AERA Special Interest Group
Social and Emotional Learning
Established 2007

Advances in SEL Research

Volume 5, No. 1 American Educational Research Association Fall 2011

Welcome to the SEL SIG Newsletter from the Chair and Chair-elect

Welcome to the annual fall newsletter of our SEL SIG. Now four years old and with 175 members, our SIG comprises a thriving, passionate, and energetic group of scholars and practitioners from around the globe. In this fall edition, we feature reports of current research and practice in SEL conducted by members of our SIG.

(L to R Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, Josh Brown, Patricia Jennings, Susan Stillman, Marc Meyer).

We would like to thank our newsletter editors, Sara Rimm-Kaufman and Patricia Jennings, for their hard work putting this issue together. We would also like to thank the contributors who took the time to share their ongoing work.

Other SIG news:

1. As you may know, our SIG reviewers have finished their reviews of proposals submitted for the Annual Meeting in Vancouver, BC in April, 2012. We received 33 individual paper submissions and 7 symposium submissions and were able to accept 14 papers and 4 symposia. We had impressive submissions and we expect to have another outstanding schedule of symposia and roundtable sessions at the conference this spring. We thank the SIG reviewers for all of their work.
2. Call for nominations. We still have a few open positions at our SIG. All names must be submitted to AERA by November 15, 2011 for an election in January 2012. We are particularly looking for someone to fill the student-elect and newsletter-editor elect positions. Please contact Susan Stillman with your nominations.

Best wishes and don't hesitate to contact us with any questions about the SIG.

Warmly,

Susan Stillman, Ed. D.
Six Seconds, The Emotional Intelligence Network
SEL SIG Chair

Joshua Brown, Ph. D.
Fordham University
SEL SIG Chair-Elect

What's Inside

Comments from Our Editors

Sara E. Rimm-Kaufman, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia
Patricia Jennings, Garrison Institute

I (Sara Rimm-Kaufman) am pleased to take on the role of editor for the AERA SEL SIG newsletter. The SEL SIG represents tremendous diversity—our roster includes researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners from a broad range of locations in North America and around the world. Members of the SEL SIG interact daily with policy-makers at federal, state, and local levels; producers, synthesizers, and communicators of educational and psychological research; developers and implementers of interventions designed to promote child and youth development; and perhaps most importantly, children and youth encountering all of the social, emotional, and academic challenges of growing up. We have strength as a group because of our diverse backgrounds and experiences. Although we represent diverse backgrounds, now is an important time for the SEL SIG come together to advance a single objective. Together, we can support efforts to translate knowledge about SEL into policies during national efforts to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This issue of the SEL SIG newsletter provides information about how you can contact members of congress to support the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2011. I encourage you to contact your own member of congress, as well. For our colleagues who live outside of the United States, please teach us what you have learned from comparable efforts within your own country.

UPDATE: Academic, Social, and Emotional, Learning Act of 2011 (HR2437)

Patricia Chesler, Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning

The Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2011 (HR2437) was introduced July 7, 2011 by U.S. Representatives Judy Biggert (R-IL), Dale E. Kildee (D-MI), and Tim Ryan (D-OH). The bill proposes to Amend Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to include a definition of social and emotional learning and allows for use of funds appropriated under Title II to be used for teacher and principal training in SEL programming.

In her announcement of the bipartisan legislation, Biggert specifically cited university-based and CDC research that demonstrates both the need for and the benefits of high quality SEL in the classroom. In thanking Representatives Kildee and Ryan, Biggert said, "This legislation will help teachers provide results-driven instruction in skills that keep children focused on learning and prepare them to succeed in the real world."

HR 2437 struck a chord for the over fifty professionals and organizations who have already formally endorsed the bill by contacting the sponsors' staff:

- brian.looser@mail.house.gov for Congresswoman Biggert
- maggie.randolph@mail.house.gov for Congressman Kildee
- anne.sokolov@mail.house.gov for Congressman Ryan

Endorsers include parent organizations, teachers and administrators, student support groups, program providers, and researchers. This interdisciplinary support for SEL across all stakeholder groups helps House members see – from many points of view – how and why high quality SEL programming is important for all children in U.S. schools.

The field owes a debt of gratitude to the scientific community that has advanced our understanding that SEL works and how SEL works. In the coming weeks, we need your help to continue to advance the inclusion of high quality SEL in education policy. As leaders, you can continue to educate policy makers about the need for SEL skills and the benefits to children, schools, and communities. For more information about HR 2437 and other policy issues, visit www.casel.org. You may also contact members of the Committee on Education and the Workforce from your state or district asking them to support HR 2437. Contact Pat Chesler at pchesler@casel.org for information on those members.

Congressman Tim Ryan (D-Ohio) Delivers Keynote Address to Social-Emotional Learning SIG at 2011 Annual Meeting in New Orleans

Joshua Brown, Fordham University

Our SIG was proud to host Congressman Tim Ryan as the keynote speaker during our business meeting at the 2011 Annual Meeting in New Orleans. Congressman Ryan, along with Congresswoman Judy Biggert (R-Illinois) and Congressman Kildee (D-Michigan), co-sponsored House Bill 4223, the *Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act*, which was introduced in the last session of Congress.

Congressman Ryan was welcomed and introduced by Linda Lantieri, Director of the Inner Resilience Program, Co-Founder of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, one of the founding board members of CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), and one of the CASEL leaders actively involved in developing and supporting the legislation with Congressman Ryan. She described Ryan as a man of vision, compassion and caring, whose own inner personal understanding of mindfulness-based practices are always evident in his work.

In his address, Congressman Ryan spoke of his own personal journey of social-emotional learning and the benefits of mindfulness practices, beginning with his participation in a mindfulness-based leadership retreat run by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 2008, an event he described as "a profound experience." Through Kabat-Zinn, Ryan met and became familiar with the work of Richard Davidson, Director of the Lab for Affective Neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin, Linda Lantieri and her book "Building Emotional Intelligence," as well as other leaders and their contributions. Ryan arranged an invitation for Lantieri to testify before the House Appropriations Committee. Within only a few months, $1 million of funding for the Youngstown and Warren City Schools and for Youngstown State University was secured for the implementation of SEL. Ryan described implementing the Inner Resilience program in partnership with Lantieri, CASEL and others, beginning with 250 teachers in these 2 smaller school districts with the expectation of reaching close to 5000 students. With these efforts, he aims to make the case that SEL can work effectively, will change the lives of young people, and can transform their communities.

Congressman Ryan described his observations of children in kindergarten classrooms and commented on how these young children were touched deeply by SEL and mindfulness-practices. He commented on the ways that SEL and mindfulness-practices help children mobilize and maintain their attention, develop listening skills, cultivate self-awareness and awareness of people around them, and recognize and appreciate similarities and differences among their peers. Further, he commented on the way that SEL and mindfulness practices foster connections among students, between students and their teachers, and between students and their schools and communities. Ryan noted advances in neuroscience, and particularly our greater understanding of brain plasticity, to support the belief that SEL skills can be developed and honed through practice.

Congressman Ryan's address was followed by a rich discussion led by Dr. David Osher, Vice President of the American Institutes for Research. Osher spoke about the uniqueness of the present moment—not only do we face many challenges but we have many opportunities ahead. Further, Osher pointed out that our history of public education embodies many of the values of SEL: from Thomas Jefferson's belief that a democracy is not possible without an educated public, Horace Mann's notion of bringing the rich and the poor together to build a national community, and John Dewey's noted connections between education and youth development. Osher described challenges ahead. He highlighted how many of the ideals within public education are under siege because of the current, narrow national paradigm that views schooling in relation to basic academic areas, not the development of SEL capacities. However, Osher also noted signs that the current narrow academic paradigm has its shortfalls and is showing signs of demise—perhaps best evidenced by large class segregation in American schools. Progress will require that we develop citizens with strong SEL capacities.

Osher asked Ryan, "What can we do to effect legislation not just in Ohio, but also ultimately the Elementary and Secondary Education Reauthorization Act, and other laws that will recognize the fundamental importance of SEL in education?" "Also, when you talk to your colleagues,

do you get the sense that they, too, are beginning to understand the importance of SEL? If so, what types of arguments do you think help?" Ryan responded, "I don't think there's a whole lot of awareness of SEL right now. However, politicians are looking for a solution so there is an opportunity available. We need more advocacy." He went on to add that he believes the way to spread SEL is by showing that it works in his districts, that it will improve test scores, and that it is ultimately cost effective. He added that it would be important to quantify what the cost savings of using SEL approaches.

Congressman Ryan's dedication to the practice and proliferation of social-emotional learning and mindfulness-based practices is evident in his forthcoming book, "A Mindful Nation: How a Simple Practice Can Help Us Reduce Stress, Improve Performance, and Recapture the American Spirit (2012, Hay House Publishing, foreword by Jon Kabat-Zinn). The book explores the benefits of mindfulness-based practices—from the personal to the societal—and provides a vision for how the emergence and growth of mindfulness practices across diverse settings such as hospitals, boardrooms, research labs, and army bases, connect to our core American values and offer clear opportunities for us to create lasting positive change in our communities and broader society.

Boston Schools Leverage SEL in Turnaround Efforts

Bethany Montgomery, Open Circle,
Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College

In 2010, Boston Public Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson identified 14 "Turnaround Schools," described as significantly underperforming and in need of monitoring and reform. The 2010 Massachusetts Education Reform Act extended school districts' authority over Turnaround Schools to allow for broader changes to staffing, budgets, curriculum, and working conditions. Each school was required to identify improvement targets to meet over a three-year period and was told they would face negative consequences if progress was not made. As two of the Turnaround Schools strived to improve under this tremendous pressure, they were mindful that many of their students faced challenges that could impede their learning. As a strategy to improve students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes, Holland Elementary and John F. Kennedy Elementary partnered with Open Circle, a provider of curricula and professional development for SEL, in grades Kindergarten through five.

Children learn best when they feel connected to

a safe, caring, and highly engaging school community, while learning suffers when children feel excluded, threatened, bullied, or discouraged. Positive emotions help students generate and sustain interest in learning, while unmanaged stress and poor impulse control interfere with attention and memory. Implementation of an SEL program such as Open Circle creates positive learning environments and teaches students crucial social and emotional skills. Research shows that effective SEL programs not only improve social and emotional outcomes, but also improve academic achievement.

Implementing Open Circle in Boston Turnaround Schools may be particularly critical, as many of their students experience extraordinary social and emotional challenges due to poverty, violence, lack of family support, and countless other factors. Central to the Open Circle approach is the year-long, grade-differentiated *Open Circle Curriculum*, which integrates research findings in social and emotional development with best practices in teaching, dialogue facilitation, and classroom management. It focuses on teaching children skills in three areas—self-regulation, communication, and social problem solving-- all within the context of a safe, caring, and highly engaging classroom community. Through Open Circle's extensive professional development programs, teachers learn to effectively implement the

Open Circle Curriculum and successfully facilitate conversations with students about their social and emotional development. Teachers also learn to infuse SEL throughout the school day, improving the environment for learning and increasing critical thinking skills across all academic areas.

Excellent school leadership is essential to the success of these efforts. Principals Jeichael Henderson of Holland Elementary and Waleska Landing-Rivera of John F. Kennedy Elementary are dedicated, talented leaders who are deeply invested in their schools, students, and communities. Both principals recognized that SEL would be a key component to achieving the outcomes they desired for their students. Principal Landing-Rivera explained, "SEL is a priority. Our students arrive each day with many needs beyond academic ones. The students must be ready to learn, and our devoting time to SEL instruction helps with this readiness." Principal Henderson echoed this sentiment, stating, "At Holland, we put children's needs first, including social and emotional needs." Given these schools' complex and time sensitive goals, they fast-tracked plans for implementing Open Circle school-wide. Program Co-Director Nova Biro shared, "Turnaround Schools often need customized programming and extra support to meet their unique needs. We are working closely with Holland Elementary and JFK Elementary to ensure that their SEL efforts not only meet the needs of all students and staff, but are also sustainable over the long term."

To accomplish this, Open Circle customized its training and coaching models. Both schools immediately trained all grade-level teachers to implement the *Open Circle Curriculum* instead of training small cohorts of teachers over a series of three or more years. Supplementary professional development time afforded to Turnaround Schools enabled this approach, which also provided a unique opportunity for teachers to work together as a group over four full days throughout the school year, strengthening staff relationships, communication, and collaboration. A team of four Open Circle coaches with expertise in urban schools worked with the two partner Turnaround Schools, supplementing the typical biannual in-classroom meetings with facilitated grade-level meetings. Coaches also met with principals more frequently to assess progress and provide support, with specialists to help integrate SEL into their work areas, and with outside partners to ensure Open Circle was well integrated with other school initiatives.

Open Circle and the two schools gathered data on improvement in students' social and emotional skills as well as overall school climate. Teachers at Holland Elementary conducted mid-year assessments to determine which SEL skills students were using consistently and which ones needed further reinforcement. Teachers at both schools completed evaluations after each training session to provide feedback on their learning experience. Results have been enormously positive. Open Circle has also gathered qualitative feedback from principals and teachers throughout the year, and teachers will complete a year-end survey to reflect on their Open Circle implementation and the outcomes they have observed in student behavior and classroom climate. This information will not only inform planning for future years of implementation in each school, as well as future SEL work in other Turnaround Schools.

Although it is still early in the implementation process, there are already signs of success. In a classroom at Holland Elementary during preparations for MCAS testing, students practiced calm breathing and positive self-talk. Teachers reported students telling themselves things such as, "I know I can do this!" Principal Landing-Rivera noted that her students are increasingly articulating their needs and feelings and that Open Circle has positively impacted behavior in the school. One teacher shared that he didn't know what he did before having Open Circle, and that it has become an integral part of his classroom. Principal Landing-Rivera attributes the success of Open Circle at JFK Elementary to the fact that the teachers have embraced the initiative, saying, "Teachers bought into the program and saw the need, and it aligns with our mission as a school."

Social Emotional Learning in the Mathematics Classroom

Erin R. Ottmar, University of Richmond, & Temple A. Walkowiak, North Carolina State University

Today, children are expected to learn and understand mathematics at a level that requires them to think critically and creatively. Most mathematics curricula require students to problem solve and apply learned concepts to new situations. In the *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics*, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM, 2000), points out how *processes*, such as communication and problem solving, are critical to the depth of children's mathematics understanding. Most recently, the release of the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics (CCSS-M, 2010) outlined mathematical practices in which students are expected to engage in mathematics classrooms. For example, students are expected to "construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others" (p. 6) and "use appropriate tools strategically" (p. 7). The successful use of these practices is dependent upon the teacher's facilitation and modeling of them. For students, succeeding in mathematics requires not only learning the prescribed content, but also developing the necessary social processes that contribute to their mathematical understanding and ability to solve problems.

Implementing standards-based mathematics instruction can be challenging for teachers. Both the NCTM process standards and the mathematical practices from the CCSS-M require teachers to change their instruction in significant ways. Shifting roles from the disseminator of ideas and information ("sage on the stage") to the facilitator of tasks ("guide on the side") can be difficult. Often, teachers are given resources to meet mathematics content standards with little support on the social processes that lead to in-depth understanding of mathematics, such as the use of discourse (i.e., mathematical conversation), reflection, or varied representations. In addition, teachers are often faced with classroom management and organizational challenges in their classrooms, which can hinder their instruction, particularly as they encourage small group work or facilitate students' use of mathematics manipulatives.

SEL programs that emphasize the importance of classroom community, social skills, and communication, provide promise to improving the quality of mathematics instruction. As one example, the *Responsive Classroom (RC)* approach (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2007), an SEL approach, is designed to promote a classroom community where students feel safe and comfortable. In this type of setting, students may be more likely to share their mathematical ideas with the teacher and their peers, an otherwise intimidating risk to

take. The explicit teaching of how to interact with others and actively participate in mathematical discourse, both speaking and listening, provides students with the skills they need to engage in the type of communication advocated by NCTM and the CCSS-M. In *RC* classrooms, teachers show students how to appropriately handle mathematical tools (e.g., manipulatives such as Base 10 blocks or pattern blocks). The clear modeling of how to retrieve, use, and even pack up the tools is a proactive approach to prevent later classroom management challenges. Rather than being an unnecessary burden, the mathematical tools can be utilized for their intended purpose—to deepen children's understandings of mathematical concepts.

Although students' opportunities to engage in discourse and to use mathematical tools are valued processes for making sense of mathematics, they are not always utilized in the mathematics classroom. However, research suggests that when a classroom community supports the development of SEL skills, children are more likely to experience doses of success in the mathematics classroom, including more classroom participation and effort, better problem solving and social skills, and higher achievement (Brock, et al., 2008; Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). In turn, students

may develop more positive attitudes about mathematics, higher motivation and self-efficacy, and greater respect for teachers. Thus, it appears that SEL programs may be an important piece of making these positive outcomes in mathematics realistic for students and teachers through the use of processes advocated by the CCSS-M and the NCTM Process Standards.

References

Brock, L., Nashida, T., Chiong, C., Grimm, K., & Rimm-Kaufman, S. (2008). Children's perceptions of the classroom environment and social and academic performance: A longitudinal analysis of the Responsive Classroom approach. *Journal of School Psychology, 46*(2), 129-149.

Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2010). *Common Core State Standards for Mathematics.* Retrieved from http://corestandards.org

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2000). *Principles and standards for school mathematics*. Reston, VA.

Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc. (2007) *Responsive Classroom: Level 1 Resource Book*. Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc.: Turners Falls, MA.

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. & Chiu, Y. I. (2007). Promoting social and academic competence in the classroom: An intervention study examining the contribution of the Responsive Classroom Approach. *Psychology in the Schools, 44*(4), 397–413.

Making an SEL Program Work Better: Self-Regulation Skills and the New Elementary Second Step Program

Tonje M. Molyneux, M.Ed.
Program Developer
Committee for Children, Seattle, WA

When developing the new K–5 *Second Step* program, a universal, classroom-based SEL program, we developers wanted to improve the program's positive impact on students' school success. We delved into the research and found self-regulation surfacing as important for improving students' chances for success both academically and socially (McLelland et al., 2006). Self-regulation has emerged as having a strong supporting role in SEL programs' positive influence on academic achievement.

Self-Regulation and School Success

Self-regulation refers to the ability to monitor and manage emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (Barkley, 2004; McClelland et al., 2010). Self-regulation helps students focus their attention on a lesson when they may be distracted by noisy classmates, a problem they had at recess, or excitement about an upcoming birthday party. The ability to self-regulate helps students get along better with teachers and other students (McKown et al., 2009). Students with good self-regulation skills get more out of school, both in terms of academics and social interactions (Barkley, 2004).

Teaching Self-Regulation Skills

Self-regulation skills can be taught and learned. The new K–5 *Second Step* program incorporates, Brain Builder games and Skills for Learning, both new elements to teach self-regulation skills. These two elements go beyond traditional program elements that contribute to self-regulation—such as emotion management and problem solving—by providing ways to both implicitly and explicitly develop students' self-regulation skills.

Brain Builders

From Kindergarten through Grade 3, students develop skills foundational to self-regulation via short, five minute games called Brain Builders. These are specially designed to build the areas of students' brains that help them focus their attention, use their memory, and control their behavior—skills known together as executive function skills. Research links these skills to later academic achievement (Blair and Razza, 2007; Duncan et al., 2007; Gathercole and Pickering, 2000; Howse et al., 2003; St.Clair-Thompson and Gathercole, 2006; Trentacosta and Izard, 2007) and also shows that games like Brain Builders can be used successfully to improve students' self-regulation skills (Bodrova and Leong, 2007; Burchinal et al., 2000; Morrison et al., 2009;Tominy and McClelland, 2011). In young children, children's self-regulatory skills are still developing, thus offering the perfect time to challenge and provide opportunities to practice self-regulatory skills using the Brain Builder games.

Skills for Learning

The new K–5 *Second Step* program further promotes the development of self-regulation skills with its focus on Skills for Learning. Students are explicitly taught four self-regulation skills they need to be successful learners: focusing attention, listening, using self-talk, and being assertive. These skills support school readiness and academic achievement (McClelland et al., 2010). The benefits of the four self-regulatory skills taught in the program go beyond academics; the skills also support the rest of the program content by

providing a critical foundation for the development of social-emotional competence (Durlak et al., 2011).

References

Barkley, R. A. (2004). Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and self-regulation: Taking an evolutionary perspective on executive functioning. In R. F. Baumeister & K. D. Vohs (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation: Research, theory, and applications* (pp. 301–323). New York: Guilford Press.

Blair, C., & Razza, R. P. (2007). Relating effortful control, executive function, and false belief understanding to emerging math and literacy ability in kindergarten. *Child Development, 78*(2), 647–663.

Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (2007). *Tools of the mind: The Vygotskian approach to early childhood education*, 2nd ed. New York: Prentice-Hall.

Burchinal, M. R., Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., Bryant, D. M., & Clifford, R. M. (2000). Children's social and cognitive development and child care quality: Testing for differential associations related to poverty, gender, or ethnicity. *Applied Developmental Science, 4*(3), 149–165.

Duncan, G. J., Dowsett, C. J., Claessens, A., Magnuson, K., Huston, A. C., Klebanov, P., et al. (2007). School readiness and later achievement. *Developmental Psychology 43*(6), 1428–1446.

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, D. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*(1), 405–432.

Gathercole, S. E., & Pickering, S. J. (2000). Working memory deficits in children with low achievement in the national curriculum at 7 years of age. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 70*(2), 177–194.

Howse, R. B., Lange, G., Farran, D. C., & Boyles, C. D. (2003). Motivation and self-regulation as predictors of achievement in economically disadvantaged young children. *Journal of Experimental Education, 71*(2), 151–174.

McClelland, M. M., Acock, A. C., & Morrison, F. J. (2006). The impact of kindergarten learning-related social skills on academic achievement at the end of elementary school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 21*, 471–490.

McClelland, M. M., Ponitz, C. C., Messersmith, E. E., & Tominey, S. (2010). Self-regulation: The integration of cognition and emotion. In R. Lerner (Series Ed.) & W. Overton (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of lifespan human development, Vol. 4. Cognition, biology, and methods* (pp. 509–533). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

McKown, C., Gumbiner, L. M., Russo, N. M., & Lipton, M. (2009). Social-emotional learning skill, self-regulation, and social competence in typically developing and clinic-referred children. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology, 38*(6), 858–871.

Moffit, T. E., Arsenault, L., Belsky, D., Dickson, N., Hancox, R. J., Harrington, H., et al. (2011). A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 108*(7), 2693–2698.

Morrison, F. J., Ponitz, C. C., & McClelland, M. M. (2009). Self-regulation and academic achievement in the transition to school.In S. Calkins & M. Bell (Eds.), *Child development at the intersection of emotion and cognition* (pp. 203–224). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

St. Clair-Thompson, H. L., & Gathercole, S. E. (2006). Executive functions and achievements on national curriculum tests: Shifting, updating, inhibition, and working memory. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology, 59*, 745–759.

Tominey, S., & McClelland, M. M. (2011). Red light, purple light: Findings from a randomized trial using circle time games to improve behavioral self-regulation in preschool. *Early Education and Development, 22*(3), 489-519.

Trentacosta, C. J., & Izard, C. E. (2007). Kindergarten children's emotion competence as a predictor of their academic competence in first grade. *Emotion, 7*, 77–88.

Vitaro, F., Brendgen, M., Larose, S., & Tremblay, R. E. (2005). Kindergarten disruptive behaviors, protective factors, and educational achievement by early adulthood. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 97*(4), 617–629.

How Children Choose to Engage or Not Engage in Learning Tasks: Looking Afresh through an Emotion Regulation Lens

Veronica O'Toole, College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand

In this article, I use the lens of emotion regulation theory (Gross, 1998) to review a subset of findings from a New Zealand elementary school classroom-based research project. Previous analyses of in-depth, video-cued interviews and classroom transcripts revealed emotion as a correlate of task selection for four individual children (Joseph , Dion, Lois & Abby)[1] when given the autonomy to choose (O'Toole, 2005). However the anticipated emotions were mainly unconscious, only coming to light through the interviews which were new conversations for the children. This brief article contributes to the SEL field through presenting real-life examples from the classroom.

Emotion regulation (ER) is a core SEL skill fundamental to young children's social and academic success (Eisenberg, Sadovsky & Spinrad, 2005). ER refers to people's ability to "influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (Gross, 1998, p. 275). ER may be automatic or controlled, conscious or unconscious, and may use any of five processes before, during, or after an emotion eliciting event (Gross & Thompson, 2007). Four of these processes are antecedent-focused, namely: 1) situation selection by choosing or avoiding situations based on

[1] Code names for all participants

their anticipated effect on emotions, 2) situation modification by intervening in a situation, such as providing verbal prompts to children to help them solve a problem, 3) attentional deployment through distraction, or specific concentration on generating an emotion, most commonly used when the situation cannot be changed, and 4) cognitive change. The fifth process, response modulation, occurs later (Gross & Thompson, 2007).

For this study, triangulation of all data collected through continuous observation, concurrent video and audio recording of four target children, in-situ emotion reports ('mood slips') and video-cued interviews, recorded the children's total classroom experiences throughout a complete curriculum unit on Space. The teacher gave the children different numbers of tasks, based on their capability, also inadvertently confirming the children's ability perspectives. "Smart" children get more tasks because they can do things "quickly" (Joseph & Dion, in O'Toole, 2005, p. 202). Speed of task completion was a real concern for Dion, who often asked others "how many" they had done (O'Toole, 2005, p.215), consistent with a performance goal orientation which is more likely to elicit anxiety (Ames, 1992).

Criteria for choosing tasks were as follows: Highest-achieving Lois: "the things I'll enjoy", "know a bit (about it)", "I like finding facts"; High-achieving Joseph: "nice and quick", "I do all the fun ones first", "not too hard", "(the tasks) give information". Mid-low achieving Abby: "nice quick and easy", "I liked it", "do all the good ones first". Mid-achieving Dion: "easy", "I like drawing", "I like that" and "best for me". Interview data revealed that the emotion correlates of these choices across all four children were interested, happy and fun. In terms of ER situation selection (Gross, 1998), all four children, irrespective of their ability, chose academic situations on the anticipated positive emotions. The differences lay in which tasks met those criteria for each child (O'Toole, 2005).

Task elimination criteria for Lois were: "take too long", "I don't like" already knows "heaps" about, and for Joseph: "I didn't like", "I wasn't interested." These criteria predicted boredom for both children. Abby and Dion eliminated tasks that were "hard." Abby did not identify an emotion. Dion said that he does not do tasks that are "too hard, I won't get it finished", which for him predicts "stress and anger." Unfortunately things did not go as planned for Dion. He chose to draw the Sea of Tranquility on a map of the moon because he likes drawing. However, he needed a certain book, which Selma was using. After three unsuccessful attempts over 20 minutes to obtain this book, he finally gave up when Selma told him "it takes ages." He then decided to continue writing his story. Dion was given a 'mood slip' and he circled the word "stressed" because as he explained later he was having trouble "getting the ideas out of his head." Dion's descriptions of his experience of stress, which feels like having a "tight brain" were consistent over three separate occasions, as were his methods of dealing with it by "just do[ing] something else" such as joking "and then I don't get stressed any more" (O'Toole, 2005, p. 275). Transcript data show that after circling "stressed" on this occasion, he joked with friends for 8 minutes after which time he wrote a few lines. Dion's ER strategies identified thus far, show *situation selection* because he likes drawing. When he was not able to get the book he needed he became stressed, and when he heard "it takes ages" he did something else. He responded to this through *response modulation*, described as "attempts to regulate the physiological and experiential aspects of emotion" (Gross & Thompson, 2007, p. 15). Joking reduced his stress in the short term. The problem was that over nine lessons, Dion completed only two of the seven tasks he had been allocated. His stress-reducing situation modification strategy was not helpful for task completion. Dion would benefit from intervention to improve his SEL skills to achieve social and academic competence (Eisenberg et al, 2005). A full paper is currently in preparation.

References

Ames, C. (1992). Classrooms: Goals, structures, and student motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 84*(3), 261 – 271

Eisenberg, N., Sadovsky, A., & Spinrad, T. L. (2005). Association of emotion-related regulation with language skills, emotion knowledge and academic outcomes. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 109*, 109-118

Gross, J. L. (1998). Antecedent- and response-focused emotion regulation: Divergent consequences for experience, expression and physiology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*(1) 224-237.

Gross, J. J., & Thompson, R.A. (2007). Emotion regulation: Conceptual foundations. In J. J. Gross (Ed.), *Handbook of emotion regulation* (pp. 3-24). London: The Guilford Press.

O'Toole, V. M. E. (2005). *The role of emotion in children's learning task engagement in the elementary school classroom.* (Unpublished thesis). Retrieved from http://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/handle/10092/2286

Action Research: Exploring the Effects of a Social-Emotional Curriculum on the Academic Competencies and Self-Perception of Students in a Third-Grade Classroom

By Anna Kearney, MA and Susan Stillman, Ed. D., Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence

Following a cluster of teen suicides in an affluent suburb in Silicon Valley, California, community members began to question the academic pressures felt by students as young as elementary school in this consistently high-performing school district. In an effort to provide students with the emotional tools needed to alleviate pressure, one K-5 elementary school began implementing a social emotional curriculum on a limited scale in 2010. As a participating member of this piloting team, one teacher-researcher examined the impact of the social-emotional curriculum, Self-Science, on the academic competencies of motivation and goal setting, critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and leadership, and agility and adaptability.

The intervention, *Self-Science*, is designed by *6 Seconds: The Emotional Intelligence Network*. *Self-Science* focuses on teaching students how to make decisions, communicate and collaborate, and problem solve creatively while fostering emotional intelligence. The authors of the curriculum note that its lessons are not lectures, but experiential-based, student-centered curricula that are designed to empower students (McCown, 2010). This curriculum is based on three main goals: to know yourself, to choose yourself, and to give yourself. Lessons focus on eight specific competency areas: enhancing emotional literacy, recognizing patterns of behavior, applying consequential thinking, navigating emotions, engaging intrinsic motivation, exercising optimism, increasing student capacity for empathy, and pursuing noble goals.

Based on the emerging body of research indicating that emotional intelligence is a predictor of classroom behavior and academic performance (Esturgó-Deu & Sala-Roca, 2010), one teacher-researcher began to question whether *Self-Science* would contribute to academic performance. Specifically, the teacher-researcher chose to examine the influence of the SEL program on the academic competencies of motivation and goal setting, critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and leadership, and agility and adaptability. Additionally, the teacher-researcher sought to gather student perceptions of the SEL program to aid in curriculum adoption decisions.

The teacher-researcher selected a 3rd grade classroom implementing *Self-Science* and compared it to a control classroom at the same school using a pretest-posttest design. The control classroom was selected based on its similarity to the experimental classroom in terms of gender and race. Additionally, both teachers had similar years of experience. The teacher-researcher developed a 40-item survey in conjunction with a university advisor.

For both groups, differences were noted within each academic competency area over the course of the school year, however the treatment group saw a significantly greater percentage increase than the comparison group. Within the competency area of motivation and goal setting, the comparison group showed an 11.4% increase and the treatment group showed a 40.1% increase over the year. Critical thinking and problem solving showed a 1.8% increase for the comparison group and a 27.0% increase for the treatment group. For the competency area of collaboration and leadership skills, the comparison group increased by 9.1% whereas the treatment group increased by 34.4%. The greatest change for both groups was seen in the area of agility and adaptability; the comparison group increased by 17.4% and the treatment group by 40.9%.

When analyzing the data for the competency area of motivation and goal setting, the survey items that saw the greatest change were, "I like assignments that challenge me" with a 64.3% increase for the treatment group, compared to a 7.2% increase for the comparison group, and "I set goals for myself in school" with a 62.2% increase for the treatment group, compared to a 10.2% increase for the comparison group.

Within the competency area of critical thinking and problem solving, both skills addressed in *Self-Science*, the largest differences between the treatment and comparison groups were in the items "I develop lots of good solutions to problems" with an increase of 1.78% in the comparison group and 34.09% in the treatment group, and "I can list reasons for and against an argument" with a decrease of 5.12% in the comparison group and an increase of 34.09% in the treatment group.

The intervention appears to have been influential on the competency area of collaboration and leadership, as indicated by the item, "I am a leader in my class," with a 73.8% increase in the treatment group and a 2.56% increase in the comparison group. Within the *Self-Science* curriculum, a great deal of attention is given to the pursuit of "give yourself." Towards this goal, students learn how to initiate change and persuade others to join their cause through clear, concise reasoning. These lessons give students opportunities to practice their leadership skills and appear to have been quite effective in students' self-image as leaders as evidenced by this survey response.

The final competency area, agility and adaptability, saw increases on each item for both the treatment and comparison groups. However, the percentage of increase was higher for the treatment group, particularly on the item "I stay on task when doing my schoolwork" which saw a 51.92% increase for the treatment group and a 14.47% increase for the comparison group. The *Self-Science* curriculum does not focus explicitly on this skill, and the connection between the intervention and this growth is not immediately clear, however, the answer may lie in the information garnered from the focus groups.

Following the intervention, students from the treatment group participated in focus groups consisting of 5-6 students. Students were asked to define the term self-science, describe positive student behavior, and indicate how *Self-Science* influenced them in the classroom setting. The teacher-researcher selected these questions to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum and aid in the adoption decision.

Notable trends included the idea that *Self-Science* teaches students to control their emotions. As one third grader described, *Self-Science* is about how "you build yourself up to a certain point where you know more about yourself and what you are feeling and why you are feeling it." When asked to describe a good student, only three of the responses were related to study skills or intellectual ability while nine of them discussed social-emotional competencies. Students also noted how *Self-Science* helped them to do well in school because they could concentrate on schoolwork instead of playground conflicts; a possible explanation for why intervention group students felt more able to stay on task than control group students (based on the post-survey). As one student described:

> I think it helps us in school because we usually have fights and stuff and it helps us to not get into fights. Most of the fights happen outside but when you come into the classroom you're still fuming about it, like 'I'm never going to talk to her again' or something like that. And then you aren't actually listening to the teacher. But with self-science you aren't getting into fights as often so you can listen more.

The primary purpose of this action research was to explore the impact of a social-emotional curriculum on student academic competencies. A comparison of the growth between the *Self-Science* and control classrooms at pretest and post-test showed a link between *Self-Science* and academic competencies.

Secondarily, this action research sought to gather information about student perceptions of the SEL curriculum *Self-Science* to aid in the adoption decision. Focus group responses indicated that students understood that emotions play a role in the ability to focus on schoolwork and that a successful student is not just somebody with high academic intelligence, but somebody with high emotional intelligence who is able to monitor his or her own behavior. These results indicated that students perceived a link between the *Self-Science* and being a successful student. Based on the findings, the elementary school site chose to implement *Self-Science* on a wider scale and students will experience the SEL curriculum over the course of several years, potentially enhancing both EI and academic competencies. With intense pressures on our schools to raise academic achievement levels, the positive effects of social-emotional instruction on academic competencies warrant more attention.

References

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*(1), 405-432. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x

Esturgó-Deu, M.E., & Sala-Roca, J. (2010). Disruptive behavior of students in primary education and emotional intelligence. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*, 830-837.

McCown, K., Jensen, A., Freedman, J., & Rideout, M. (2010). *Self-Science: Getting started with social emotional learning.* San Francisco, CA: Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence Press.

Welcoming Applications for Graduate School at the University of Virginia

The Educational Psychology-Applied Developmental Science (EP-ADS) Training program offers masters and doctoral training at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. The EP-ADS programs prepare promising students to understand and produce research in applied developmental science that explicitly acknowledges the contribution of school and out-of-school settings on the development of children and youth. Further, these programs prepare students to examine how systematic changes in those contexts can alter developmental pathways. Several researchers are actively engaged in research on Social and Emotional Learning and provide mentorship in this area.

The programs focus on:

- Rigorous, programmatic research that offers scientifically-based evidence pertaining to the social and schooling environments of children and youth.
- Interdisciplinary approaches to addressing research on children and youth.
- Strength-based approach to studying children and youth from diverse backgrounds.
- Attention to implications of research for practice and policy.

For more information: http://curry.virginia.edu/ep-ads.

Deadline for applications: December 15, 2011 for doctoral program; March 15, 2012 for masters.

Announcing the New Edition of Second Step Programs

New Edition K-5 Second Step *Program*: The revised *Second Step: Skills for Social and Academic Success* includes new content based on recent research about brain function and self-regulation skills. It now features Skills for Learning, to help students with academic tasks and social situations, and Brain Builder games that promote executive-function skills. It also has updated content on empathy, emotion management and problem solving. Lively media components and a colorful design engages students while they learn and practice skills. The easy-to-use online Teaching Guide includes directions for teaching and reinforcing the lessons, video examples, assessment tools, and interviews with real teachers. Online training is also available.

New Second Step *Early Learning Program*: The brand-new *Second Step: Social-Emotional Skills for Early Learning* is designed specifically for classrooms of three and four-year-olds. Twenty-eight weekly themes consist of five- to seven-minute daily activities that integrate into the flow of the day. The activities include puppets, photo-based stories, songs, brain-building games, and skill practices to develop children's self-regulation skills and social-emotional competence. The easy-to-use online Teaching Guide includes directions for teaching and reinforcing the weekly themes, video examples of activities, and interviews with real teachers. The guide also includes resources for program directors to help them create professional development opportunities for their teachers.

For more information, contact Bridgid Normand, M.Ed., Program Development Manager Committee for Children, Seattle, WA, bnormand@cfchildren.org

WINGS for Kids

The Institute of Education Sciences has awarded a grant to the University of Virginia to conduct an efficacy study of the "WINGS for Kids" Social and Emotional Learning Program. WINGS is a 15-hour per week afterschool SEL program that weaves 30 learning objectives into everyday activities to develop self-awareness, relationship skills, social awareness, self-management and responsible decision-making. The efficacy study will be conducted in four low-performing elementary schools in North Charleston, South Carolina. Because more kindergartners apply for WINGS than can be accommodated, a lottery in each school will determine which children enroll, and the study will compare social and academic outcomes of participating and non-participating children. The research team includes David Grissmer and Andrew Mashburn (Co-PIs), Julia Blodgett, Elizabeth Cottone, Nancy Deutsch, and Sara Rimm-Kaufman (Co-Is from the University of Virginia) and Laura Brock (Co-I from the College of Charleston). WINGS has been recognized as representing best practices by the Academy for Educational Development and the National Institute of Out-of-School Time.

SIG Officers and Leaders

SIG Chair: Susan Stillman
sbstillman@gmail.com

SIG Chair-Elect: Joshua Brown
cjobrown@fordham.edu

Program Chair: Kim Schonert-Reichl
kimberly.schonert-reichl@ubc.ca

Program Chair Elect: Susan Rivers
susan.rivers@yale.edu

Secretary-Treasurer Elect: Nancy Markowitz
nmarko49@gmail.com

Membership Chair Elect: Norris Haynes
HAYNESNM@aol.com

Communications Chair: Maria LaRusso
maria.larusso@nyu.edu

Student Representative: Keith Zander
keithjzander@gmail.com

Student Representative Elect: Amy Mart

amykathrynmart@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor: Patricia Jennings & Sara Rimm-Kaufman
tish@garrisoninstitute.org
serk@virginia.edu

Newsletter Editor Elect: Sara Rimm-Kaufman
serk@virginia.edu

The SEL SIG newsletter is published twice annually - fall and spring.