Chapter 8

Building Capacity to Support Culturally Responsive Social–Emotional Learning Practices in Schools

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ABSTRACT

Research has demonstrated the positive relationship between student social-emotional development and academic achievement and overall positive life outcomes. Evidence-based social-emotional practices such as direct instruction in core social-emotional learning (SEL) components, modeling, and reinforcement of appropriate SEL skills have been found to increase student social-emotional functioning, reduce maladaptive behavior and promote prosocial behavior. However, despite reports of positive outcomes based on school-based interventions, there remain questions regarding the appropriateness of strategies and practices for students from racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse backgrounds. In order to address the needs of the "whole child," educators must view social SEL with a culturally responsive lens to ensure equitable treatment and development for all students.

INTRODUCTION

Schools have become increasingly concerned with identifying evidence-based practices to enhance prosocial behavior, support student mental health, and ameliorate maladaptive behavior. In recent years we have observed significant increases in bullying, suicide, school shooting, and students in need of mental health services. Approximately 1 out of 6 children living in the United States, ages 6-17, experience a mental health disorder each year (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2019). Furthermore, 1

in 5 children living 100% below the federal poverty line displays mental, behavioral, or developmental delays (Center for Disease Control, 2019). Research continues to evince strong correlations between poor social-emotional functions in childhood with adverse outcomes such as low academic achievement, higher dropout rates, and unemployment rates (Graves et al., 2016).

Over the last 20 years, there has been a significant shift in interest in social-emotional learning. Research has demonstrated that schools play a vital role in shaping not only the cognitive development of students, but also their social-emotional growth (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Utilizing evidence-based Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) instruction and interventions in schools has been found to enhance protective factors, increase student social-emotional skills, and the reduced rates and severity of students exhibiting deficits in social-emotional and behavior (Durlak et al., 2011). In efforts to address the needs of the "whole child," schools are partnering with families and communities to facilitate healthy social-emotional development and academic growth (Weissberg, Durlak, Domotrivich, & Gullotta, 2015). As a result of an extensive amount of positive support demonstrating the positive impact of SEL on academic achievement and overall functioning, states across the country have included state learning standards in the area of social-emotional functioning (Gresham, 2018; Weissberg et al., 2015). To date, all 50 states have adopted some form of social-emotional standards at the preschool level, with many as well various countries across the globe developing social-emotional standards for K-12 students (Dusenbury et al., 2015).

While there is a substantial amount of research support demonstrating the efficacy of incorporating evidence-based SEL practices into instruction, there continues to be a concern as to how commonly used SEL interventions and curricula address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. This issue is further exacerbated by the racial and cultural differences between the change agents (namely teachers) and the students in their classroom.

This chapter will review the foundational components of social-emotional functioning and discuss research demonstrating the positive effects garnered when SEL is incorporated into learning standards, curricula, and practices. Additionally, this chapter will examine the importance of incorporating culturally responsive practices when implementing SEL interventions and methods to increase self-awareness and cultural competence of teachers implementing SEL in the classroom. Lastly, we will discuss the use of culturally responsive positive behavior as a framework to guide culturally responsive SEL practices.

BACKGROUND

Statistics from various national and state organizations have continually shown that more students are entering schools with developmental backgrounds and life experiences that place them at-risk for poor academic achievement and deficits in social-emotional and behavioral functioning. Walker and Shinn (2010) assert various "social toxins" such as "violence, fear for one's personal safety….rampant child abuse and neglect, …. Class conflicts, racial discrimination, and general animus toward others in ordinary social relations" (p.1) present significant barriers to effective instruction and academic achievement. Bitkso et al. (2016) reported that 1 in 7 children in the United States ages 2-8 were diagnosed with mental, behavioral, or developmental disorders by parents. The National Center for Health Studies (2007) reported that over 5% of children ages four to seventeen demonstrated significant difficulties with concentration, behavior, and social-emotional functioning. Disaggregated data looking at the factors associated with higher reports of lower social-emotional functioning included students from low socio-economic back-

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