

Promoting Academic Growth for ELLs with Socioemotional Learning

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Abstract

The problem I want to address is the lack of socio-emotional support given to ELLs in their educational journey. This problem affects ELLs mentally as well as academically. There needs to be a focus on the academic aspect with support of the mental aspect. Without proper support, ELLs social and emotional health declines and their academic performance is not showcased to its fullest extent. Teachers are not able to differentiate lessons and develop plans for ELLs as their social and emotional health are not taken into consideration. By implementing strategies, the child's full identity can be represented and their academic skills are showcased. This is showcased in a professional development, targeting teachers, and focusing on the learning goal of defining socioemotional learning and its connection to academic skills for ELLs. The findings of the associated research and professional development opportunity gives insight to how the use of socioemotional learning improves ELLs academic abilities. The field of socioemotional learning is an evolving subject, so research must continue in order to determine the most accurate information associated with the effect on academic development.

Keywords: ELLs, mainstream classroom, differentiation, ESOL, PD, socio-emotional

Chapter 1: Introduction

The idea of improved data relating to students' academic growth is constantly prioritized by administration. There is always a new goal in mind in order to ensure student success is shown through levels of proficiency, whether it be in Math or English Language Arts. Specifically, English Language Learners, or ELLs, are being tested and retested in order to ensure they are increasing their levels of knowledge in school. However, something that gets lost in the midst of meeting goals and showcasing improved assessment results is the idea of ELLs socio-emotional health.

In thinking about the overarching idea of socio-emotional health, confidence is the first topic that comes to mind. This is especially true for ELL students. Assessments and academic tasks offer a range of either increasing confidence levels or diminishing any sort of self-confidence. ELLs struggle in completing a lot of assessments due to the lack of accommodations offered nationwide, and in turn affecting their status in mainstream classrooms and leading to a higher rate of failures than successes (Dellicarpini & Guler, 2013). The minimal accommodations given to ELLs were based on previously existing accommodations for students with disabilities, rather than considering the idea of students relocating to a completely new environment, such as what a lot of ELLs do. Many studies found that the prioritization of high-stakes testing led to the lack of ensuring ELLs succeeded in mainstream classrooms academically (Dellicarpini & Guler, 2013). By solely focusing on the high-stakes testing, ELLs socio-emotional health suffers during the school year and leads them to believe confidence levels and their only goal is to succeed on whatever important assessment awaits them toward the end of the year.

In this capstone project, I will be using several academic terms and acronyms. English language learners, acronym ELLs, will be used frequently. This refers to students who are learning to communicate effectively in English and who come from a home that utilizes another language, such as Spanish or Russian. Another term that will be used is mainstream classroom. This refers to a classroom following the general curriculum without special accommodations for students with disabilities or ELLs. Differentiation will also be a term used when referring to tailoring instruction for specific needs. Professional development, acronym PD, will be used as well, in order to promote various training material for educators on various topics. English as a second language (acronym ESOL) teachers will also be utilized when referring to educators who focus on teaching the fundamentals of English to non-English speaking students. Finally, social and emotional, or socio-emotional, will be discussed frequently, referring to regulating emotions and discussing problems in a healthy manner. With this, social emotional learning, acronym SEL, will be discussed as the promotion of teaching students to own and respect their emotions and feelings.

In this capstone, the overarching question will be: How can educators support ELLs academic growth with socio-emotional strategies? As discussed above, there is so much pressure placed on ELLs when it comes to academic success and assessment proficiency. My goal in completing this capstone and providing an accompanying professional development session is to promote strategies that will prioritize socio-emotional health and in turn, improve academic growth. If educators find ways to encourage the discussion of socio-emotional health in the classroom, the pressure of academics is alleviated and assessment data improves.

Social and emotional health begins before students step foot into a classroom. This is something that happens naturally at home and is brought into the classroom, as a type of

foundation. Research shows that students that are mentally healthy participate in the classroom, socialize with others, show engagement during lessons, and perform at a more proficient standard than those less mentally healthy (Ho & Funk, 2018). Teachers must be able to support their students' socio-emotional health in order to promote more academic success. Without the knowledge of various strategies to promote mental health, teachers are doing a disservice to ELLs when it comes to their potential and capabilities. Schonert-Reichl (2017) explains that teachers must be educated themselves in teacher-preparation programs in order to recognize the prioritization of social and emotional health and the use of SEL to promote ELLs academic success. By being informed of various SEL strategies, teachers can pass on techniques to promote ELLs socio-emotional health and in turn, improve academic success.

Significance of the Problem

The issue of the prioritization of social and emotional health is a national problem for ELLs in the classroom. Ragozzino et al. (2003) elaborates on the idea that having a lack of SEL and the promotion of socio-emotional health ensures student attendance, motivation, and engagement decreases and in turn, negatively affects academic growth. ELLs face a vast array of challenges as compared to other students, such as linguistic challenges and cultural adjustments. Some students come to the United States without family and without any knowledge of the English language. By forcing these students into a classroom with a focus on assessment proficiency and academic success, their social and emotional well being declines and their probability of success deteriorates.

Research has shown that in order to capitalize on students' academic success, their well being as a whole must be prioritized and recognized within the classroom (Dixon, 2016). This is especially true for ELLs. In coming to a completely new country or being transplanted into a

new environment outside of their non-English speaking home, their identity is questioned and they must discover their own mental health before enhancing their academic skills. By implementing various SEL strategies and promoting ELLS socio-emotional health, their identity becomes more clear to them and their motivational skills come naturally.

Purpose

In thinking of the issue at hand, ELLs socio-emotional health and its effect on academic growth and success, my goal is to curate a PD that promotes various SEL strategies. The PD will be delivered in three days. The first session will focus on socioemotional learning. The second session will focus on ways to connect with students outside the classroom, making socioemotional connections and ways to promote socioemotional learning in the classroom. The last session will center on implementations of strategies addressed in the previous two sessions. However, the overall goal is to ensure the use of these strategies and not only encourage SEL, but academic growth. These go hand in hand for the overall well being of the students.

My primary audience for the PD will be elementary and middle school educators, as these are the guides of these strategies and techniques for ELLs. The PD will offer multiple forms of research as well as opportunities to showcase examples and knowledge of these strategies being utilized in the classroom environment. The promotion of at least one of the strategies will be encouraged within the first couple weeks of school and its effect measured mid-year.

Summary

The importance of ELLs socio-emotional health must be prioritized by educators. By prioritizing and utilizing different strategies and techniques, their academic success will be showcased with various data points. This problem affects ELLs mental well being and leads to a

lack of self-confidence and motivation when performing school related tasks, in turn showing a lack of academic success and growth. This capstone and PD will encourage the use of SEL with a focus on ELLs social emotional well being interlocked with their academic success. In turn, strategies will be utilized to help ELLs develop more self confidence and self respect for themselves in and out of the classroom.

In chapter 2, the reader will find a review of the literature with information on social emotional strategies from various research sources and how these strategies promote social and emotional health and academic growth. In chapter 3, readers will be given a layout and description of the PD that enhances the research from the previous chapter with hands-on opportunities and personal connections. In chapter 4, all of the given information will be concluded in a concise manner that offers suggestions and restatement of the overall goals of the capstone and PD. In addition, I will also include an Appendix A that includes figures in the form of handouts and materials for the PD.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will review literature and research that is relevant to the overarching question: How can educators support ELLs academic growth with socio-emotional strategies? The objective of this chapter is to provide theories, problems, and solutions related to the overarching question. The chapter will include multiple tools, materials, and methods that support the implementation of a professional development for educators.

This portion of the capstone revolves around the concept of social and emotional learning and how this can affect ELLs socioemotional health and academic success. Specifically, the importance of a teacher's role is showcased through various data points obtained from studies that implemented SEL programs within ELL environments. Continuing the idea of staff support, the role of administration is discussed and how administration's leadership abilities can make or break an SEL program and how it is curated for a specific district and population. Also discussed is the importance of family involvement and collaboration between all adult parties in ELLs lives in order to promote social, emotional, and academic growth. Concluding the chapter, supportive and contrasting evidence lays out the foundation for future studies and research around the everchanging area of ELLs and socioemotional health, as related to academic growth.

Social and Emotional Learning

The central theme of the overarching question revolves around the focus on student socioemotional health and how this improves their academic skills. The concept of social and emotional learning (SEL), introduced by Daniel Goleman, is the foundation of the research and literature being reviewed in this capstone project. A study conducted by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2007), or CASEL, reports that the focus on student

socioemotional health, as implemented with the idea of social and emotional learning, improves academic skills in all areas as well as the promotion of positive relationships and empathy. The concept of social and emotional learning provides a foundation of positive socioemotional health that leads to increased academic skills (CASEL, 2007).

SEL ensures that students are able to regulate their emotions in a way that promotes their socioemotional health while ensuring their academic skills remain the primary focus.

Schonert-Reichl (2017) elaborates on the idea that a collaboration between teachers allows for more enhanced versions of SEL to be implemented within classrooms and students respond to the strategies frequently. However, the idea of SEL and socioemotional health must be translated to teachers before these practices can be implemented within classrooms successfully. Without the knowledge and importance of socioemotional health being explained with consistent definitions, teachers are not able to strategize how the concepts and strategies help students academically.

Research provided by CASEL showcased that students who received SEL in elementary school had an eleven point higher grade point average as compared to their peers who did not receive SEL in their academics (CASEL, 2007). This multiyear study is just one of many that ensures the promotion of SEL implements socioemotional strategies that lead to academic success. Research shows that students that are mentally healthy participate in the classroom, socialize with others, show engagement during lessons, and perform at a more proficient standard than those less mentally healthy (Ho & Funk, 2018). All of these facts, along with the study mentioned earlier, solidify the idea that focusing on a student's socioemotional health enhances the schooling experience of students and ensures consistent academic success based around student identity.

SEL and ELLs

The implementation of SEL and focus on socioemotional learning is critical for ELLs academic success within the classroom environment. The pressure of second language acquisition offers multiple challenges socially, emotionally, and academically for ELLs as anxiety levels and feelings of isolation are higher (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). These feelings lead to a lack of academic success and focus for ELLs as they are not able to solely focus on the study of common standards but also the pressure of acquiring a language that the common standards are being delivered in.

Reese et al. (2014) conducted a study in California that showed the effect of focusing on ELLs cultural identity and how this led to higher academic success by implementing strategies that promote socioemotional health. The study delivered results for Latino children that showcased their academic skills rising when teachers and administration intertwined cultural identity within the curriculum and how this type of SEL activated higher socioemotional and academic skills. This study supports the idea that as students transition into a new environment and begin second language acquisition, socioemotional support is necessary in ensuring their academic skills increase at a rate that keeps them on a successful track.

Some ELLs experience problems with discrimination, immigration, family separations, poverty, discrimination, and cultural discrepancies. These problems lead to irregular amounts of internalizing emotions and coping with issues in their lives outside of school (Reese et al., 2014). These internalizations affect academic success and more importantly, their socioemotional health. Although many schools focus solely on the academic success of ELLs, the promotion of SEL programs is equally as important as ELLs socioemotional health can dictate how well academic success rates increase (Adams & Richie, 2017). By implementing various SEL

programs within schools servicing ELLs, student socioemotional health is something that is discussed more frequently and more doors are opened as to how various challenges can be overcome in order to move forward.

Klem and Connell (2004) conducted a study that determined 40-60% of students were disengaged from their schooling experience by the time they reached high school when they had teachers who did not engage them in topics that were relatable, such as cultural values and bilingualism. The study determined that, with teacher engagement and meaningful conversations about student interests and their lives outside of school, student engagement increased between 40-70% leading up to high school. One of the simplest solutions to ensuring SEL becomes a norm for educators is to have conversations about challenges in ELLs lives and how these challenges have affected their school performance (Durlak et al., 2011). By showcasing empathy for situations ELLs have dealt with, students are more likely to collaborate with educators and administration in a way that promotes their academic success once they realize their socioemotional health is being prioritized.

Educators using socioemotional strategies to support ELLs academic growth

There are many strategies implemented by the use of SEL that support the idea of academic growth through the focus of socioemotional health. These strategies not only take into consideration the common challenges any student faces when showcasing their academic skills, but also the many traumas and uphill climbs that ELLs face exclusively. Educators are the leaders in implementing socioemotional strategies under the umbrella of SEL. However, one of the biggest challenges to the implementation of SEL and socioemotional strategies is the fact that if a teacher is showcasing increased stress levels due to a lack of socioemotional health, students become stressed out as well (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This is especially true for ELLs as a big

part of their cultural adjustment is understanding how emotions and a new society intertwine with one another. So, in order for these strategies to be implemented successfully, educators must be aware of their own socioemotional health and the effects that SEL can have not only on their students, but on themselves.

There are many different SEL strategies that promote academic success with a focus on socioemotional health. Adams and Richie (2017) elaborate on various strategies such as: implementing problem-solving strategies that incorporate cultural events in history; class sharing that allows students the opportunity to share various experiences and gives ELLs the chance to use listening and speaking skills; meditation allows ELLs the opportunity to spend a moment of their day relaxing and taking a breath while in the classroom; and goal setting gives ELLs the chance to visualize the challenges in front of them and how to address each challenge in order to grow each day, whether academically, socially, or emotionally. These are a few strategies that change the scope of ELLs learning in a classroom. While focusing on student growth, educators that lead these moments of SEL experience the various benefits as well, such a moment to meditate and reflect on their own goals and outcomes. These small moments in the classroom give the educator and students chances to glimpse at their socioemotional health while also unintentionally promoting the growth of their academic success.

Recognizing Student Identity

A big focus in ensuring ELLs experience SEL and promote socioemotional health is the use of culturally responsive materials. Student identity is critical in making mental health important in a classroom. Language and cultural background are two key components in developing effective SEL programs for classrooms involving ELLs (Kao, 2017). Student identity recognizes the cultural background and language background that ELLs bring to the classroom.

By discussing their identity and background at the forefront of instruction, socioemotional health becomes a natural part of the curriculum and academic growth is showcased through various subjects of instruction.

Recognizing student identity in a classroom does not only involve discussions about family dynamics or culture, but also the implementation of lessons with familiar faces and ideas. An example of this is using picture books in elementary classrooms to showcase different types of people. Libnoch and Ridley (2020) detailed a teacher's elementary classroom in which a picture book about refugees opened up a conversation about family identities and the importance of recognizing each person's journey. By delivering a lesson about refugees, ELLs are able to discuss personal connections they may have with a text while also discussing a topic that can affect socioemotional health. This is one example of how delivering culturally responsive teaching enhances strategies implemented by SEL strategies and in turn, promoting socioemotional health and discussion. While ELLs are growing academically on a social studies topic, their personal identities are represented and their families are able to be involved in a discussion about a sensitive topic.

The many socioemotional strategies offered through a SEL lens gives ELLs and educators a chance to reflect on their own identity while promoting academic success in the classroom. In connection with the curriculum, instruction becomes more effective across multiple modalities of learning and ELLs see themselves across many different subjects. Districtwide SEL implementation offers more consistency for ELLs socioemotional and academic growth.

Family Involvement

Niehaus and Adelson (2014) explain that one of the most important components of ensuring socioemotional health is prioritized for ELLs is the involvement of families. Academic success is more apparent when all parties are involved in consistency for the students. When educators, administration, and parents are on the same page as far as academic goals and the importance of socioemotional health, students remain consistent in their growth and are able to recognize their emotions in a way that translates through their academics. According to Niehaus and Adelson, research shows that when all parties are not involved in a student's academic success with the implementation of SEL, ELLs internalize emotions in a way that leads to a lack of focus in the school environment and they do not bring the interest of academic success into their homes. By implementing programs that offer collaboration with the adult parties, ELLs become more understanding of intertwining socioemotional health with their academics.

Strategies to support academic growth

Libnoch and Ridley (2020) elaborate on the importance of family involvement by explaining their experience with using picture books involving refugees within elementary classrooms, allowing for conversations about family backgrounds. This goes hand in hand with familial collaboration because ELLs and their families are able to have conversations about past occurrences and possible personal relationships with those that have been refugees. This is one example of a series of lessons that can be utilized in the home in partnership with the classroom.

According to Lado (2012), the use of picture book implementation in various school districts showed proven success for ELLs comprehension abilities. Specifically, the use of a Dr. Seuss vignette allowed students the opportunity to showcase their content knowledge while engaging with picture books. By showcasing the importance of recognizing personal connections

within education, ELLs become aware of discussing socioemotional health of not only themselves, but family members that they may or may not have met, yet carry some of their family history. Picture books are one component of an elementary setting that offers opportunities for personal narrative discussion and how various subjects have affected ELLs lives outside of the classroom (Libnoch & Ridley, 2020). The family involvement aspect of the personal discussions create a consistent connection between home and school. NYSED (2022) reports that 60% of the ELL population is in the elementary grades, so making these home connections at an early age and encouraging the conversation of socioemotional health and personal relationships offers emotional growth throughout their schooling years and in turn, promotes the growth of academic success.

Shillady et al. (2014) conducted a study involving elementary principals that offered a glimpse at various strategies that were helpful in engaging families in the conversation of socioemotional health and academic growth. A partnership between administration, parents, and community organizations was happening in this community, which housed a large number of Spanish speaking families, and encouraged participation in educator-hosted events. Shillady et al. explain that these events consisted of various activities such as families showcasing cultural norms; educator visits to homes in order to enhance the use of STEM outside of the classroom; and games with families and educators in order to encourage collaboration. This strategy of family engagement allows for collaboration between administration, families, and the classroom teacher. According to Shillady et al., the study of families in this community elaborated on the fact that collaboration between home and school is critical for student success socially, emotionally, and academically.

Panferov (2010) conducted a study with various ELLs and their families, explaining the importance of a positive learning environment in the home and the connection made between the classroom and the home. The study found that without learning being promoted in the home, ELLs lacked the motivation to focus on their academics while at school. As a way to promote socioemotional strategies and incorporate SEL within the classroom, the educators of the ELL students began performing home visits in order to get to know student families and provide various resources for families to become involved in their student's education. In the study, families were given resources to help their children connect home learning and school learning. Also, parents received resources to help them enhance their English speaking skills by being introduced to various events in the community and socioemotional strategies to cope with molding their lives within a new community. According to Panferov, this elaboration on the importance of socioemotional health led to an increase of academic performance for ELLs and a deeper collaboration between educators and families.

School Investment

Family involvement in the socioemotional health and academic success of students is a clear component in ensuring ELLs discover the connection between their identity and the classroom. However, something that can offer challenges to the success of a SEL program is the investment of school districts. In their study, Brook et al. (2010) unveiled the importance of school building level administration and ELL socioemotional health. Brooks et al. delivered the results of the study by explaining that when administration supported the implementation of inclusive programs within schools, ELLs academic success was apparent, but in contrast, when programs were not supported by administration, ELLs socioemotional health and academics

declined. When thinking of collaborative measures to support ELLs success academically, the support of administration is critical.

Strategies to support academic growth

Classroom educators are able to implement many SEL strategies in order to promote ELLs academic success. However, Durlak et al. (2011) clarifies that studies of various kindergarten through twelfth grade classrooms have shown a more universal approach where administration implements various SEL programs within schools and ensures consistency between various classrooms delivers significant academic growth and promotes socioemotional health. According to Durlak et al., 213 schools were examined with the implementation of SEL programs and once the programs were successfully intertwined within curriculum, there was an 11% increase in academic performance overall. Durlak et al. noted after this study was completed that one of the most important parts of utilizing SEL strategies for academic success is the promotion of ELLs confidence. When students feel more confident in their academic success and feel as if families and educators support student confidence levels, they become more involved in learning and growth. Strategies involving SEL programs universally implemented by school districts where academic success became a consistent celebration gave ELLs the confidence levels to continue with their success and even celebrate success with families. Durlak et al. findings in this study showed that building confidence led to academic growth and the promotion of socioemotional health, but this was all reliant on the usage of a universal SEL program administered by the leaders of school districts.

Teachers of ELLs must be aware of the importance of socioemotional health and its connection to academic success before change can happen within these school districts.

Schonert-Reichl (2017) reports that as teachers become aware of their own socioemotional health

and the importance of SEL strategies utilized in a classroom, educators are able to deliver data and conversation that becomes convincing for administration to promote universal SEL programs within schools. Schonert-Reichl conducted a study on teacher preparation programs with 43 different universities, finding that only 16% of programs required educators to partake in a course about emotional development. According to Schonert-Reichl, understanding one's own identity as an educator allows for the opportunity to promote the conversation of identity for ELLs in a classroom. The study showcased that the programs requiring emotional development courses led to greater success rates for SEL implementation within classrooms. By utilizing strategies based around identity and socioemotional growth, students become more aware of their own surroundings and connections between home and school. These conversations can be convincing for the administration to implement universal SEL strategies in classrooms once data shows the academic growth of ELLs. Although educators cannot make a decision for all classrooms and all schools, providing consistent data and personal experiences in their own classroom ensures administrators become aware of the importance of socioemotional health and academic growth.

Teacher preparedness in supporting SEL implementation

Before teachers can push for socioemotional health and promote academic success for ELLs in the classroom, there must be a clear understanding of various methods and strategies for ELLs. Teacher preparation programs prior to the beginning of having one's own classroom involve very few, if any, courses involving specific education on differentiating lessons for ELLs (de Jong & Harper, 2005). This lack of preparation leads to the deficiency of instruction for ELLs that incorporates socioemotional strategies leading to academic growth. Although it is not up to a teacher to design curricula for a college preparatory program, there are measures that can

be taken to ensure teachers leading classrooms with ELLs enhance experiences for the students in front of them without the prior training.

Teachers are the foundation for ensuring classrooms are delivering culturally responsive instruction that promotes ELLs socioemotional health and academic growth. Without the knowledge to differentiate instruction and understand ELLs backgrounds, this is not something that can happen consistently. In a general education classroom, teachers are not going to face the uniqueness that a bilingual environment offers such as understanding code-switching and second-language production (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Without the knowledge of understanding the various characteristics ELLs bring to a classroom, teachers may assume this uniqueness is a language delay or undiagnosed disability. As showcased by the study conducted by Schonert-Reichl (2017), this lack of knowledge and preparation affects ELLs academic growth and in turn, affects their confidence and socioemotional health. According to de Jong and Harper (2005), this also affects how information is communicated to families and misinformation is spread. In turn, the ELLs educational journey is completely altered and they are not set up for success socially, emotionally, and academically (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). However, there are ways educators can educate themselves and prepare for ELLs in their classroom.

Strategies to support academic growth

Schools have the opportunity to offer professional development designed for the needs of the specific students they are serving. According to de Jong and Harper (2005), 42% of educators claim they have ELLs in their classroom, but only 12.5% of those educators have had professional development based around curating instruction for ELLs. de Jong and Harper constructed professional development ideas for schools such as: L1 and L2 development strategies; reading, writing, speaking, and listening strategies; making cultural needs explicit; and

cultural identity. Although cultural diversity is a priority for programs serving ELLs, language diversity is a critical measure that must be accounted for as well. Content teachers are not as prepared for promoting language skills for ELLs in classrooms. Bunch (2013) describes the biggest challenge for mainstream classroom teachers as not understanding the role of language when it comes to ELLs and how this understanding can completely change the scope of how content is delivered to this diverse group of learners. According to de Jong and Harper, a solution for this problem is the enhancement of professional development opportunities at the beginning of school year and throughout as well. One strategy that can be used is the collaboration of a teacher familiar with SEL strategies and a teacher familiar with the instruction of language for ELLs. By offering educators the opportunity to host a professional development based around the importance of socioemotional health and language instruction, mainstream teachers become more aware of the areas of focus needed for the ELLs in the classroom.

Muñoz et al. (2008) conducted a study on a strategy that has been implemented in various districts, the use of systemic functional linguistics, or SFL, which is centered around the notion of language function. This strategy utilizes the importance of language instruction within content areas and how pre teaching various vocabulary increases ELLs confidence and in turn, assists with socioemotional health. Muñoz et al. examined 21 educators before and after a professional development session on the use of SFL in classrooms. According to Muñoz et al., the results of the study showed that once teachers understood the use of SFL, students' writing performance increased along with their confidence and socioemotional health. Providing professional development opportunities for teachers to practice various SFL strategies ensured language instruction was understood across a broad spectrum of elementary classrooms and implemented more effectively in classrooms (de Jong & Harper, 2005). According to Muñoz et al., educators

were given the opportunity to role play with SFL strategies and then implement these strategies within their classrooms with ELLs. Ensuring equity between cultural instruction and language instruction allows for a natural usage of SEL within classrooms as well as a connection between the classroom and the home for families to understand the content being learned in a classroom (Bunch, 2013).

Supportive Evidence of SEL in Classrooms

The many studies surrounding the importance of cultural and language focus in connection with SEL, ELLs, and socioemotional health deliver consistent results linked to higher academic success. Kao (2017) conducted a study that involved interviews with various ELL educators, guidance counselors, and principals. Kao (2017) conducted that with multiple observations and interviews, notings in the findings that focusing on cultural backgrounds when considering SEL strategies linked socioemotional health and academic success consistently. ELLs and families seeing their identity represented within school events and classrooms led to higher attendance rates and more collaboration with families. This data supported the idea that a focus on socioemotional health is critical to greater academic success.

Cho et al. (2017) conducted a study with refugee ELLs and families that examined the various socioemotional skills needed in order to succeed in specific classroom environments. The most important aspect of the study involved six educators' perspectives, derived from interviews, about the refugee students in their classes and the capabilities teachers assumed students had or lacked. According to Cho et al., when teachers developed their expectations for the students based on each ELLs specific identity, the student had a more differentiated and individualized instruction that led to higher academic success. However, when the teacher made generalizations about the status of being a refugee and the needs of the specific student, SEL

strategies were not as successful. These findings show the criticality of focusing on student identity and recognizing each ELL as an individual, in turn curating an academic journey based on individual ELLs social, emotional, and academic needs.

Counter evidence of SEL in classrooms

There have been some studies that showcase lower academic rates in association with utilizing SEL programs with a focus on ELLs socioemotional health. Specifically, Niehaus and Adelson (2014) conducted a study with 1,020 third grade ELLs where a vast amount of socioemotional strategies were used to enhance academic abilities, but the ELLs academic skills were lacking as compared to peers attending different schools with less services being offered. According to Niehaus and Adelson, this finding was surprising, but a few explanations came to mind when trying to understand the data. For example, the study found that the schools providing a multitude of SEL programs within classrooms had higher turnover rates linking to districts that were not paying staff well as compared to other, better funded districts. This connected to the amount of new staff entering the school each year and providing the services. In comparison, schools with the higher academic rates and less SEL programs for ELLs had tenured educators and less of a turnover rate. The study concluded that less teacher knowledge of SEL strategies led to less success of these strategies. The data supported the idea that when teachers have a supportive foundation of socioemotional strategies for themselves, they are able to supply the students with ways to utilize socioemotional skills to enhance academic abilities (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Continuous research: What's missing?

Although there is much data based on the general student population and SEL programs, there is a lack of research on curating programs specifically for the socioemotional health of

ELLs. Even more necessary, and even more lacking, is the need for research based on how these programs positively affect ELLs academic growth. Kao (2017) produced a study with various educators that showcased the importance of intertwining social, emotional, and academic success, but pinpointed the lack of research available for the specific population of ELLs. SEL initiatives are clear and in the works for a lot of school districts, but the specificity and needs of ELLs has a lot of potential research that could help not only the students, but also the educators and administration spearheading the various programs. With continued research and data, students and families in various ELL environments can have more individualized instruction and socioemotional strategies to assist academic journeys.

Conclusion

The importance of SEL programs when it comes to ELLs socioemotional health and academic growth is something that needs to be continuously researched and advocated for. What is clear is that the role of administration, educators, and family is the driving force behind any of these types of programs becoming successful for ELLs in whichever area of growth is desired. Professional development is necessary for the educators involved in ELLs journey, as many college programs did not prepare educators for the role they have in differentiating instruction for ELLs while considering their social and emotional health.

The most important part of the education of ELLs is including identity in every part of the curriculum. In turn, socioemotional health becomes the forefront of the plan and a foundation is built for a successful SEL program. The data points displayed prior showcase the association with ELLs socioemotional health and higher academic rates. In chapter 3, I will describe professional development and materials designed in mitigating solutions to the overarching question.

Chapter 3: Description of Product

Introduction

This capstone project focuses on the overarching question of: How can educators support ELLs academic growth with socio-emotional strategies? This chapter contains information on a three-day professional development session, including associated activities and handouts. All copies of materials associated with the three-day professional development session are included in Appendix.

Session 1

The session will begin with greetings and all participants will receive a copy of the agenda (see Figure 1). Each day of professional development has a note catcher (see Figures 2-4), handed to attendees at the beginning of each session. The attendees are encouraged to take their completed note catchers home with them, as well as a copy of the slides. This ensures there is retainment of the knowledge from each day and attendees can apply information within their own classrooms and learning environments. The first day of the professional development session begins by going over the agenda (see Figure 1) and completing a two minutes quick writing activity with an opening question. The opening question is: What word would you use to describe your outfit today? (see Figure 2) What I wear and what others wear provokes some sort of emotion or feeling. It could be the colors, the material, the combination of the top and the bottom, or a mix of all of these. By beginning with this opening question, attendees are encouraged to become comfortable with one another and share something personal about themselves.

The first day has two learning goals. The first learning goal is: I can define socioemotional learning. This learning goal helps address the overarching question by giving

attendees the opportunity to reflect on their prior knowledge of socioemotional learning before becoming more familiar with it. The second learning goal is: I can identify ways that ELLs utilize socioemotional learning in a classroom. This learning goal helps address the overarching question by giving attendees the opportunity to showcase their knowledge and takeaways from the first professional development session. This ensures that before moving into the second day of professional development, the specificity of ELLs socioemotional learning is targeted.

The first day has two activities. For the first activity, attendees will use their note catcher and then turn and talk about the question: How would you define socioemotional learning? Attendees will have two minutes to discuss their definition of socioemotional learning with someone next to them, before coming back together to share for one minute (see Figure 2). Once the sharing is completed, we will reference the definition of socioemotional learning, as discussed in chapter two of the capstone project. The concept of social and emotional learning provides a foundation of positive socioemotional health that leads to increased academic skills (CASEL, 2007). By reflecting on one's own knowledge of the overarching question and topic, attendees are able to think of strategies already implemented within their classrooms and how these strategies, and others, can ensure students socioemotional health becomes a priority. The second activity branches off of the first activity, as attendees will use Figure 2 for a quick write activity with the prompt: Write down three things that help boost your socioemotional health. As stated in the second chapter of this capstone, as educators become aware of their own socioemotional health and the importance of SEL strategies utilized in a classroom, educators are able to deliver data and conversation that becomes convincing for administration to promote universal SEL programs within schools (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). With personal reflection,

attendees can begin to brainstorm ways to mitigate the problem within their own learning environments while using the note catcher.

Session 2

The second day of the professional development session begins by going over the agenda (see Figure 1). Then the attendees will have a two minutes quick writing activity with an opening question. The opening question is: When you think of music, what song comes to mind? What does that song remind you of? (see Figure 3) Music has guided me through so many moments in my life. When I think of certain songs, I think of certain memories. By beginning with this opening question, attendees are encouraged to become comfortable with one another and share something personal about themselves.

The second day has three learning goals. The first learning goal is: I can identify ways ELLs utilize socioemotional learning outside of the classroom. This learning goal helps address the overarching question by giving attendees the opportunity to make connections between ELLs school and home lives. By doing so, attendees find similarities and differences in utilizing their socioemotional and academic skills in both of these environments. The second learning goal is: I can make connections between the importance of socioemotional learning in and out of the classroom. This learning goal helps address the overarching question in a similar way as the first learning goal of the second day, mainly by ensuring attendees make connections for ELLs socioemotional and academic skills in multiple environments. The third learning goal is: I can identify ways to promote socioemotional learning within my own classroom. This learning goal helps address the overarching question by giving attendees the opportunity to put some of the various socioemotional strategies learned into practice. This is one of the first opportunities to utilize the knowledge learned in professional development in their own environments.

The second day has two activities. The first activity will give attendees the chance to meditate during the session. As stated in the second chapter of this capstone project, meditation allows ELLs the opportunity to spend a moment of their day relaxing and taking a breath while in the classroom (Adams & Richie, 2017). By giving an opportunity for meditation, the attendees are able to witness the effect this has on socioemotional health within a learning environment. The second activity will give attendees the chance to create a small booklet about their culture and share it with others sitting around them. Attendees will be given pieces of construction paper, writing utensils, and a stapler, as well as instructions on how to create a cultural booklet (see Figure 4). As stated in the second chapter of this capstone, language and cultural background are two key components in developing effective SEL programs for classrooms involving ELLs (Kao, 2017). This is another strategy that attendees have the opportunity to experience for themselves. Attendees have the opportunity to see themselves represented within an activity, showcasing how this type of activity uplifts socioemotional health in an academic environment. As a follow up, attendees will complete a two minute quick write answering: How would you differentiate this activity for ELLs? (see Figure 3). Then, attendees will share with one another.

Session 3

The third day of the professional development session begins by going over the agenda (see Figure 1) as well as a two minute quick write activity with an opening question. The opening question is: If you could order anything for lunch today, what would it be? (see Figure 5) Food opens up the conversation of similarities and differences. By beginning with this opening question, attendees are encouraged to become comfortable with one another and share something personal about themselves.

The third day has one learning goal. The learning goal of the day is: I can implement activities that promote socioemotional learning within my classroom. This learning goal helps address the overarching question by bringing together the overarching question and the various goals from the day before. Attendees will be able to think of ways to mitigate the lack of socioemotional focus in ELL classrooms in their own environments and schools.

The third day has one activity. Attendees will watch a Youtube video about ESL games that can be utilized in classrooms. They have a reflection sheet to be complete as they are watching the video (see Figure 6). After the video is over, attendees will discuss some of the information that was recorded on their sheet with a partner. Teachers will collaborate to add activities or variations of activities to their handouts. This activity helps connect to mitigating the overarching problem by giving attendees opportunities to see various strategies used in classroom environments for ELLs. Not only are the attendees able to add these strategies to their teacher toolbox, but they are making connections to how this supports ELLs socioemotional health while promoting academic success.

Conclusion

This portion of the capstone project elaborated on various materials included in the three-day professional development session associated with the overarching question. During the three days of professional development, attendees were given the opportunity to collaborate with others through discussion techniques, as well as share ideas and takeaways from each session. Following this chapter will be chapter four, which concludes the capstone project by summarizing research, takeaways, and future application.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Introduction

The idea of improved data relating to students' academic growth is constantly prioritized by administration. There is always a new goal in mind in order to ensure student success is shown through levels of proficiency, whether it be in Math or English Language Arts. Specifically, ELLs are being tested and retested in order to ensure they are increasing their levels of knowledge in school. However, something that gets lost in the midst of meeting goals and showcasing improved assessment results is the idea of ELLs socio-emotional health.

The importance of ELLs socio-emotional health must be prioritized by educators. By prioritizing and utilizing different strategies and techniques, their academic success will be showcased with various data points. This problem affects ELLs mental well being and leads to a lack of self-confidence and motivation when performing school related tasks, in turn showing a lack of academic success and growth. This capstone and PD encouraged the use of SEL with a focus on ELLs social emotional well being interlocked with their academic success. Strategies were promoted to help ELLs develop more self confidence and self respect for themselves in and out of the classroom.

Conclusions

Although there is much data based on the general student population and SEL programs, there is a lack of research on curating programs specifically for the socioemotional health of ELLs. There is a need for research based on how these programs positively affect ELLs academic growth. Kao (2017) produced a study with various educators that showcased the importance of intertwining social, emotional, and academic success, but pinpointed the lack of research available for the specific population of ELLs. SEL initiatives are clear and in the works

for a lot of school districts, but the specificity and needs of ELLs has a lot of potential research that could help not only the students, but also the educators and administration spearheading the various programs. With continued research and data, students and families in various ELL environments can have more individualized instruction and socioemotional strategies to assist academic journeys.

The most important part of the education of ELLs is including identity in every part of the curriculum. In turn, socioemotional health becomes the forefront of the plan and a foundation is built for a successful SEL program. With the help of researching the overarching question, it is clear that intertwining socioemotional health within academic curriculum

Implications for Student Learning

Students benefit from a focus on socioemotional health in many different ways, mostly showing improvements in academic skills. As stated in the second chapter of this capstone project, meditation allows ELLs the opportunity to spend a moment of their day relaxing and taking a breath while in the classroom (Adams & Richie, 2017). The use of meditation gives students a chance to enhance their thinking abilities and find a moment of peace in a classroom, where some students feel forms of natural anxiety.

Focus on student identity gives students the chance to see themselves represented within a classroom, thus leading to positive socioemotional learning. Language and cultural background are two key components in developing effective SEL programs for classrooms involving ELLs (Kao, 2017). By representing each identity in a classroom, educators give students a chance to show respect for themselves and their style of learning. Kao (2017) conducted that with multiple observations and interviews, notings in research findings that focusing on cultural backgrounds

when considering SEL strategies linked socioemotional health and academic success consistently.

Implications for Teaching

By following the leadership of educators, students become more aware of their own socioemotional needs. As educators become aware of their own socioemotional health and the importance of SEL strategies utilized in a classroom, educators are able to deliver data and conversation that becomes convincing for administration to promote universal SEL programs within schools (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). When educators find time to focus on their own socioemotional health, they come to the realization of the importance of socioemotional learning.

Recommendations

The importance of SEL programs when it comes to ELLs socioemotional health and academic growth is something that needs to be continuously researched and advocated for. What is clear is that the role of administration, educators, and family is the driving force behind any of these types of programs becoming successful for ELLs in whichever area of growth is desired. Professional development is necessary for the educators involved in ELLs journey, as many college programs did not prepare educators for the role they have in differentiating instruction for ELLs while considering their social and emotional health. College preparatory programs should enhance their educational programs to give educators the ability to comprehend socioemotional learning before being placed in front of students.

Final Thoughts

With the combination of professional development and college preparatory programs enhancing their teachings to educators, the promotion of socioemotional learning enhances ELLs experience within the classrooms. By recognizing ELLs identity and the importance of their

socioemotional health, their academic skills improve across all content areas. Research should continue in order to grasp the consequences of recent events related to Covid and the lack of schooling in person, but the trend shows that with more effective SEL programs, ELLs enjoy school and find encouragement to succeed academically.

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Appendix with Figures

Figure 1

Agenda

Day 1-

Icebreaker- 5 minutes

Presentation-20 minutes

Activities-20 minutes

Closing-5 minutes

Day 2-

Icebreaker- 5 minutes

Presentation-20 minutes

Activities-20 minutes

Closing-5 minutes

Day 3-

Icebreaker- 5 minutes

Presentation-20 minutes

Activities-20 minutes

Closing-5 minutes

Figure 2

Day 1 Note Catcher

Day 1-Topic	Notes
<p>Opening Question-What word would you use to describe your outfit today?</p>	
<p>How would you define socioemotional learning?</p>	
<p>Write down three things that help boost your socioemotional health.</p>	

Figure 3

Day 2 Note Catcher

Day 2-Topic	Notes
<p>Opening Question-When you think of music, what song comes to mind? What does that song remind you of?</p>	
<p>How would you differentiate this activity for ELLs?</p>	

Figure 4*Instructions to create a cultural booklet*

Step	Directions	Notes
1	Stack papers on top of one another; Fold in half; Staple together to create shape of booklet (3 staples on the folded part of the papers)	
2	On the cover, write your name and title of your booklet. Draw something representative of your culture.	
3	On pages 2-3, answer the question: Where are you from? Draw a picture representing the answer to where you are from.	
4	On pages 4-5, answer the questions: What food is popular in your culture? What activities are popular in your culture? Draw pictures representing the answers to these questions.	
5	On pages 6-7, add any additional fact about your culture. Draw pictures representing these facts.	
6	On the back cover of the booklet, add a picture summarizing your thoughts.	

Figure 5

Day 3 Note Catcher

Day 3-Topic	Notes
Opening Question-If you could order anything for lunch today, what would it be?	

Figure 6

Day 3 Reflection Sheet

Name of activity									
Social and emotional support									
Academic support									
Feedback									