History of Social and Emotional Learning

Jodi Beaty, M.Ed

Robert Morris University, USA

Abstract

This article explores the history of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). It includes an introduction to SEL, the historical content, with educational benefits, and lastly the improvements to student achievement in schools and a lifetime of outcomes for children that would be strengthened by social and emotional learning.

Keywords: academics, history, SEL
Introduction

Social and emotional learning can be dated as far back as 380 B.C. through the work of Plato’s *The Republic* (Edutopia, 2011). Plato believed in having a holistic education by stating “maintaining a sound system of education and upbringing you produce citizens of good character; and citizens of sound character, with the advantage of a good education, produce in turn children better than themselves and better able to produce still better children in their turn…” (Lane, 2013; Plato, 2016, p. 424). Priming children to be compassionate, constructive, dependable, and engaging citizens is an enduring quest that continues to be the goal of education (Edutopia, 2011).

Historical Background on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Comer School Development Program (CSDP) was piloted in the 1960’s (Edutopia, 2011). The CSDP was founded on the idea that there are extreme values in the relationships that children form as they grow up, particularly bonds that are built with adults (Comer, 2013). The theoretical framework of the CSDP states, "Children need positive interactions with adults in order to develop adequately" (Comer & Ben-Avie, 1996, p. 28). To foster this type of interaction, the CSDP involved multiple members of the community in the educational process, beyond the usual teachers and administrators (Comer, 2013) to build these relationships.

Between 1987 and 1992 Weissberg, Shriver, and additional educators established the K-12 New Haven Social Development program (New Haven Public Schools, n.d.; Weissberg, Shriver, Bose, & DeFalco, 1997). Also during this same time frame the W.T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence (1992) was established and chaired by Weissberg and Elias (Cummings & Haggerty, 1997; Edutopia, 2011) this group of school-based-prevention and youth-development experts announced an outline for incorporating SEL in schools. The outline listed skills such as being able to assess the intensity of feelings, controlling impulses, delay gratification, express, identify, label, and manage emotions, along with reducing stress are needed for students to have emotional competence (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1998).

In 1994 the Fetzer Institute gathered educators, researchers, and child activists to a meeting to develop ideas in assisting children in becoming positive citizens (CASEL, 2018). From this meeting, the term “social and emotional learning” materialized along with the leading organization in encouraging social and emotional learning within the United States called the Collaborative for
Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). CASEL has been leading the charge since 1994 in supporting “integrated academic, social, and emotional learning for all children in preschool through high school” (CASEL, 2017). The ambitious purpose of CASEL is to provide Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as a crucial part of education back by evidence-based research to programs within schools.

During this time schools were being overwhelmed with affirmative youth improvement programs (CASEL, 2018) such as drug (Scheier & Grenard, 2010) and violence prevention (Allison, Edmonds, Wilson, Pope, & Farrell, 2011), sex (Piotrowski & Hedeker, 2016), civil, and moral (Proios & Gianitsopoulou, 2009) education and these were just a small number of applications introduced. In 1997 the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) united with CASEL and presented a “framework” that concentrated on the needs of children. Through this collaboration, a comprehensive list of strategies was now available to educators in a book called Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators (Elias et al., 1997). This first of its kind book laid the foundation for the country to begin addressing the “missing piece” in education (CASEL, 2017).

In 1994 the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was established to advance research surrounding the social and emotional competencies that contribute to student success in school and life with support from the Fetzer Institute (1962) and Surdna Foundation (1917) (CASEL, 2018). CASEL’s mission is to make “evidence-based social and emotional learning an integral part of education from preschool through high school” (CASEL, 2003). CASEL’s leadership team of professionals and researchers began with Berman, Caesar, Elias, Goleman, Greenberg, Growald, Haynes, Jackson, Lantieri, Long, Manning, O’Brien, Patti, Pickeral, Shriver, Sluyter, Walberg, Weissberg, and Zins (CASEL, 2018; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011) have defined social and emotional learning and have put forth a set of social and emotional skills that translate well into social and emotional learning standards. SEL standards serve as a “blueprint” for instruction in SEL; the standards characterize specific goals and benchmarks for students by grade levels and express what students should be able to know and do (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2018). Standards can also guide the selection of evidence-based programs and the creation of professional learning related to SEL (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015). SEL standards vary
from academic standards “in that they do not imply assessment measures or suggest accountability. It can be helpful to think and talk about them as learning goals or competencies instead of standards” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2018).

Illinois was the first state in 2004 to create an SEL framework which includes goals, learning standards, and benchmarks for kindergarten to high school (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.) and in 2013 they revised their framework to include preschool and presently all preschools in the United States have developed SEL standards (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015). Illinois three SEL goals are: 1) develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success; 2) use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships; and 3) demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts (Reid, 2018; Zinsser, 2015). These skills and SEL standards have begun to transform educational practices in some schools, resulting in meaningful, positive outcomes for students.

Conclusion

According to a report by the National Research Council (2012), Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge in the 21st Century there is an understanding that schools need to teach more than just academics to prepare students for real-world experiences. “There is powerful evidence that SEL if scaled, could dramatically improve student achievement in schools and a lifetime of outcomes for children that would strengthen education, the economy, and our communities” (Civic Enterprises, Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013, p. 11).

References


History of Social and Emotional Learning

Jodi Beaty M.Ed


History of Social and Emotional Learning

Jodi Beaty M.Ed


