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The Impact of Adult Social and Emotional Competencies on Student Social and Emotional Learning and Success

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Abstract

Social and emotional learning is a key component to educating the whole child. Teachers today must try to intertwine the competencies into their classrooms. Teachers who possess their own social and emotional well-being are better equipped to help students make the appropriate, pro-social behavior choices which can enhance their performance and achievement. The goals of social and emotional learning include student ability to become self-aware individuals who are able to manage behaviors in social and interpersonal situations while making positive decisions within the community. In order for these goals to be met, teachers must model the social and emotional competencies within the classroom. Teachers who are better able to manage classrooms, create positive environments, and build relationships with students allow for student empowerment and learning.

The purpose of this study was to understand the influence of teacher social and emotional behaviors on student social and emotional behaviors, including the five social and emotional competencies. Teachers who have inadequate or nonexistent social and emotional competencies are being asked to teach social and emotional learning in their classrooms. The problem is teacher inadequacy in this realm may adversely affect student social and emotional learning. By interviewing secondary school students, the research found teacher pro-social and anti-social behaviors impact the students in their classrooms. The study found teacher inadequacies in social and emotional learning impact student social and emotional learning and work production negatively. These findings will help drive professional learning opportunities to better help teachers acknowledge their own social and emotional needs as well as those of their students.

Key words: adequacy, anti-social, benefit, classroom management, collaborative, emotional, emotional literacy, emotional, growth mindset, high school, inadequacy,

intrapersonal, interpersonal, middle school, mindfulness, modeling, preservice teacher, prosocial, puberty, relationship, relationship management, responsible decision making, self-awareness, self-management, social, social awareness, social and emotional competencies, social and emotional learning, wellbeing, whole child.

The Impact of Adult Social and Emotional Competencies on Student Social and Emotional Learning and Success

Student performance and achievement is not only affected by the students' cognitive and intellectual actions, but by the social and emotional skills they possess. Social and emotional learning has come to the forefront of public education as educators are now seeing the importance of communication, collaboration, and relationships when working with students. Social and emotional learning contains competencies which allow for students to be self-aware, manage emotions and behaviors, build relationships, make appropriate decisions, and adhere to social norms (Dominguez & LaGue, 2013). Teachers greatly influence students during their formative years and the social and emotional competency of teachers can positively or negatively affect student achievement (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). With the lack of social and emotional learning content in pre-service teacher training, many students are learning in classrooms that may have little capacity for their social and emotional needs (Markowitz, Thowdis, & Gallagher, 2018). Teachers who have inadequate social and emotional competencies themselves may affect a student's ability to develop prosocial behaviors needed for success.

Middle and high school students find themselves in an important, ever-changing, transitional period where influence comes from many directions. As students come from various backgrounds and start making their own individual decisions, it is important for the adults in their lives to demonstrate appropriate prosocial behaviors that can help shape the students into contributing members of society. Students spend hours in school and teachers can positively or negatively affect their development, especially socially and emotionally. Social and emotional learning is becoming increasingly important in the educational setting as school administrators

find themselves dealing with students who have emotional disturbances, mental health issues, and debilitating family situations.

Schonert-Reichl (2017) states, “Teachers are the engine that drive social and emotional learning” (p. 138). The responsibility teachers have in cultivating student social and emotional capacity is immense. Teachers can promote social and emotional learning by modeling the five competencies (self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, and relationship skills), creating positive classroom environments which are well managed, and building authentic relationships with students (Bird & Sultmann, 2010; Cranton, 2006; Dominguez & LaGue, 2013; Norris, 2010; Yang, Bear, & May, 2018). Research has shown the many benefits of student social and emotional learning; however, what the research lacks is an investigation of how inadequate or nonexistent teacher social and emotional competencies can impact the social and emotional learning of students and their academic success.

Literature Review

Social and emotional learning has always been a component within public schools, and as education continues to move forward in preparing future citizens to collaborate effectively, it is even more paramount. Almost 100 years ago in *The Child: His Nature and His Needs*, O’Shea (1924) observed that “the chief purpose of the school in America is to make an individual social. It is to teach him so that he will understand how he must live in order to dwell in peace and harmony with his associates” (p. 365). Today, teachers still have the responsibility to help students develop the social and emotional competencies needed to succeed in the classroom and in life. However, the ability of teachers to promote social and emotional learning begins with their own social and emotional competencies. Research has indicated social and emotional

learning impacts educational success and a meaningful teacher–student relationship can be transformative in the classroom, thus the need for high social and emotional competencies in teachers (Cranton, 2006; Dominguez & LaGue, 2013). Unfortunately, teachers who have inadequate social and emotional skills or fail to use them in the classroom may have a negative effect on students.

The skill and abilities of teachers to weave social and emotional learning into the daily routines and processes of their classroom using their own social and emotional competencies varies dramatically within schools. Today, educational leaders must ensure teachers can promote social and emotional learning. Students who lack social and emotional skills become less connected to school as they progress through their formative years. Adding the development of emotional literacy and positive relationships into everyday processes can enhance the social and emotional learning needed for success (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

Social and Emotional Learning

Miller, Wanless, and Weissberg (2018) contend parents think the most important skills students should learn are social and communicative skills and studies have shown parents are concerned with children’s emotional well-being (Princeton Survey Research Associates, 2015). Social and emotional learning is the process through which people acquire the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one’s life and are based on three goals: (1) the development of self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success, (2) the use of social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships, and (3) the development and use of decision-making skills and responsible

behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts (Allbright, Marsh, Kennedy, Hough, & McKibben, 2019; Cressey, 2019; Dominguez & LaGue, 2013).

Social and emotional health is also a component of overall well-being, which is the sustainable condition that allows students to thrive in their growth and development (Bird & Sultmann, 2010). The need to include social and emotional learning within schools is growing. As schools grasp the concept of educating the whole child, teachers must strive to mold well-adjusted, confident, and happy students by demonstrating their own prosocial behaviors and providing safe, positive environments (Miller et al., 2018). Poulou (2014) contends the cultivation of social and emotional competencies in students is vital for their psychological health, school adjustment, and interpersonal relationships. As students spend hundreds of hours within the school setting, it is important for them to be surrounded by adults who positively influence their decisions and behaviors and impact their social and emotional learning in helpful ways. Teachers who demonstrate adequate social and emotional competency within the classroom setting can have a lasting impact on their students.

Social and Emotional Competencies

People who develop social and emotional competencies can demonstrate the attitudes, knowledge, and skills to manage emotions, show empathy, develop strong relationships, and make responsible decisions (Miller et al., 2018). Social and emotionally competent students show fewer problematic behaviors, can make friends, and can interact with adults successfully (Poulou, 2014). These individuals can integrate their thoughts, emotions, and actions into achieving life tasks through self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management, and relationship management skills (Dominguez & LaGue, 2013). Each

competency connects the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills needed for positive behaviors. The competencies include (1) self-awareness, which is the ability to evaluate emotions, recognize strengths and weaknesses, and have a high sense of confidence; (2) social awareness, which includes perspective taking, empathy, appreciating individual differences, and the ability to foresee possible social outcomes; (3) self-management for the appropriate control of emotions, goal setting, motivation, coping skills, and ability to overcome obstacles; (4) relationship management, which includes working cooperatively with others, managing conflicts, resisting inappropriate social pressures, and seeking help when needed; and (5) responsible decision making, which includes the ability to ethically and morally evaluate situations to solve problems, respect social norms, reflect on decisions made, and contribute to the well-being of others (Bird & Sultmann, 2010; Dominguez & LaGue, 2013).

For 25 years, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been researching social and emotional learning and educating schools on its importance (2019). The five competencies have been the foundation for programs which enrich the lives of students within the classroom. CASEL (2019) states, “Social and emotional learning is a deeply ingrained part of the way students and adults interact both in the classroom and out of it, and helps provide children with equitable, supportive, and welcoming learning environments” (p. 3). When teachers use their own social and emotional competencies to broaden student learning in sequenced, active, focused, and explicit ways, students show improved attitudes, fewer behavior problems, better emotional control, and improved academic performance (CASEL, 2019).

However, CASEL (2019) acknowledges the difficulties which come with teaching and the importance of teachers to take care of their own well-being. Schonert-Reichl (2017) contends the stressful lives of teachers, which can lead to burnout and high attrition rates, actually play a

large role in the stress of their students. Teachers who were stressed, sleep deprived, depressed, and frustrated had students who exhibited higher interpersonal problems (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). CASEL suggests social and emotional learning programs for teachers which include stress management, developing a growth mindset, and learning how to disconnect from school life. Stringer (2017) explains it is hard for students to cope with “stress and anger if the person teaching them is frazzled or unkind” and suggests that inadequate social and emotional skills of teachers may affect student abilities and explains the importance of teachers acknowledging how their behaviors play a role in the lives of students (p. 1). Jennings et al. (2014) found teachers who participated in a mindfulness program called CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) showed improvements in well-being, anxiety levels, stress, and sleep. Jennings et al. (2014) suggest programs which encourage a teachers’ own development of well-being and emotional needs can positively affect school climate and may improve student academic achievement. Lastly, teachers must also believe in the importance of social and emotional learning. Schonert-Reichl (2017) indicates positive teacher belief of social and emotional learning creates a motivation for them to incorporate competencies into their classrooms. Teachers who are confident in their skills are much more dedicated to developing student social and emotional skills and they choose to link social and emotional skills into teaching practices and the classroom environment (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Benefits of Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional competencies vary within students and adults; moreover, social and emotional competencies can affect how teachers teach and students learn. Teachers who use their own competencies to develop student skills can create effective classrooms where learning is present, behaviors are managed, and motivation is high (Dominguez & LaGue, 2013). Other

benefits of social and emotional learning include the prevention of antisocial behaviors and other behavioral issues, the creation of warm classroom environments, a greater effort among students, increased student personal well-being, high student engagement, a positive school climate, better classroom management, and a growing sense of community (Domiguez & LaGue, 2013; Norris, 2010; Yang et al., 2018). Durlak et al. (2011) believe social and emotional learning creates a connection to the school environment which produces protective mechanisms for students; moreover, social and emotional competencies can create a foundation for academic performance and allow student contribution to school success. Social and emotional learning helps students experience a level of satisfaction during school activities as well as increase a student's growth mindset (Allbright et al., 2019; Durlak et al., 2011).

In a 4-year foundational cycle of social and emotional learning program implementation, Bird and Sultmann (2010) found a dramatic learning impact on students from one school. The study participants indicated they formed better relationships with others, increased on-task behaviors, improved scholastic competencies, increased emotional stability, increased self-control and personal empowerment, and were better able to communicate. The authors also indicated the teaching of emotional literacy promoted improved performance for student lifelong learning, overall well-being, and sustained relationships (Bird & Sultmann, 2010).

The benefit of social and emotional learning at the middle and high school levels can be seen through the ample research which reports that social and emotional learning helps increase test scores; increase motivation and perseverance; decrease anxiety, depression, and stress; and reduce bullying (Aidman & Price, 2018). Haymovitz, Houseal-Allport, Lee, and Svistova (2018) note social and emotional learning may decrease bullying behaviors, reduce behavioral issues, increase academic performance, increase positive attitudes, help students create a positive

connection with school, boost test scores, and build positive relationships. Studies have found social and emotional programs improve school climate, create safer schools, create a sense of commitment, and improve school-based substance abuse and violence prevention programs (Smith & Low, 2013).

Middle and high school students present varying levels of development as they travel through their secondary education. Puberty increases the need for social and emotional competencies and teachers must help students traverse the realm of cognitive and intellectual growth while developing the social skills for peer-to-peer interactions (Aidman & Price, 2018; Durlak et al., 2011). Developing student social and emotional skills during this transition will ultimately prepare students for further life changes. Schonert-Reichl (2017) explains positive social and emotional skills can influence a student's ability to graduate from high school, obtain a college degree, and help secure stable employment.

Teacher Social and Emotional Skills and Behaviors

Most pre-service teacher education programs lack courses and content on social and emotional learning, which puts the 200,000 annual graduates of these programs at a disadvantage when they enter their classrooms (Markowitz et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers who lack this content knowledge may struggle with implementing social and emotional learning, creating warm environments, and modeling appropriate prosocial behaviors. These teachers may also lack the ability to understand how their social and emotional abilities affect teacher-student interactions. Baum and King (2006) state, "Teachers need to have the ability to make prudent decisions based on reflection, responsibility, ethics, creativity, and caring" (p. 217); essentially, teachers must have the ability to be aware of how their emotional interactions affect their

students. Teachers also choose their behaviors based on their social and emotional competencies and the classroom situations in which they are involved. Behaviors that are communicative, immediate, clear, and organized have been found to increase student engagement and positivity (Houser & Frymier, 2009). Houser and Frymier (2009) found students became empowered learners when their teachers' behaviors were clear and motivating; thus, teacher behavior and action play a role in student learning.

Teacher Competencies. Goegan, Wagner, and Daniels (2017) assert teachers must have not only professional qualifications but also certain personal qualities which lead to positively managing their intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions. These social and emotional competencies can enhance teacher self-efficacy, build classroom management techniques, create healthy student–teacher relationships, and model prosocial behaviors (Goegan et al., 2017). Similarly, Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd (2013) suggest educator social and emotional skills are needed the most for fostering teacher–student bonding, being role models of appropriate behaviors, and organizing productive classroom environments. Schonert-Reichl (2017) states a teachers' skill in regulating personal social and emotional needs must be intertwined with their pedagogical skills and ability to create a safe classroom environment. When teachers mismanage the social and emotional needs of themselves and others, student performance is low (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

One major component of appropriate social and emotional learning in the classroom is teacher self-awareness. Miller et al. (2018) explain that all five social and emotional competencies are relevant to adults, but overall competence must start with self-awareness. Self-awareness in the classroom is an essential part of teaching as it helps teachers examine personal characteristics, beliefs, and attitudes; manage stress; eliminate power struggles with students; and

keep a sense of humor (Baum & King, 2006; Richardson & Shupe, 2003). Self-awareness plays a vital role in being able to create student relationships while modeling appropriate behaviors and managing students in the classroom setting. Self-aware teachers are better able to minimize emotional triggers, give positive feedback, use appropriate management actions, and maintain an attitude of productivity (Richardson & Shupe, 2003).

Modeling Behaviors. The social and emotional competencies of teachers affect their behaviors within the classroom and these behaviors can also affect teacher credibility and student well-being. Teacher social awareness and self-management competencies play a role in how they present themselves to students. Students can be witnesses to or participants in teacher behaviors and Jones et al. (2013) state “students learn from the way teachers manage frustration, maintain control of themselves . . . and stay focused in the face of distractions” (p. 63). Finn et al. (2009) found teachers who demonstrate trustworthy, competent, caring, and communicative behaviors enhance student learning; caring teachers led to increased student attention and activity. Strong teacher social and emotional competencies may also increase student well-being. Van Petegem, Aelterman, Van Keer, and Rosseel (2008) explain the well-being of students can be a gauge of quality education, and teachers who show tolerant, cooperative, and enthusiastic behaviors positively affect student well-being. Van Petegem et al. (2008) also relay the importance of teachers knowing student perspectives about their behaviors, which can assist in self-reflection and teacher improvement. Teachers must take a proactive role in modeling prosocial and emotional behaviors. Talvio, Lonka, Komulainen, Kuusela, and Lintunen (2015) assert students learn behaviors by looking at adults. When teachers display behaviors intentionally or inadvertently, students learn which behaviors are appropriate and acceptable (Talvio et al., 2015). Talvio et al. (2015) further explain teachers who model emotional regulation and who are

emotionally responsive to students are better able resolve conflict, manage behavior problems, and ensure learning is taking place within the classroom.

Positive Environment and Classroom Management. Aidman and Price (2018) believe students succeed in safe, inviting environments which are inclusive to all individuals. Classroom environments are directly related to teacher decision making, which includes problem solving, working with social norms, and contributing to the welfare of others. Positive classroom environments are created when socially and emotionally competent teachers decide to positively reward student behavior, set norms for respect and safety, show empathy and a concern for mental health, and create a support system (Baum & King, 2006; Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). Socially and emotionally competent classrooms assist students academically, and Goegan et al. (2017) found teachers who have high social and emotional competencies have higher self-efficacy regarding classroom management and student engagement within the classroom.

Norris (2010) asserts effective classroom management is directly linked to the ability of teachers to establish a classroom climate that has high expectations for the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual environments of the classroom. The teacher's ability to build a sense of community and a strong platform for human interaction is vitally important for social and emotional learning and relationship building (Bird & Sultmann, 2010; Norris, 2010). Norris (2010) further explains that socially and emotionally competent teachers, classrooms, and schools utilize effective communication strategies, a common social and emotional language, and respectful responses to student needs.

Teacher–Student Relationships. Social and emotional classrooms are filled with strong, positive teacher–student relationships; these relationships can serve as a regulatory foundation

for students which helps develop their social and emotional competencies. Substantial research indicates meaningful teacher–student relationships are transformative to student learning (Cranton, 2006; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Poulou, 2014; Yang et al., 2018). Teachers who are competent in relationship building are at an advantage. Cranton (2006) explains that teachers who practice authentic relationship building foster the growth and development of students by making learning individual. Teachers who know students as individuals, respect their differences, and see students as people influence the genuineness of the teacher–student relationship (Cranton, 2006). Socially and emotionally competent teachers advocate for their students and build the relationships which allow for classroom and school adjustment (Cranton, 2006; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Poulou (2014) states “high-quality interpersonal relationships” help students adapt to school, prevent behavior issues, and create connections to school and academic outcomes (p. 987). Yang et al. (2018) assert strong relationships foster student engagement; moreover, the student perception of the relationship impacts their interest and behavior at school. In addition, Yang et al. (2018) found teacher–student relationships to have lasting effects on behavioral, cognitive, and emotional outcomes and to affect the emotional climate of the classroom; these authors suggest schools establish a “caring social/relational climate” which will cultivate strong teacher–student relationships (p. 58).

Adults influence children in many ways and this influence can affect a child’s overall well-being. In schools, adults can play a pivotal role in the life of a student, and teacher behaviors can either promote student abilities or cripple them. The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of social and emotional teacher behaviors on social and emotional student behaviors and success. Social and emotional competencies greatly influence how teachers act, react, and respond which then directly influences how students act, react, and

respond. As middle and high school students start to develop personal autonomy, their behaviors are still highly influenced by teachers. Understanding how school staff can influence the social and emotional learning of students is an important step in creating positive environments and strong relationships. Teachers who have inadequate or nonexistent social and emotional competencies may damage the emotional literacy and social connections of students. There is an inherent need to determine how social and emotional competencies of adults impact middle and high school student social and emotional learning and their success, both positively and negatively.

Methodology

Social and emotional learning is the process through which people acquire the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life (Dominguez & LaGue, 2013). By gaining student perspective on how teachers influence social and emotional learning, this study provides insight on how teacher social and emotional adequacies and inadequacies affect students and their success. Social and emotional learning is based on five competencies: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, and relationship management. A qualitative, phenomenological approach was used to gather data from secondary education students about their classroom teacher's emotions and behaviors.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), qualitative methodology allows for complex data to be gathered in great detail. Moreover, using the phenomenological approach allows researchers to gather several perspectives which could possibly be applied by others in future research. The student perspectives collected in this study have broadened the knowledge of

social and emotional learning as it relates to teacher and student interactions and classroom success.

Data Collection

The data collection intended to be used in this study was individual semi structured interviews with nine randomly selected students from one middle school. However, due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic mandatory school closings and social distancing mandates, which began in March 2020, only available students answered the 27 interview questions via an electronic form. Thirteen students from seven different middle and high schools, ranging from grade 6 to grade 11, answered questions about how their classroom teacher's social and emotional behaviors affect their own personal social and emotional learning and classwork. Two students from the original randomly selected group were interviewed and 11 other students were chosen based on their availability and ability to use electronic methods of inquiry. The 13 students included 8 female students and 5 male students. Written and electronic consent was obtained from the participants' parents before the students were asked to complete the electronic interview questions. Once consent was obtained, an electronic form with the prepared interview questions was emailed to students via their school-based email account. Students first gave assent and were able to ask questions via email before answering the interview questions.

The 27 interview questions were created using aspects of the five competencies of social and emotional learning. Questions were posed from both positive and negative standpoints to gain a range of emotional insight and perspective from the students. Interview questions were developed in relation to an observable skill related to each competency as well as how students felt when teachers demonstrate certain prosocial and antisocial behaviors in the classroom

setting. Students had free rein to answer questions and could write as much or as little as they desired. Questions were presented one at a time and students could refer to an image of Plutik's Wheel of Emotions (Appendix A) to help them decipher and state emotions which they had experienced or witnessed.

During research interviews, Bloom, Stevens, and Wickwire (2003) suggest using differing types of questioning to gather facts and focus on key elements of the topic; this process was used with the electronic form. Two opening questions were used to help the students get a sense of the purpose of the study and help the researcher gather some basic facts about the students' perspective of their school year and teacher relationships. Two introductory questions were then presented to turn the subject to social and emotional learning and introduce Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions to the student. Four transition questions were then posed to create a link between the study topic, the student, and the key questions to be asked. Students were then asked key questions which were based on the already established competencies of social and emotional learning. Asking key questions allowed the researcher to gather the bulk of the data and let the student focus on the actual behaviors they saw from teachers. After the key questions, students were presented with three ending questions which allowed for student reflection and closure of the topic. The electronic form automatically created transcripts of the student answers and students were able to review their responses before submitting their answers. Each student validated their answers using this method before the researcher was able to view their answers.

Table 1

Interview Questions Posed to Students

Opening Questions

How has school been going for you this year, what has made it

good or bad?

Thinking about all of your teachers, why do you like some teachers more than others?

Introductory Questions

Think back to health class when we discussed social health, or having a healthy or unhealthy relationship with others, what characteristics would make a healthy or unhealthy “student–teacher” relationship?

Think back to health class when we discussed emotional and mental health (about our thoughts and feelings), what types of emotions have you seen teachers show in the classroom?

Transition Questions

When teachers show really strong emotions in class or when interacting with a student, for example, anger, frustration, or annoyance, how does it make you feel? How does it affect your emotions or classwork?

When teachers show really strong emotions in class or when interacting with a student, for example, happiness, joy, or excitement, how does it make you feel? How does it affect your emotions or classwork?

What emotions does your least favorite teacher show normally?

What emotions does your favorite teacher show normally?

Key Questions

Self-awareness and self-management

If a teacher is showing really strong, negative emotions, how do they usually interact with the students? How do the students react to that teacher?

How do you feel when a teacher seems unkind to you, another student, or the class?

How do you feel when a teacher’s class is unorganized or out of control?

How do you feel when teachers argue with students or other adults?

Social-awareness and relationship skills

If you have a good or poor relationship with a teacher, how do they react if you are successful or if you fail at something?

If you have a good relationship with a teacher, how do they react if you are successful at something or if you fail at something?

Empathy means someone is able to understand your feelings. What actions do teachers take to show empathy to students?

Can you tell me about a time when a teacher seemed to not care about your feelings? How did that make you feel?

Can you tell me some ways teachers disrespect students? How often do you see this happening?

If a student and a teacher are in a conflict, what emotions does the teacher show and what emotions does the student show?

How does it make you feel when a teacher's directions are not clear? How does this affect your classwork?

What behaviors do you see from teachers and students when everyone is working together to complete class successfully?

Responsible decision making

If there is a problem with students in the classroom, how does the teacher normally take care of it?

If there are constant problems in the classroom, how does this make you feel? How does it affect your classwork?

Ethical means doing the right thing. Can you tell me about a time when you think a teacher was ethical and "did the right thing" in a problematic situation?

Unethical means not really doing the right thing. Can you tell me about a time when you think a teacher was unethical and "did the wrong thing" in a problematic situation?

Ending Questions

What are some negative behaviors you have seen teachers do? How did that make you feel?

What are some positive behaviors you have seen teachers do? How did that make you feel?

Is there anything else you wish to add about how teachers react socially or emotionally with students or other adults?

Data Analysis and Findings

Data analysis for qualitative, phenomenological studies includes identifying common themes through the statements of the participants, grouping statements into “meaning units,” considering various perspectives, and then constructing an overall description of the topic (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Analysis for this study used the already established social and emotional competencies as themes and data were reviewed using a positive and negative standpoint. The analysis grouped student statements into three categories: (1) relationships, (2) emotions and attitudes, and (3) successful/unsuccessful actions.

The opening, introductory, and transition questions were grouped and analyzed using positive and negative standpoints and the three categories of relationships, emotions and attitudes, and successful/unsuccessful actions. Table 2 shows the prominent answers from the student subjects.

Table 2

Student Positive and Negative Perspectives

Positive Perspectives on School and Teachers

Student–Teacher Relationship

- Bonding
- Happy to help, positive energy
- Respect, fairness
- Communicates well, answers questions
- Good working relationship

Emotions/Attitude of Teacher

-
- Trust
 - Happiness/Joy
 - Excitement
 - Proud
 - Calm

Emotions/Attitudes of Student

- Happy/relaxed
- Focused
- Secure
- Welcome/comfortable
- Engaged

Successful Actions of Teachers

- Help with learning and understanding
- Interested and enthusiastic about content
- Positive environment
- Variety of activities
- Creates safe space

Successful Actions of Students

- Ready to work/learn
- Works harder
- More accurate work
- Faster completion of work
- Want to go to class

-

Negative Perspective on School and Teachers

Student–Teacher Relationships

- Lack of understanding
- Lack of help
- Disrespect/dishonesty
- Does not want to be there
- Hostile to students

Emotions/Attitudes of Teacher

- Annoyance/frustration
- Anger
- Disapproval
- Boredom
- Negativity

Emotions/Attitudes of Student

- Awkward
 - Worried/tense/anxious
 - Nervous/stressed
-

-
- Cautious
 - Angry

Unsuccessful Actions of Teachers

- Inadequate teaching
- Extreme, crazy environments
- Teach all students the same
- Not showing students their mistakes
- Makes students do work alone

Unsuccessful Actions of Students

- Difficult to complete work
 - Do not want to put forth effort
 - Not able to work in the environment
 - Impacts work negatively
 - Hard to focus on work
-

The first findings demonstrate how a strong connection between a teacher and student, which includes respect, fairness, and an eagerness to help, creates a more relaxed, focused, and comfortable environment for the student. Teachers who show positive actions such as creating a safe space and having an enthusiasm for learning produce students who enjoy going to class and are ready to work and learn. Furthermore, teachers who communicate well, answer questions, and provide a variety of activities produce more focused students who are happy and engaged and feel they complete their work more accurately. Essentially, positivity from teachers breeds positivity in students.

Analysis of the negative standpoint shows a similar point: negativity breeding negativity. Relationships that include disrespect, dishonesty, hostility, and a lack of help from teachers increase the feelings of awkwardness, anxiety, stress, and anger in students. Teachers who show annoyance, frustration, and disapproval toward students intertwined with inadequate classroom environments, inadequate teaching, and inadequate student engagement have students who are either unable to work or choose not to put forth effort in their classwork.

The key questions were analyzed using the competencies of social and emotional learning as themes. Theme 1 included self-awareness and self-management, theme 2 included social-awareness and relationship management, and theme 3 included responsible decision making. Categories of each theme again included relationships, emotions and attitudes, and successful/unsuccessful actions. Table 3 shows the prominent answers from the student subjects. Instead of using the standpoints of positive and negative, analysis included the standpoints of adequacy and inadequacy of the social and emotional competencies.

Table 3

Student Perspectives of Social and Emotional Learning Competencies

Teacher Inadequacy with Self-Awareness and Self-Management

Student–Teacher Relationship

- Fewer interactions
- Reciprocal feelings shown
- Arguing/rudeness
- Bothered by students
- Mean and unfair

Emotions/Attitudes of Teacher

- Unfairness
- Rudeness
- Disrespectful
- Unprofessional
- Unkindness

Emotions/Attitudes of Student

- Anger/disturbed
- Rudeness/disrespect
- Worry/fear/nervous
- Feel like giving up
- Feelings of stupidity/inadequacy

Actions of Teachers

- Yelling at students
 - Does not explain material or answer questions
 - Gives independent work
 - Strict standards
-

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- Unorganized/out-of-control class

Actions of Students

- Will not pay attention/boredom
 - Changes mood
 - Do not want to do anything
 - Make more mistakes/hard to focus
 - Less productive
-

Teacher Adequacy with Social-Awareness and Relationship Management

Student–Teacher Relationship

- Encourages/wants to help
- Supportive/calms student down
- Listens
- Tries to relate
- Respects opinion

Emotions/Attitude of Teacher

- Believes in students
- Excited for student
- Feels proud of student
- Feels sorry for student
- Shows kindness

Emotions/Attitudes of Student

- Satisfied
- Happiness/joy
- Relaxed
- Not worried
- Positive mood

Successful Actions of Teachers

- Offers help
- Offers resources
- Congratulates
- Shows kindness
- Focus on student needs

Successful Actions of Students

- Cooperation/participation
 - Paying attention
 - Positive behaviors/moods
 - Work completion
 - Better understanding of material
-
-

Teacher Inadequacy with Social-Awareness
and Relationship Management

Student–Teacher Relationships

- No difference if student sees success or failure
- No relationship/student invisibility
- No value/care
- Will not listen
- Unhelpful

Emotions/Attitudes of Teacher

- Disappointment
- Disrespect
- Lack of empathy
- Annoyance/frustration
- Aggressiveness

Emotions/Attitudes of Student

- Mad
- Sad/embarrassed
- Stressed/anxious
- Frustration
- Annoyance

Unsuccessful Actions of Teachers

- Focus on failures
- Does not acknowledge success
- Yelling/rude comments
- Treating students differently
- Pointing students out

Unsuccessful Actions of Students

- Cannot complete work
 - Lower grades/do not do well
 - Slow completion of work
 - Incorrect work/doing the wrong thing
 - Arguing with teacher
-

Teacher Adequacy with Responsible Decision
Making

Student–Teacher Relationship

- Talks one on one with student/private conversations
- Clear communication of expectations
- Helps student understand issue
- Clear explanations
- Hears all sides of issue

Emotions/Attitude of Teacher

- Remaining calm
-

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- Being nice about issues
 - Complimentary/positive attitude
 - Calm demeanor
 - Helpful to students

Emotions/Attitude of Student

- Happy
- Feels included
- Feels good
- Relaxed
- Positive

Successful Actions of Teachers

- Warning then action
- Creates safe environment
- Not making a big deal of something small
- Not embarrassing the student
- Taking control of a situation/problem solving

Teacher Inadequacy with Responsible Decision Making

Student–Teacher Relationships

- Feed into negative situation
- Not giving students a chance
- Arguing/raising voice
- Ignore questions
- Calling students out in front of class

Emotions/Attitudes of Teacher

- Annoyance
- Disrespect
- Negative attitudes
- Anger
- Gives up

Emotions/Attitudes of Student

- Uninterested
- Uncomfortable
- Stressed
- Annoyed
- Negativity

Unsuccessful Actions of Teachers

- Constant classroom issues
 - Negative environment
 - Does not take action
-

-
- Yelling
 - Getting physical with a student

Unsuccessful Actions of Students

- Hard to focus
 - Distracted
 - Poor grades
 - Shuts down
 - Incomplete work
-

Self-awareness and self-management are the underlying competencies that drive either successful or unsuccessful interactions with others. Those who are self-aware and can manage emotions are better able to recognize how they are feeling and then take responsible action. The ability for teachers to understand how they feel and then to control those feelings can have a heavy impact on the classroom environment. Findings show teachers who have inadequate self-awareness and management skills have less interaction with students, are bothered by students, are rude, and are seen as unfair. Moreover, teachers who are driven by the emotions and attitudes of anger, disrespect, and unfairness are seen as unprofessional to students. Teachers who yell, have overly strict standards, or have unorganized or out-of-control classes can affect students negatively. Students with teachers who have inadequate self-awareness and self-management skills show feelings of worry, fear, nervousness, and stupidity and feel a sense of inadequacy. Students in these classrooms are less productive, make more mistakes, are less focused, have changes in mood, and will choose not to pay attention. Essentially, students are feeling negative emotions when teachers are showing negative emotions or inadequacies in their own social and emotional management. The weight of teacher negative emotions decreases student production in the classroom. One student expressed, “The best teachers keep their composure when they are dealing with strong emotions and they don’t take it out on their students or other teachers.”

Students are keenly aware of how negative emotions affect themselves and others and secondary school students are mature enough to understand the unprofessionalism of inadequate self-awareness and self-management.

The second theme, social-awareness and relationship management focuses on the ability to understand the perspectives of others, cooperate with others, and resolve conflict. Analysis of the teacher adequacy standpoint shows teachers who are supportive and respect student opinions build greater relationships. These teachers want to help students succeed, get excited for student success, feel proud of students, and always offer help. Teacher adequacy in social-awareness and relationship management allow students to be happy and relaxed, to be satisfied in the classroom environment, and to want to cooperate and participate in class activities. When there is teacher inadequacy of social awareness and relationship management, teachers are indifferent to student success or failure, show no care to student progress, and are unhelpful. A teacher's lack of empathy for student circumstances or annoyance and frustration is demonstrated by yelling, calling students out, focusing on student failures, and treating students differently leads to an underdevelopment in their student's social and emotional learning. Students in these classrooms are mad, embarrassed, stressed, frustrated, and annoyed. These students cannot complete work, have lower grades, argue with the teacher, and are slower in work production. One student stated, "Students tend to reciprocate the treatment." Thus, the social and emotional tendencies modeled by teachers may be reciprocated by the students, essentially developing either prosocial or antisocial behaviors in students.

The third theme, responsible decision making, concerns ethics, safety, and social norms. Teachers with adequate levels of responsible decision making can build relationships by creating safe environments, remaining calm, helping students understand situations, and providing clear

expectations. Their complimentary, positive attitudes can successfully take control of situations where all sides are heard, no one is embarrassed, and students feel relaxed when issues occur. Teachers with inadequate responsible decision making can feed into negative situations with students by not giving them a chance, arguing or raising their voice, or simply not taking action when action is needed. One student stated, “It is unprofessional to argue with students or other adults in school.” Teachers who show anger or give up in a tough classroom can breed constant classroom issues. Students in these environments are uncomfortable, stressed, annoyed, and become uninterested; one student shared, “I start to work faster and make more mistakes.” Classroom teachers who make poor management decisions have students who get distracted, shut down, and have poor grades. Teachers make numerous decisions for the classroom environment, and demonstrating inadequate responsible decision-making skills does not provide the positive modeling needed for building student decision-making skills.

The ending question allowed for the students to state what they thought of teachers in regards to the social and emotional aspects of the classroom. One student stated, “Emotions make a person who they are and that’s what makes them [teachers] special and different from us.” Another student expressed, “If a teacher really wants to be a teacher make sure you love what you are doing, not something you hate.” Students can be very astute when it comes to the classroom environment, their relationships with teachers, and how they feel within the school building. Teachers must understand that they, sometimes unknowingly, affect a student’s social and emotional learning by showing strong emotions, demonstrating certain behaviors, and making certain decisions. The study’s findings indicate a teacher’s social and emotional adequacies and inadequacies affect not only a student’s social and emotional development, but also their academic production and success.

Figure 1

Teacher Adequacy of Social and Emotional Competencies and Student SEL Development

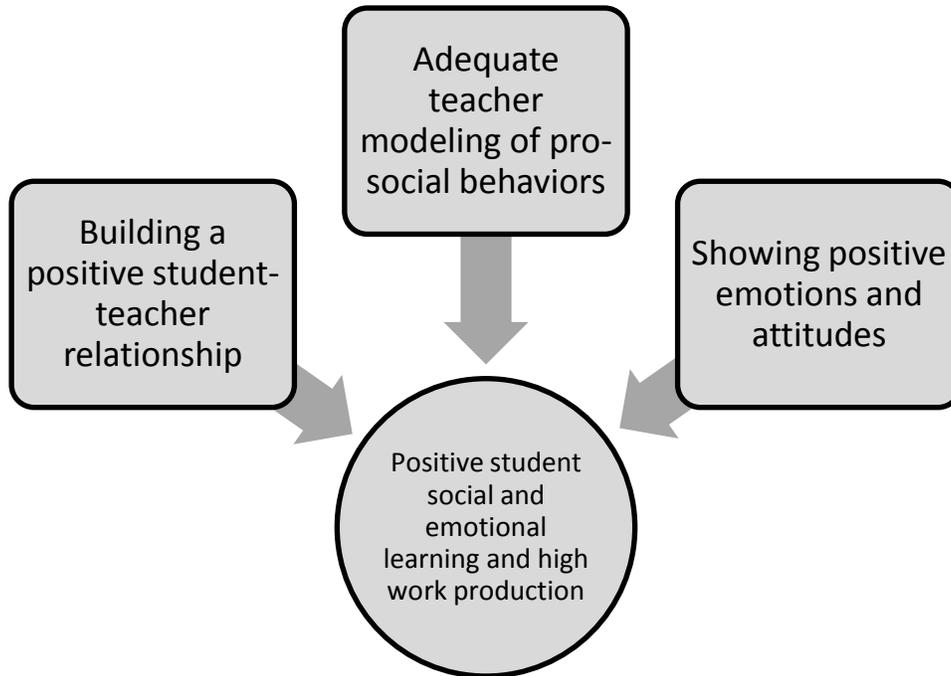
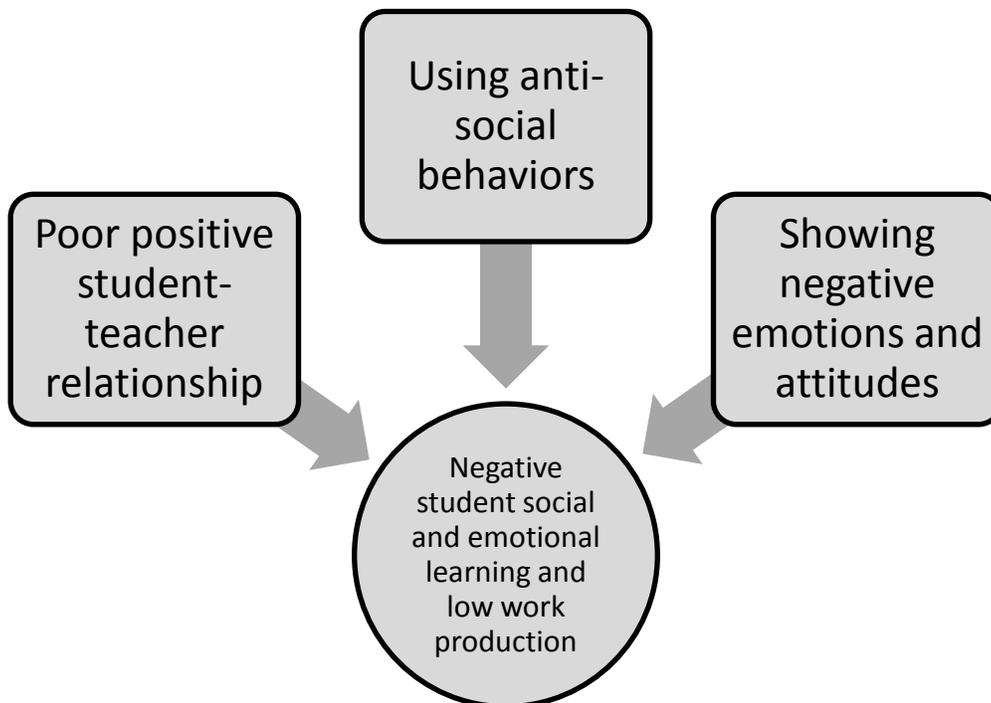


Figure 2

Teacher Inadequacy of Social and Emotional Competencies and SEL Development



Discussion

Public schools today have a much greater responsibility than teaching students the academic and intellectual skills needed for future success. Teachers of 21st-century students must cultivate and develop the skills needed for successful decision making, appropriate relationships, and emotional control, which help individuals thrive in a global society. However, teachers themselves must have the social and emotional capacity to be self-aware, model appropriate prosocial behaviors, and build authentic relationships. Teachers who use positive social and emotional competencies can make a difference in the learning environment by making sound decisions and having positive interactions with students. However, a teacher whose competencies are inadequate or nonexistent may also adversely affect student performance.

Social and emotional learning has an impact on student success, and students must rely on teachers to help them develop those skills and then feel worthy using them (Dominguez & LaGue, 2013; Durlak et al., 2011). The findings of the current study indicate that when a teacher demonstrates positive emotions, creates a safe classroom environment, is proud of student success, builds relationships with students, and makes rational decisions, students feel comfortable and motivated to work. As teachers exceed the modeling of prosocial behaviors, their students learn that those behaviors can breed more successful and productive outcomes. However, the current study has also found that teachers who demonstrate more antisocial behaviors, such as showing indifference to students, arguing with students, yelling at students, and enabling unruly classrooms, have students who are often tense, anxious, distracted, and angry. The negative interactions students take away from these teachers and classrooms can bleed into other adult and peer relationships as well as create lower work productivity and decreased success.

As parents request more communicative and regulatory skills to be developed in their children, schools are turning toward social and emotional programs which can be implemented in the classroom. Schonert-Reichl (2017) explains teachers are strong advocates for social and emotional programs, but also asserts that teachers need substantial support in cultivating their own skills in order to successfully implement social and emotional learning within the classroom. The current study indicates some teachers may need professional development in the following areas, 1) maintaining a calm demeanor while angry, 2) building relationships through positive communication channels, 3) praising student success, 4) showing enthusiasm for teaching, 5) creating emotionally responsible classrooms, and 6) demonstrating emotional regulation methods. CASEL has led the way in promoting the needs of the whole child as they continuously research how the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, decision making, and relationship skills affect student well-being. However, teachers and adults also need continuous health and well-being in order to successfully and adequately demonstrate proper prosocial behaviors to students. CASEL has developed the social and emotional learning platform into a gateway for improved behaviors and increased academic achievement for students. Moving forward, school divisions would be wise to create opportunities for teachers to also grow their social and emotional learning, which will greatly impact their influence on students. Teachers who participate in their own social and emotional well-being practices or programs are better able to buy in, support social and emotional initiatives, and understand their role in student learning (Jennings et al., 2014; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

The goal of social and emotional learning is for students to become self-aware individuals who are able to manage behaviors in social and interpersonal situations while making

positive decisions within the community (Allbright et al., 2019; Cressey, 2019; Dominguez & LaGue, 2013). However, these skills must be reinforced during the hundreds of hours students spend in classrooms. The people available for this task are school teachers and staff. Teachers who are able to exhibit their own social and emotional competencies use clear, concise communication, organize processes effectively, motivate students, create safe classroom environments, build authentic teacher–student relationships, and generate a sense of community (Bird & Sultmann, 2010; Cranton, 2006; Dominguez & LaGue, 2013; Norris, 2010; Yang et al., 2018). Similar findings were seen in the current study as students specifically stated that bonding with teachers who have a positive energy helped them feel relaxed and focused in the classroom setting. Students became ready to learn and work hard when teachers showed an interest in helping them understand the material.

Benefits of adequate social and emotional learning include well-managed student behaviors, greater effort among students, student contribution to school success, and the development of a growth mindset (Allbright et al., 2019; Durlak et al., 2011). Further benefits of developing student social and emotional skills include school satisfaction, increased on-task behaviors, emotional stability, decreased stress, a boost in test scores, and an increased sense of school commitment (Bird & Sultmann, 2010; Haymovitz et al., 2018; Smith & Low, 2013). However, to gain these benefits schools and teachers must demonstrate a concerted effort in developing their own competencies to model for the students. Teachers must understand they are models of behavior. Student perspectives in the current study indicate reciprocity of negative behaviors between students and teachers; essentially students will treat teachers how they are being treated. One student even stated she wanted to give unkind teachers “a taste of their own medicine.”

Due to the lack of social and emotional content in college teacher education preparatory programs, teachers entering the classroom may be ill equipped to handle students' antisocial behaviors (Markowitz et al., 2018). These teachers must learn quickly to make ethical, equitable decisions based on the various needs of a child and to understand how their behaviors can either empower or incapacitate learning (Baum & King, 2006; Houser & Frymier, 2009). Teachers who develop a strong social and emotional capacity not only build their own self-efficacy but are also able to strengthen their classroom management skills, build healthy teacher–student relationships, and model prosocial behaviors (Goegan et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2013). The ability of teachers to also weave their pedagogical style into those three essential elements allows for not only the social and emotional growth of students but also the expansion of teacher confidence (Shonert-Reichl, 2017). The current study demonstrates the powerful impact relationships have on students, both positively and negatively. Relationships with strong bonds, mutual respect, encouragement, and clear communication create positive working conditions between teachers and students. Healthy relationships include positive emotions, relaxed feelings, and engaged students. Pedagogically, teachers with more than adequate social and emotional competencies demonstrate good teaching practices, which include a variety of activities, offering resources, focusing on student needs, answering student questions, and positively managing a classroom into a safe and welcoming environment. However, the current study found that teachers who model antisocial behaviors such as showing hostility toward students, acting bored within the classroom, and failing to listen to students create an environment where students are cautious of building relationships. Other behaviors from teachers who struggle with building relationships include poor pedagogical skills, such as “not showing students their mistakes,” “making students do work alone,” “not explaining material or answering questions,” and

“ignoring questions.” These antisocial practices not only impact student learning but also create uncomfortable emotions in students, such as annoyance, frustration, and anger. Students entering school classrooms that breed negativity in the social and emotional realms have difficulty staying focused and completing classwork accurately.

A major component to all social and emotional learning is self-awareness. Teachers who possess this competency are able to examine their personal attitudes and beliefs and relate them to how they approach their profession (Miller et al., 2018). Students who witness teachers recognizing their own needs and using appropriate prosocial behaviors in spite of tough situations give credibility to the teacher (Jones et al., 2013; Richardson & Shupe, 2003). Teacher credibility lends itself to student respect. Students who respect and trust their teacher’s ability to make positive, responsible decisions for their growth are more likely to emulate those positive social and emotional behaviors. Teachers who take a proactive role in modeling appropriate behaviors, intentionally or inadvertently, will help students develop the responsive practices needed for interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution (Talvio et al., 2015). The current study extends the research in the opposite direction. Student perspective indicates that when teachers feed into negative situations and do not allow students a voice, antisocial behaviors from both the teacher and the student increase. Behaviors such as arguing, yelling, calling students out in front of the class, and hostility create unsafe environments in which student learning and work production is low. When teachers show disrespect to students, a student’s mood changes, and students are less likely to engage in positive communication or cooperation within the class. Furthermore, teachers’ antisocial behaviors such as a lack of empathy, disappointment, aggressiveness, and annoyance breed embarrassed students who shut down and are unable to complete classwork.

Another avenue where teachers can have a social and emotional impact on students is the development of the classroom environment. Teacher decision making directly influences the routines, processes, norms, and management practices found in the classroom. The teacher's ability to build classroom community directly relates to social and emotional competencies which allow for relationship building and strong interpersonal relationships between peers (Norris, 2010). Effective classroom communication skills not only demonstrate respect for students, but model the appropriate actions needed for relationship building. Research indicates that strong relationships can be transformative to students and are explicit in developing student social and emotional competencies (Cranton, 2006). Building authentic, genuine relationships with students not only helps students adjust to school, but also prevents behavioral problems and strengthens the cognitive and emotional outcomes of students (Cranton, 2006; Poulou; 2014; Yang et al., 2018). The current study demonstrates how classroom environments which promote respect, fairness, and enthusiasm, and which focus on student needs, generate students who show a better understanding of the material and complete more work. However, inadequate classroom environments, which include mismanagement, conflict, and disorder, have students who are unable to focus on classwork and who are stressed over insufficient teaching and an unruly learning environment.

Social and emotional learning plays a key role in the growth and develop of students. Students learn social behaviors and emotional regulation by watching and interacting with those around them. The school environment is rife with opportunities for social and emotional learning and it is vitally important for teachers and school administrators to not only demonstrate appropriate behaviors, but also integrate them into everyday learning. Building student capacity for emotional regulation and relationship skills will not only improve the school environment but

also prepare students for the rigors of society. Teachers who possess adequate social and emotional competencies can greatly influence positive student behaviors, outcomes, and performance. However, the same is true on the negative side. The current study has found that inadequate relationship building, negative teacher emotions, and ineffective classroom decision making increase the negative emotions students feel and can negatively impact their cooperation and success in the classroom environment. Essentially, the lack of adequate teacher social and emotional competencies does influence student emotions and behaviors negatively and can stunt students' social and emotional learning.

Limitations and Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic which swept the nation in March 2020 created several limitations to this study. The mandatory school closings and social distancing mandates did not allow a face-to-face semi structured interview with the researcher. The use of an electronic form allowed for data collection but did not allow the researcher to ask probing questions of the students. Also, the electronic form was a self-report tool. Self-report tools in research can come with several biases, such as varying participant honesty (providing more socially acceptable answers), participant interpretation the questions (possible misunderstandings), and response bias (personal variables). Second, only two of the randomly selected student participants were able participate. Available student participants, who had the ability and access to complete the online interview, were utilized. Even though more participants were used than originally planned, the majority of these students were children of educators. Children of educators live in environments where education is held in high regard, which could have swayed student answers. Lastly, secondary students' social and emotional states fluctuate greatly, especially during times of uncertainty, which may have produced varying emotions.

Recommendations for further study include completing the study using the actual semi structured interviews as originally planned. This method would allow the researcher to ask probing questions and elicit more detailed information from the students. Moreover, completing the study in regards to only the inadequacy or negative side of social and emotional competencies would extend the research further. Similar research at the elementary levels may determine if student social and emotional learning is affected by age and independence level. Further study could also include teachers' perspectives of their own social and emotional competencies and how they feel those affect student social and emotional learning and success.

Conclusion

Positive social and emotional learning is an essential piece in developing students who can maneuver the many obstacles of school, learning, and life. Classroom teachers and school staff may knowingly or unknowingly contribute to this development as the creators of classrooms and models of behaviors. Teachers who possess and model the prosocial behaviors of emotional regulation, relationship building, empathy, and ethical decision making into strong pedagogically sound classrooms are able to better influence students' positive social and emotional learning. The beneficial outcomes for students with teachers who possess social and emotional competencies not only include high engagement, but also allow for feelings of school satisfaction, success, and stability. The positive emotions felt by students who have strong interpersonal relationships with a teacher increase their willingness and ability to demonstrate positive behaviors toward others and increase their learning potential.

However, teachers who lack the decision-making and management skills to adequately work with individual students or who model negative attitudes during student interactions can

change a student's mood about school and learning. A teacher's inadequacy in their own social and emotional learning can create classroom environments which include arguing, yelling, uncooperative behaviors, and stress, which lead to student worry, an inability to focus, and a lack of productivity. An absence of strong teacher–student relationships can also lead to the underdevelopment of student social and emotional learning. Interactions with teachers which include disrespect and hostility make it difficult for students to use positivity in a moment of stress.

This study's findings showed that secondary students reciprocate or want to reciprocate the feelings and actions of teachers in the classroom environment. Thus, teachers, with the help of their school divisions, must learn and develop the competencies needed to create positive, strong relationships with students and utilize the necessary actions for both student and teacher success. Teachers who are emotionally self-aware and have the ability to manage strong emotions and use responsible decision making in the classroom will ultimately help students develop their own social and emotional competencies. Teachers who care about student success will ensure their classroom environments welcome not only learning, but the development of the whole child.

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