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Integrating Mental Health and Social Emotional Learning Into Secondary Curriculum

Jain Prabhu Thomas

Research Scholar at School of Management affiliated to NICHE University,
Kumaracovil, Kanniyakumari, Tamil Nadu, India

K. Asha

Management Department of NICHE University, Kumaracovil, Kanniyakumari,
Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract--- The capability to acquire knowledge on all levels improves among students when they can ably manage and handle their social as well as emotional aspects of their lives. Therefore, SEL (Teaching Social / Emotional Learning), should be an integral part of secondary education which will increase student's academic performance and at the same time passively groom them to face the challenges which will keep posing them lifelong and give them a scope of learning more in the volatile world environment. The previous literature reviews advocate that there is a consistent general improvement in student behaviour and learning wherever established SEL programs is implemented. Furthermore, regular sessions of compassion for members of the society which are important element of SEL when combined into education at secondary level, a marked decrease of violence and absenteeism rates is observed, at the same time it improves student relations, focus and academic education. Therefore, teacher credential programs are recommended.

Keywords---emotional intelligence, emotions, review, social intelligence, training.

Introduction

In simple terms we can define 'Social and Emotional Learning' as the capability to identify and cope up with emotions, resolve problems effectively, and form positive relationships with others (Zins & Elias, 2007). It is imperative that the prerequisite for the learning process to occur is the ability of an individual to deal with stress, depression or emotion. One of the most important aspect of being successful in both professional sphere and private life is Emotional Intelligence.

The ability of an individual to handle the circumstances and to understand behaviours, attitudes, and urges is defined as EI (Emotional Intelligence) Quotient.

Having worked with pupils who had difficulty in academic writing on a one to one basis as I was the specialist in high school level writing, I observed a trend. According to my observation, most of these students were dealing with different types of emotional and situational stresses which kept them distracted, resulting in weak writing skills. The lack of proper addressable of their major hurdles were social and/or emotional needs which needed to be addressed. How could they concentrate on the assignment at hand with a distracted mind? A major concern which erupts in this scenario is, if the students do not learn the skills of handling social / emotional issues in schools or at home, then how would they be able to become responsible members of society who could contribute to the society and the nation at large.

Problem statement

Secondary schooling usually occurs during the period of adolescence. This era in an individual's life is often a chapter which is crucial in catering to shape his/her life; the basic needs viz. physical health, security and social recognition are very unstable. Apart from the physical and emotional changes which occur during this period, they face challenges as per the general norms of the society to achieve academic expectations which are thought to be catered in college and other educational institutions. Some students flare well when these challenges pose themselves, while others somehow learn to "survive" the challenges by hook or by crook. Unfortunately, far too many fall behind as they are not dexterous enough to understand and imbibe the demanding academic content since they do not get enough basic social and emotional support.

Research questions

How does secondary curriculum benefit by integrating SEL into it? How can the implementation of SEL be done in an effective way?

Theoretical rationale

As such the term 'SEL' is a new jargon comparatively; in the field of education; the public education system of this country, does address the social and emotional needs of students, as a vital part of the curriculum, in different passive ways. As per Daniel Goleman's first publication of Emotional Intelligence in (2005) - A theory of education which is over encompassing enough can be found to be deeply embedded in SEL- this comprises of intelligence, emotions along with physical, social, and spiritual awareness for development (Meaker, 2006, para.1).

Need and background

The world today is suffused with distractions and uncertainty. If we consider the technological front alone, one can keep wondering how swiftly our society has transformed and is continuing to morph on. Adolescents are by far adept at using

modern gadgets than most of their parents and teachers. There is a flood of information; good, bad and evil along with untamed accessibility. With such profound accessibility to information, young people sift through various ads, concepts with little to no instructional guidance. After all what is the purpose of all this information about teaching? Apart from technology-based distractions, pressure of academic performance has overloaded the students of secondary level, eating upon quality time with family and reducing the passive opportunities of skill development outside the academic knowledge at school, for example interacting with people while doing part-time job or engaging with some charitable organization for a cause etc.. if an individual works outside after school hours it promotes non-academic talents, increases interaction between people of two generations and the positive interpersonal skills get honed.

Summary

In the prevailing age of Information Technology there is an increasing sense of overpowering capacity. Nowadays, students are trying to cope with the hectic schedules of class sessions for passing exams that measure their capacity for objective reasoning, rational and diagnostic skills and as a result they are left with little time or desire for developing their ability to cope with uncertain situations which might arise round the corner, nor do they know how to how to manage stress. The improvement of the overall learning environment is the ultimate purpose of this study. The main objective of the design is to acquire knowledge and collection of data about the students. It involves measurement, classification, analysis, comparison and interpretation and seeks to find answer through the analysis of various relationships. In this research the researcher focused on socio demographic features of the secondary school students.

Review of the literature

The literature review was conducted on SEL programs based on prior researches in this field. Practicing exercises based on developing awareness about oneself, ability to manage the issues upcoming in life, and the ability to interact optimistically with the society at large improves the ability to learn among the students and also gives them an edge which help them throughout their life.

Social and emotional problems

The outcomes of many researches have elaborated that youth with emotional and behavioural disorders have the worst graduation rate of all students with disabilities. Studies have shown that the national average of students graduating high school is 76 percent while only 40 percent of students with emotional, behavioural and mental health disorders are able to graze through. Similar studies have supporting data that over 50% of students with emotional and behavioural disabilities who fall above the age 14 and above tend to be dropouts of high school. The dropout rate is alarming as compared to any disability group.

Designing and implementation of SEL

The effectiveness of SEL programs are based on two factors viz. design and implementation as per the meta-analysis done in 201. It is as follows:

- Programs are more successful when the four major aspects of training referred to by the acronym SAFE are followed. SAFE stands for (1) structured training (2) energetic methods of learning (3) focus on allocating ample time on developing skills and (4) having clear-cut aim in learning.
- Usually strategies for SEL implementation according to most of the studies and researches are based on classroom-based interventions passively intertwined in regular classrooms by teachers, as a regular educational practice along with subject matter.

The following three requirements had to be met for inclusion in this pilot program for SEL implementation:

- Well-made programs that methodically stimulate SEL competence in the classroom environment and offer enough opportunities for practice at different levels.
- The training given to the facilitators and other infrastructural support guarantees proper implementation of the programme.
- Evaluation that has been conducted in the field show positive effects on student's attitude and/or academics.
- The educational models to be used during the regular school days with all students must be uniform in nature
- The written materials should be properly codified
- The new facilitators should be upgraded by providing appropriate professional development opportunities.
- The programme should have been replicated at multiple sites to guarantee the outcome.
- A tangible exercise on evaluating to show optimistic influence on students' behaviour and/or outcomes in the field of academic should be done to make others believe on the need and effectiveness of SEL programmes.

CASEL collaborates with the University of Illinois to find states which are interested in developing and implementing standard SEL programs in their schools and colleges. Their goal is to develop a comprehensive programme within five-year for being trained in dealing with social issues as well as emotional issues which crop up in our lives, from preschool through high school, in at least more than a score of states. Expert's view on SEL programs vide short one-to-one interviews:

- Dr. K.Asha has been a patron of developing the professional in schools nationwide to help instructors to start an inclusive program for preventing social evils and promoting positive attributes. Her professional certification on dealing with emotional intelligence and is also a guide of research scholars in the field of Emotional Intelligence.

- Dr. Shaju Ph.D. He is an author and a recognized trainer of trainers at schools and colleges for environment improvement, character-building education, community related and mood & attitude related learning. Presently the Registrar of Mianz International College, and student and teacher support personnel.
- Dr. Delphin, has been a child physiotherapist in the clinical environment for children aged 10 to 18 years where she experimented with and developed treatment programs using expressive therapies for children and families with issues. Thereafter, she diverted her focus from clinics to school environments stretching from preschool to college level where she has worked for 15 years in different positions as facilitator, trainer and programme developer. Presently she is the Principal of Education at the Institute of Vins International School, Nagercoil in Tamil Nadu in South India.
- Dr. Ashok Jayarama is a famous educator from India who initially worked in Maldives and is now The Dean at a Business College named International Training Institute in Papua New Guinea. He has co-authored a paper on Worldview Explorations – It deals in the incorporation of SEL based curriculum within standard secondary school teaching outlines in areas such as Finance, Social Studies Management, Education, and Art.

Method

This research is based on the qualitative approach using purposive sampling to select respondents who were secondary students who took part in a social emotional learning program offered at local school. All the details about location, access and permission, instruments used, strategies for data gathering and data analysis methods are mentioned in this section.

Sample and site

A sample of thirty-five students from grade 8, 9 and 10 from Omadhoo School who voluntarily participated in a program called Social Emotional Learning Discussion (SELD)

- Grade 8 – 12 students
- Grade 9 – 11 students
- Grade 10 – 12 students

Access and permission

Before volunteering to conduct the study at Omadhoo School, proper Consent of Participation letters were acquired from the parents of the respective students. Due feedbacks were taken from the student and teacher who participated in the SELD pilot program.

Data gathering strategies

I have prepared a questionnaire to collect the relevant data from respondents. In this questionnaire, students elaborated their involvements in the SELD program

by responding to the questions based on social problems, emotional problems and infrastructural facilities and services available in the school.

Data analysis approach

Responses for the survey forms with the respective questions were duly gathered and reviewed. They were categorized according to their importance levels into main and minor themes and thereafter the analysis for similarities of views and differences in views amongst participants would be done. The narratives of developing themes were deduced along with parallels and variances from the participant responses which were also coded.

Findings

The volunteers for the SELD program were thirty-five students from Omadhoo School who studies in grades 8,9 and 10.. The English teacher volunteered to facilitate the program after seeking due permission from the principal to incorporate the SELD program as with English curriculum for experimenting on the effect of its implementation on students. The units such as:

- Understanding and respecting ourselves.
- Understanding Others and giving them due respect
- Networking with and being a contributor to the World

Themes and overall findings

The students who volunteered to participate in SELD program completed the questionnaires in the survey forms and wrote feedback essays at the end of the program. Three major themes appeared commonly from the review of these students' essays. All the students' participating in the program submitted their reports.

Table 1
Student participation report in the SELD

Classes	Number of Students	Social Problems		Emotional Problems		Satisfaction of School facilities.	
		High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Grade 8	12	10	2	11	1	11	1
Grade 9	11	10	1	11	0	11	0
Grade 10	12	12	0	10	0	11	1

35 students reported the following subthemes in their feedback:

- The significance of approval for others
- Probability of reduction in conflicts because of the awareness gained by the knowledge acquired by the SELD program.
- The program broadened their overall perception towards life by being broad minded and knowing the fruits of open-mindedness.

Summation of major findings

A summarized form of SEL curriculum was employed to a pilot group of 35 students who participated voluntarily, in it. There was no academic credit or grade for certified recognition, but many positive outcomes based on their involvement were self-reported, as revealed from some of the comments by students which are as follows:

- Student 1- Vide the SELD program of Worldview Project I have become a better person who would like to live in harmony with the other members in the. In this way, the world will be a place free of hate and a better place to live in.
- Student 2- After undergoing the SELD program I have discovered that we should know about the ways to deal with life but we can upgrade ourselves by looking around the things hapennig in our society and develop our personlity
- Student 3- After undergoing the Worldview SELD program, I am planning to teach my peers about the benefits of the program. I think we should invest more time in similar programs because there is a lot to learn in this field for having a healthy and satisfied life.

Comparison of findings to previous research

This research also accentuates the previous endeavours in the field of SEL program implementation and the outcomes are quite in sync with them too. The importance of a properly developed SELD program when implemented effectively will surely improve the ability to deal with personal matters and interactive skills of participants, along with a bunch of other benefits which ultimately improve the learning atmosphere and ability for all levels of students. Based on some, condensed SELD program that were used as the basis for this research study, focused particularly in the area of self and social awareness, it was found to be effective and welcoming by the stakeholders.

Limitations/shortcomings in the study

The following limitations of this study are worth a mention so that in future they can be overcome for a better research outcome which could be more applicably authentic:

- The SEL curriculum implemented in this research had to be done in a short span of time due to the circumstances.
- The use of a condensed version of the SEL content was used to get it synched with the available time limit given.
- The sample size of respondent students was small as the program and not mandatory for all the students. This also affected the outcome as students from all strata could not be accommodated in the research study.

Suggestions for future research

Further researches in a more elaborate scenario by overcoming the shortcomings mentioned above will put more relevant light on the positives of integrating SEL in secondary curriculum. As a result, more funds can be allocated or arranged by CSR activities to enable the schools to address the utmost demands in their respective communities. Other areas of interest which could be included in future studies are:

- The correlation between teacher turnover, enhanced classroom controlling methods and student behaviour.
- The correlation between student's behaviour in sync with the norms of the society and graduation rates.
- Analysing the overall program cost for implementation of SEL program vs. increased teacher retention and higher graduation rates in the long run.
- Benefits of incorporating SEL related components into programs meant for training teacher, coaches and facilitators.
- Integrating SEL to common academic subject matter with due assessments linking to reach universal SEL standards.
- Inclusion of SEL in the curriculum as compulsory subject for students who require more help in the form of guidance in academic or psychological field due to any societal lacuna.
- Develop a SEL community with due parent education outreach to improvise environmental factors for a more permanent skill development and there by develop the cohesiveness in the community.

Importance of the study

The moment a child steps out of the protective shield of childhood to adolescence and thereafter adulthood; he/she faces the world full of differences and vague issues leading them to nowhere groping in the maze they try to find the helping hand of a mentor among the adults in vicinity. The lucky ones do get some able mentors but they might be prejudiced and not open-minded enough to guide properly to cope with the fast changing world. The child stands with erratic peers, enthusiastic but afraid, as they will get into this world, together, but they are not sure about the success in whatever they are trying to do. They believe that something constructive and beneficial can be done by them for the entire world but they are not sure.

They feel bored in the classroom lessons as the teachers teach them the knowledge which they can easily access by clicking the Goggle buttons on their pocket mobile smart phones. Students of the secondary level are technical savviness and much more advanced in the use of the internet related options compared to their teachers. Schools try their best to get the facilitators to adapt and come at par by giving crash courses and workshops. A constant progressive reflection on how to utilize classroom time viably gives the promising edge to encourage schools for integrating SEL to make room for community based learning.

- Do we want our children to become only knowledgeable?

- Do we want our children to be dependable, peaceful, drug free and gentle?
- If the content in the curriculum is too wide to teach them all those qualities, then we are not left with any option for omissions? (Elias, 2008b).

When these questions are asked to parents of the respective students or the management boards of schools, or decision makers of curriculum selection, then the answers will not come in candid terms. It is true that both academics and social life are important for survival.

About the authors

- Jain Prabhu Thomas began his career in the field of Business Administration. Five years of studying in Business Administration (BBA, Bachelor of Business Administration, Three years and MBA, Master of Business Administration, Two years) he has earned knowledge and served as Administration Manager in Hospitality industries for four years. Teaching is his favourite field so it tends to lecturing to students during the experience of hospitality industry. Thereafter, got an offer in one of the reputed international college in Maldives. By his incessant hard work and a burning desire to reach out more students, he has joined a school in the Ministry of Education, Maldives as a secondary teacher. He is a scholar in management studies under the guidance of Dr.K.Asha, Assistant Professor of NICHE, Kumaracovil, India, He is currently a student of Master of Education, MI College, Maldives under the guidance of Dr.Shaju, Registrar, MI College, Maldives. Jain Prabhu was analysing that students are emotionally not stable to manage social comments to education. Society is a factor which influences the student's emotional learning. Jain is now concentrating on facilitating secondary schools in evaluating, planning, implementing and assessing social and emotional programming. He is a motivational speaker, advisor, gives counselling sessions to stressed people, a positive thinker, writer, poet, and an actor.
- Dr. K. Asha, Assistant Professor, NICHE-Kumaracovil.
Asha is an Assistant Professor of Management Studies at Noorul Islam Centre for Higher Education where she has taught courses for MBA and BBA students and she is also actively involved in guiding multiple doctoral students at Noorul Islam Centre for Higher Education. She is specialized in Marketing Management. Her research examines the Behaviour of Rural Consumer towards Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) in Tamilnadu. Asha earned her B. Sc (Computer Science) in Kamaraj College, Thoothukudi, affiliated to M.S. University, her MBA in HR and Marketing from Noorul Islam Centre for Higher Education and her Ph. D in Management from Noorul Islam Centre for Higher Education. Her area of interests is Marketing Management, Organizational Behaviour, Human Resource Management, Production and Operations Management

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