demonstrate how it can be used for positive outcomes.

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