The effects of a social and emotional learning curriculum on the academic achievement of high school students

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THE EFFECTS OF A SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM
ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by
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Abstract

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The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum on students' academic achievement, classroom behavior and SEL skills. An SEL curriculum was administered to 105 randomly selected college preparatory United States History 10th grade students. Students' received a pretest and a post test measuring their perception of SEL skills. This was administered before the 10 lesson unit was facilitated and after the action research was completed. The curriculum combined SEL and American Government. Various forms of assessment were used to measure academic achievement.

Survey results were analyzed and comparison percentages tabulated to demonstrate students' changes in perception from the pre to the post survey. Numerical grades were recorded using both objective and subjective grading criteria. Students' misconduct was recorded throughout the study and journal notations made documenting student behaviors.

The results of the study suggest that after the SEL curriculum, students' perceived that discipline was handled with greater fairness, trusted others to respect their property in class, perceived greater respect from their teacher, and felt that their classroom time was spent more purposefully. Students' perceived and actual grade point averages were in the 80 to 90 percent range. The classroom environment became cooperative with very few misconduct reprimands noted.
The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of an SEL curriculum on achievement, behavior and SEL skills. The results suggest that students' perceived fairer discipline, trusted others to respect their property, and felt greater respect from their teacher. Grades averaged 87% for all academic work.
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Chapter 1

The Effects of a Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum on the Academic Achievement of High School Students

Introduction

Social-emotional learning (SEL) and school success have received increased attention in recent years. Educators recognize that SEL must be incorporated into children’s educational experiences to maximize their potential to succeed now, as well as later in their lives (Zins, 2001). SEL is the process by which children enhance their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behavior to achieve important tasks such as managing their emotions, establishing healthy relationships, meeting personal needs, making responsible decisions, and solving problems. SEL instruction which encourages students to come prepared for class, motivates them to exert more effort, supports them working cooperatively with each other, and reinforces class participation can effect educational outcomes such as students’ attendance, completion of homework, and academic knowledge and achievement (Zins, 2001).

Focus of the Study

This study was conducted to answer the question, “will an SEL curriculum improve the academic achievement of college preparatory United States History students?” The study focused on academic achievement as measured by various forms of assessment, including; tests, quizzes, projects, oral presentations, group work, and individual research studies. Secondary outcomes observed, included; students’ motivation to learn, students’ attitudes and interest in the subject, students’ academic engaged time, classroom attendance, peer leadership skills, cooperative learning skills, and students’ overall self control. Students’ perception of their education being serious and purposeful was also considered as a meaningful outcome. The
motivation for this study came from two sources, the first, our quest to fulfill the principles of our Whole School Reform model, the Coalition of Essential Schools. Secondly, it aligned itself with the five pillars of our Character Education program, including, teaching students' respect, responsibility, caring, trustworthiness, fairness, and citizenship.

**Purpose of the Study**

The objectives for the 2001-2002 school year were to implement our Whole School Reform model, the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES). The CES Task Force and the School Management Team (SMT) Communications Subcommittee intended to share our progress through the following venues:

- Using the School's site to post information about WSR, progress and accomplishments.
- Developing a newsletter for parents and community members.
- Interviewing for newspaper articles with local papers.
- Instituting morning P.A. announcements.
- Developing a curriculum around school change.
- Posting bulletin boards and display cases throughout the building.
- Using Community Cable TV to communicate WSR.
- Using the school's closed circuit TV for education and communication.
- Providing a videotape of MHS made for Middle States Evaluation.
- Doing mailings to parents from MHS; orientation, back to school night.
- Communicating our goals at the Leadership Luncheon.

The Committee agreed to set and maintain a communication style that was simple, active, and positive at all times. The content we agreed to focus on included positive accomplishments in the Millville High School community, goals and vision for school reform, inviting all stakeholders into the process of Whole School Reform (WSR),
publishing real data from our needs assessment surveys, and sharing the enthusiasm of the mission.

The intern participated in a study which answered the question, "will an SEL curriculum improve the academic achievement of college preparatory United States History students? This study helped to fulfill our mission of delivering a school change curriculum that emphasized the CES principles; the tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress a tone of decency and respect (CES Principle #7), and students should learn to use their minds well (CES Principle #1). The curriculum delivered, incorporated SEL lessons within the social studies content area. Students demonstrated higher-order thinking skills, depth of knowledge, connection of content material to the world beyond the classroom, and substantive conversation as measures of academic achievement. Focusing on establishing a tone of decency and respect, students engaged in authentic learning which incorporated many challenging learning activities from both SEL and social studies content. While the Communications Committee developed and implemented messages regarding Whole School Reform at Millville Senior High School that led to shared enthusiasm and commitment, the intern facilitated this objective through classroom instruction and student learning.

Definitions

*Social and Emotional Intelligence* - Social and emotional competence is the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life.

*Character Education* - Teaching students' respect, responsibility, caring, trustworthiness, fairness, and citizenship.

*Academic Achievement* - Students demonstration of higher-order thinking skills, depth of knowledge, connection of content material to the world beyond the classroom, and the sharing of ideas, as measured by tests, quizzes, projects, oral presentations,
group work, and research studies.

*The Coalition of Essential Schools* - A Whole School Reform model. A school joins the Coalition when it has committed itself to improve student achievement by redesigning the school according to a set of ideas referred to as the Coalition's Common Principles. These principles articulate a vision of education in which students are active learners and are able to demonstrate their skills and knowledge publicly; in which teachers tune instruction to individual needs and design curriculum to promote deep understanding rather than mere coverage of material; and in which school schedules and routines help teachers and students to know each other well and to work in an atmosphere of mutual trust and high expectations.

*Whole School Reform* - Is the process of incorporating the goals and objectives of the Coalition of Essential Schools into the culture and curriculum of the school.

**Limitations**

The limitations of the study included both the facilitation of the SEL curriculum and the measurement of academic achievement. For example, the SEL lessons delivered were created by the intern with the guidance of the research. The lessons fostered skill development in the areas of decision making, communication, problem solving, self management, cooperative learning, and productivity, all relevant SEL skills. The technique for demonstrating the effect of SEL instruction including the pretest and post-test, as well as the assessments used, were qualitative in nature. Furthermore, many other dependent variables such as the six pillars of character education including respect, responsibility, caring, trustworthiness, fairness, and citizenship were not necessarily the focus of this study. The correlational data may have been influenced by the teaching style of intern, the time of day instruction took place, students' previous experiences with and perceptions of education, their individual aptitude for the subject, and their level of motivation to learn. All of these factors
influence academic achievement and can be studied in isolation as dependent variables. Lastly, the sample population was college preparatory sophomores, with a few juniors and seniors, students predisposed to higher achievement academically.

Setting of the Study

Millville Senior High School is located in Southern New Jersey's Cumberland County and is a large community of approximately 44.3 square miles. The total population for the city is 26,000 with roughly 5,600 Pre K to grade 12 students in the school system. Millville Senior High School is in a receiving district, with students coming from Port Norris, Mauricetown, Woodbine, and Commercial Township.

Cumberland County ranks lowest in per capita income in New Jersey and Millville School District is classified as a "special needs" Abbott district by the State Department of Education. Millville's chief industries are glass making, textile manufacturing, aircraft engine overhaul, industrial machine development, house wares manufacturing, and recreational boat manufacturing. The industry base has changed dramatically over the last decade with glass plants shutting down and the town's major employer, Prudential Insurance, closing. The large surrounding rural area, once used for agriculture, is utilized for prison facilities by the state and federal government.

During the 2000-2001 school year, there were 1,421 students enrolled in the high school's 10th through 12th grades. The average economic classification for the students of Millville Senior High School is lower middle class. Students represent a variety of backgrounds, interests, and abilities. Our graduating class of 2000 demonstrated the following characteristics: 64% of our seniors went on to college or other training, with an additional 8% going into the armed forces. 20% of our student population went into the workforce with 7% undecided at graduation as to what their plans were.
Millville Senior High School offers a comprehensive program for students in grades 10 through 12. Students are offered three major areas of study; college preparatory, business, and vocational/technology education. Advanced Placement courses are offered in U.S. History, Biology, Chemistry, Macro Economics, German Language, Spanish Language, English Literature, Calculus AB, and Physics B. Courses are selected on an individual basis incorporating preparation for post high school study or for the world of work. Students may also complete part of their education in a shared time vocational program at the Cumberland County Technical Education Center. The high school offers an extensive co-curricular program which includes 20 interscholastic athletic programs, intramural programs, and over 50 clubs for student membership.

There is a strong community/school relationship as indicated by the large number of parental support groups functioning in our schools. Booster clubs and PTA organizations successfully support each school in the district. Community groups, along with the adult continuing education program use school facilities continuously. Most recently, the city administration, along with school district administrators, joined for an investigative conference in hopes of uniting to develop a Metropolitan Area Network plan. The coordination of resources will serve the needs of both school and community while expanding technology capabilities to more efficiently and economically serve the needs of the citizens of Millville.

The single greatest challenge facing our school is to graduate every single student. Other challenges include meeting the needs of the whole child in the areas of health and social services, technology access, adequate facilities, and providing up-to-date resources through a progressive and dynamic instructional program. To address these challenges, we conduct ongoing needs assessment and adjust priorities accordingly. We allocate resources in multiyear increments to complete projects,
apply for grants to fund projects, share resources with other schools and the community whenever possible, and continue to request additional resources from the NJDOE each year. To validate our requests to the state, we form school and district level committees to conduct thorough investigations and acquire supporting documentation which clearly reflects our needs.

Our primary objectives reflected by the Coalition of Essential Schools, our Whole School Reform Model, include the following:

- The school should focus on helping young people learn to use their minds well.
- The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress a tone of decency and trust.
- Administrative and budget emphasis should reflect resources dedicated to teaching and learning.
- The school should model democratic practices, honor diversity, and challenge all forms of inequity.

**Significance**

Millville Public Schools is an Abbott district and therefore mandated by the State Department of Education to adopt a Whole School Reform Model. We have adopted the Coalition of Essential Schools as our Facilitator. In order to implement the CES principles, it is essential that we get stakeholder involvement and commitment to school change. The purpose of this project was to improve students, academic achievement through the integration of an SEL curriculum into the American Government content area. Ultimately, the intern intended to create a curriculum to facilitate Whole School Reform such that school change would be supported by all stakeholders of Millville Senior High School.

The project provided the intern with an opportunity to promote the success of all students through student reflection, learning and application of skills. My intent was to
foster in students, their understanding and impact on the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural community in which they live. Specifically, to take control of their learning and thus their lives, with the intent of helping students to use their minds well while promoting a tone of decency and trust in the classroom, school, and community.

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature, will provide an evaluation and synthesis of information dealing with the research question. Chapter 3 The Design of the Study, addresses five areas related to the research design used for the study. The first area is a general description of the research design. The second, is a description of the development and design of the research instruments used in the study. Third, a description of the sample and sampling technique used in the study. Fourth, a description of the data collection approach including surveys and assessments used to measure students' social and emotional learning and academic achievement. Fifth, a description of the data analysis plan for the future. Chapter 4 Presentation of the Research Findings, will describe the information that was found and analyze the meaning of the findings. Chapter 5 Conclusions, Implications and Further Study will describe the study's major conclusions and their corresponding implications. It will also highlight conclusions and implications of the study on the intern's leadership development, address how the organization changed as a result of the study, and address the need for further study.
Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Background on Character Education

Social and emotional competence is the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one’s life. In Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman (1995) provides evidence for social and emotional intelligence as the complex and multifaceted ability to be effective in all the critical domains of life including learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development. Social and emotional learning is the process through which children develop the skills, attitudes and values necessary to acquire social and emotional competence. It includes self-awareness, control of impulsivity, working cooperatively, and caring about oneself and the well being of others.

In the past several years initiated by President Clinton's 1997 State of the Union address, character education has received a great deal of attention. Both character education and social and emotional education share many overlapping goals. Character education and social and emotional learning have evolved based on at least three distinct societal causes as described by Thomas Lickona (1993).

The family, traditionally a child's primary moral teacher, is for vast numbers of children today failing to perform that role, thus creating a moral vacuum. Sylvia Hewlett (1991) documents that American children, rich and poor, suffer a level of neglect unique among developed nations. Overall, child well-being has declined despite a decrease in the number of children per family, an increase in the educational level of parents, and historically high levels of public spending in education. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead (1993) synthesizes the social science research on the decline of the
two biological-parent family in America:

If current trends continue, less than half of children born today will live continuously with their own mother and father throughout childhood. An increasing number of children will experience family break-up two or even three times during childhood (In Lickona, 1993 pg. 8).

Children of marriages that end in divorce and children of single mothers are more likely to be poor, have emotional and behavioral problems, fail to achieve academically, get pregnant, abuse drugs and alcohol, get in trouble with the law, and be sexually and physically abused. Children in stepfamilies are generally worse off (more likely to be sexually abused, for example) than children in single-parent homes (Lickona, 1993). No one has felt the impact of family disruption more than schools. Whitehead (1993) writes:

Across the nation, principals report a dramatic rise in the aggressive, acting-out behavior characteristic of children, especially boys, who are living in single-parent families. Moreover, teachers find that many children are so upset and preoccupied by the explosive drama of their own family lives that they are unable to concentrate on such mundane matters as multiplication tables (In Lickona, 993, pg. 8).

Family disintegration, then, drives the character education movement in two ways: schools have to teach the values kids aren't learning at home; and schools, in order to conduct teaching and learning, must become caring moral communities that help children from unhappy homes focus on their work, control their anger, feel cared about, and become responsible students (Lickona, 1993).

A second impetus for renewed character education is the sense that young people in general, not just those from fractured families, have been adversely affected by poor parenting (in intact as well as broken families); the wrong kind of adult role models; the
sex, violence, and materialism portrayed in the mass media; and the pressures of the peer group. Evidence that this hostile moral environment is taking a toll on youth character can be found in 10 troubling trends: rising youth violence; increasing dishonesty (lying, cheating, and stealing); growing disrespect for authority; peer cruelty; a resurgence of bigotry on school campuses, from preschool through higher education; a decline in the work ethic; sexual precocity; a growing self-centeredness and declining civic responsibility; an increase in self-destructive behavior; and ethical illiteracy (Lickona, 1993).

The statistics supporting these trends are overwhelming according to Lickona (1993). For example, the U.S. homicide rate for 15- to 24-year-old males is 7 times higher than Canada's and 40 times higher than Japan's. The U.S. has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates, the highest teen abortion rate, and the highest level of drug use among young people in the developed world. Youth suicide has tripled in the past 25 years, and a survey of more than 2,000 Rhode Island students, grades six through nine, found that two out of three boys and one of two girls thought it "acceptable for a man to force sex on a woman" if they had been dating for six months or more (Kikuchi 1988).

A third point leading to interest in character education is a recovery of shared, objectively important ethical values. We are recovering the wisdom that we do share a basic morality, essential for our survival; that adults must promote this morality by teaching the young, directly and indirectly, such values as respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, caring, and civic virtue; and that these values are not merely subjective preferences but that they have objective worth and a claim on our collective conscience.

Such values affirm our human dignity, promote the good of the individual and the common good, and protect our human rights. They meet the classic ethical tests of
want all persons to act this way in a similar situation?). They define our responsibilities in a democracy, and they are recognized by all civilized people and taught by all enlightened creeds. Not to teach children these core ethical values is a grave moral failure (Lickona, 1993).

Faced with this deteriorating societal morality, character education curriculum must be broadly conceived to encompass the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of morality. Good character consists of knowing what is right, desiring what is right, and doing the right thing. Schools must help children to understand, adopt, and act upon core values in their own lives.

Lickona (1993) suggests that the cognitive side of character includes six specific moral qualities: awareness of the moral dimensions of the situation, knowing moral values and what they require of us in given situations, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, thoughtful decision making, and moral self knowledge. All of these powers of rational moral thought are required for full maturity and citizenship in a democratic society.

Moral education must incorporate both an intellectual and emotional component. Decisions that require judgment and action are influenced by one’s conscience, self-respect, empathy, loving the good, self-control, and humility. Thus, developing character requires a comprehensive, holistic approach which influences all three parts of character (knowing, feeling, and behavior). Lickona (1993) suggests the following classroom practices and calls upon teachers to:

- Act as caregiver, model, and mentor, treating students with love and respect, setting a good example, supporting positive social behavior, and correcting hurtful actions through one-on-one guidance and whole-class discussion;
- Create a moral community, helping students know one another as persons, respect and care about one another, and feel valued membership in, and
responsibility to, the group;

- Practice moral discipline, using the creation and enforcement of rules as opportunities to foster moral reasoning, voluntary compliance with rules, and a respect for others;

- Create a democratic classroom environment, involving students in decision making and the responsibility for making the classroom a good place to be and learn;

- Teach values through the curriculum, using the ethically rich content of academic subjects (such as literature, history, and science), as well as outstanding programs, as vehicles for teaching values and examining moral questions;

- Use cooperative learning to develop students' appreciation of others, perspective taking, and ability to work with others toward common goals;

- Develop the "conscience of craft" by fostering students' appreciation of learning, capacity for hard work, commitment to excellence, and sense of work as affecting the lives of others;

- Encourage moral reflection through reading, research, essay writing, journal keeping, discussion, and debate;

- Teach conflict resolution, so that students acquire the essential moral skills of solving conflicts fairly and without force (pgs. 10-11).

Character education must be facilitated beyond the classroom and incorporate the whole school and community. Creating a school culture that amplifies the values taught in the classroom, fostering caring beyond the classroom in students performance of school and community service, as well as recruiting parents and community as partners in character education, will create a comprehensive approach to the learning of character.
Whereas many character education programs promote a set of values and directive approaches that presumably lead to responsible behavior (Brick and Roffman 1993, Lickona 1993b, Lockwood 1993), social and emotional education efforts have a broader focus. Rather than simply helping young people to develop good character traits such as fairness, honesty, compassion, responsibility, and respect for oneself and others, social and emotional learning places more emphasis on active learning techniques. These learning techniques include generalization of skills across settings, the development of problem solving skills and decision making skills that can be applied in many situations. Social and emotional education is targeted to help students develop the attitudes, behaviors and cognitions to become healthy and competent overall, that is, socially, emotionally, academically, and physically, because of the close relationship among these domains (Ellias, M.J. etal, 1997).

The accumulation of evidence suggests that it is not possible for students to attain true academic and personal success without addressing SEL skills. Studies of effective middle schools have shown that the common denominator among different types of schools reporting academic success is that they practice SEL curriculum integration (Ellias, M.J. etal, 1997). The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) reported that school wide mentoring programs, group guidance and advisory periods, modifications to traditional discipline procedures, structured classroom time devoted to social and emotional skill building, group problem solving, and team building led to academic success in middle schools. Despite having sound academic programs and competent teachers and administrators, the SEL component distinguished the effective schools from the ineffective schools.

The importance of SEL for successful academic learning is further strengthened by
new insights from the field of neuropsychology (Ellias, M.J. et al, 1997). Many elements of learning are relational (or, based on relationships), and social and emotional skills are essential for the successful development of thinking and learning activities that are traditionally considered cognitive (Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern 1990; Perry 1996). Processes we had considered pure thinking are now seen as phenomena in which the cognitive and emotional aspects work together. Brain studies show that memory is coded to specific events and linked to social and emotional situations, and that the latter are integral parts of larger units of memory that make up what we learn and retain, including experiences in the classroom. Under conditions of real or imagined threat or anxiety, there is a loss of focus on the learning process. It is as if the thinking brain is taken over (or “hijacked,” as Goleman says) by the older limbic system.

Slywester (1995) points out that

we know emotion is very important to the educative process because it drives attention, which drives learning and memory. We’ve never really understood emotion, however, and don’t know how to regulate it in school--beyond defining too much or too little of it as misbehavior and relegating most of it to the arts, PE, recess, and the extracurricular program....By separating emotion from logic and reason in the classroom, we’ve simplified school management and evaluation, but we’ve also separated two sides of one coin--and lost something important in the process. It is impossible to separate emotion from the other important activities of life. Don't try (pp. 72, 75).

The facts presented spell out a serious message: We should do more to prepare children for the challenges of life and teach them ways that will give them a realistic chance of successfully managing the challenges of learning, growing and developing. We must remember that:
the democratic way of life engages the creative process of seeking ways to extend and expand the values of democracy. This process, however, is not simply an anticipatory conversation about just anything. Rather, it is directed toward intelligent and reflective consideration of problems, events, and issues that arise in the course of our collective lives (Beane and Apple 1995, p. 16).

The question becomes, what do we want our students to achieve? Our society would agree that social and academic success as well as a sense of personal well-being that enables students to participate in school, family, home, workplace, and community life with thoughtfulness and integrity are desired goals. In other words, we want them to be knowledgeable, responsible, and caring individuals (Ellias, M.J. et al, 1997). In order to increase the probability of this happening, there are certain tasks that students need to master along the way, certain competencies needed to accomplish those tasks, and certain values and attitudes they need to develop. Knowledge, skills, values and attitudes must work together and be nurtured within a supportive climate.

Educators at all grade levels need explicit plans to help students become knowledgeable, responsible and caring. Teaching efforts are needed to build and reinforce skills in four major domains of SEL:

1. Life skills and social competencies.
2. Health-promotion and problem-prevention skills.
3. Coping skills and social support for transitions and crises.
4. Positive, contributory service.

Skill development requires ongoing exposure and practice. Social and emotional skills, like academic skills are built over time and can be combined to address increasingly complex situations. The coping and greater independence skills required of high school students are built on earlier foundations, hence it is necessary to address these skills at each grade level (Weissberg and Greenberg 1997).
Life skills and social competencies include life, health, citizenship, and workplace skills. Examples include stress management, self-control, decision making, problem solving, conflict resolution, assertiveness, social skills, listening, self-expression, skills related to identity and spiritual development. Furthermore, children must be able to access their own creativity, how to set academic, career, and relationship goals; and how to discover constructive personal meaning and purpose. These skills are the foundation of successful social interaction and shortcomings in these areas will diminish potential accomplishments in academic and other areas (Elias et al 1994, Gardner 1993, Goleman 1995).

Health-promotion and problem-prevention skills are strategies and behaviors to reduce the likelihood of students experiencing specific problems such as drug use, violence, AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, premature sexual activity, delinquency, and suicide attempts. These skills complement life skills but include context specific information related to a particular problem or risk area. The National Commission on the role of the School and the Community in Improving Adolescent Health (1990, P. 36) describes a "new kind of health education" that highlights the importance of social and emotional skills in efforts to promote health and prevention problems. For example it provides honest and relevant information about diseases, family life, sex education, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, mental health, and nutrition. It teaches students skills and strategies for making wise decisions, developing positive values, dealing with group pressure and working cooperatively to avoid fights. It includes a physical activity program that fosters lifelong exercise habits. Finally, it begins before students are pressured to experiment with risky behavior and continues throughout adolescence.

Developing coping skills and providing social support for transitions and crises is essential for social and emotional development. Students need specialized skills to
help them address the personal and interpersonal conflicts that accompany life change and loss. This information is best communicated through structured programs of conflict resolution, support groups such as Natural Helpers, CORE team, and guidance services. The support group activities are generally delivered individually or in small groups by various school personnel.

Fostering a sense of relatedness and community is a critical component that can be facilitated through positive, contributory service. With the growing demands of citizenship, community leaders and volunteers are needed. Preparing students for this service includes such school based activities as tutoring and mentoring; classroom, school, or community service; serving as peer mediators, buddies to younger students, and orienters for new students.

Success in each of the four domains cited involves the coordination of skills in emotion, cognition, and behavior. Helping students develop and coordinate these skills is a necessary activity at the classroom, school, and district level (Shriver and Weissberg 1996, Weissberg and Greenberg 1997).

The skills for becoming emotionally competent begin in infancy and at their simplest level involve recognizing cues from the faces, postures, and vocal tones of others, followed by labeling and verbalizing the emotional experience. Emotional awareness and regulation depend on skills of memory and language, and how emotion, events, and their labels become integrated, coordinated, and recalled. The ability of children to learn and apply their learning, is interwoven with emotion (Ellias, M.J. etal., 1997).

To live and learn we need the cognitive skills to be able to listen accurately, pay attention, remember what we hear and learn, and guide ourselves in thoughtful decision making and problem solving. Ellias (1997) suggests that we need a social decision-making and problem-solving strategy that includes the following skills:

- Understanding signs of one's own and others' feelings.
• Accurately labeling and expressing feelings.
• Thinking of alternative ways to solve a problem.
• Thinking about long and short-term consequences for oneself and others.
• Reflecting on one’s strategies, and learning for the future.

Our students will demonstrate great intellectual problem-solving abilities but will be unsuccessful because of difficulties dealing with feelings or in carrying out desired behaviors. Additionally, carrying out successful decision making and problem solving under stress requires reflection and understanding as previously discussed.

Behavior, including self-control skills are necessary to accurately process information contained in social encounters, to engage in social decision making, and to be able to approach others in difficult situations without provoking anger and annoyance. These skills include the ability to follow directions, calm oneself down when under stress, manage anger, and communicate in a respectful manner. Ellias (1997) states that group participation skills underlie the exercise of social responsibility, task-oriented contributions to the group, and the building of meaningful communities. They include the following:

• Recognizing and eliciting trust, help, and praise from others.
• Recognizing others’ perspectives.
• Choosing friends wisely
• Sharing, waiting, and participating in groups.
• Giving and receiving help and criticism.
• Resisting pressure from peers and the media to engage in antisocial, illegal, or dangerous behaviors.
• Exercising leadership, accepting diversity, and demonstrating desirable attributes such as honest, responsibility, compassion and caring.
Emotional intelligence, that is, competence in social and emotional functioning is a product of an interrelationship of skills in the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral areas (Goleman 1995, Mayer and Salovey 1995). The following example shows the key skills that make up emotional intelligence and cut across different domains of human functioning:

**Emotional Intelligence: Key Skills in Social and Emotional Learning**

**Self Awareness**
- Recognizing and naming one's emotions.
- Understanding of the reasons and circumstances for feeling as one does.

**Self-Regulation of Emotion**
- Verbalizing and coping with anxiety, anger, and depression.
- Controlling impulses, aggression, and self-destructive, antisocial behavior.
- Recognizing strengths in and mobilizing positive feelings about self, school, family, and support networks.

**Self-Monitoring and Performance**
- Focusing on tasks at hand.
- Setting short and long term goals.
- Modifying performance in light of feedback.
- Mobilizing positive motivation.
- Activating hope and optimism.

**Empathy and Perspective Taking**
- Learning how to increase these, and develop feedback mechanisms to use in everyday life.
- Becoming a good listener.
Increasing empathy and sensitivity to others' feelings
Understanding others' perspectives, points of view, feelings.

Social Skills in Handling Relationships

- Managing emotions in relationships, harmonizing diverse feelings, viewpoints.
- Expressing emotions effectively.
- Exercising assertiveness, leadership, persuasion.
- Working as part of a team/cooperative learning groups.
- Showing sensitivity to social cues.
- Exercising social decision-making and problem-solving skills.
- Responding constructively and in a problem-solving manner to interpersonal obstacles.


Developing a Safe, Caring, Responsive and Empowering Classroom

In a safe and caring classroom environment, students can express themselves, risk making mistakes, and know they will be accepted no matter what. Adler (1930) proposed that a sense of belonging motivates children to develop their skills and contributes to the welfare of all students. Research indicates that educators who establish firm boundaries, foster warm personal relationships in the classroom, and enable students to have an impact on their environment strengthen students' attachment to school, their interest in learning, their ability to refrain from self-destructive behavior, and their positive attitude (Hawkins, Catalano, et al. 1992; Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, and Delucchi 1992). Furthermore, an emotional attachment to teachers, peers, and school is a vital link to academic success (Hawkins, Catalano, et al. 1992; Solomon et al. 1992). Much of the foundation of SEL is the
conscious effort of school personnel to foster a sense of belonging and attachment to
the school community (Charney 1992; Lewis, Schaps and Watson 1996).

Model teachers understand that students require an environment of mutual respect
and trust. Teaching practices must respect each student as a responsible and active
learner. Williams (1993) found that respect is taught best through a hidden curriculum
of modeling and quality teaching that creates a positive moral classroom climate. In
her research of students grades 6-8, students reported that model teachers behave in
the following way:

- present clear, consistent, and sincere messages.
- do not pull rank, are never authoritarian.
- communicate high expectations.
- really listen.
- communicate their commitment through action.
- are hard working and really care about student learning.
- deserve respect.

The characteristics of a model teacher or quality teacher, is that they create
classroom environments that are nurturing and risk free, along the guidelines of
constructivist theory as proposed by Vygotsky (Clark 1990). These teachers are direct,
nonjudgmental, and open-minded. Model teachers use specific classroom situations
as lead-ins to brief discussions about proper conduct and ethical behavior (Williams
1993).

SEL instructional methodology is based on research that various domains of
intelligence are interrelated (Gardner 1983, Sylwester 1995). For example, an athlete’s
thoughts and feelings while competing will affect the level of success attained, a
student’s ability to learn academic material is affected by emotional state, and social
problem solving is a function of the integration of emotional intelligence and analytical
cognitive processes (Damasio 1994). SEL is most closely linked with Gardner’s interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences but can also be enriched by other intelligences: verbal, artistic, musical, logical/mathematical, spatial, and bodily/kinesthetic. Thus, teachers learning activities can call on a variety of intelligences which cultivate the strengths of the learner.

The instructional techniques used to introduce or explore a particular area depend on the developmental level of the students, the teaching style and strengths of the instructor, the needs and interests of the students, and the goals of the lesson (Elias 1997). Different methods used in SEL instruction include:

- Storytelling and biography
- Group discussion and debate
- Rehearsal and practice (role play)
- Self-awareness and self-regulation
- Artistic expression
- Play
- Cooperative and small-group learning

For the sake of this discussion, high school social studies curriculum and instruction will be addressed. For example, Prager (1993) in his Ethics Course at The Ethel Walker School in Simsbury, Connecticut, designed a curriculum with the objective of getting students to figure out what they believe is right. What are their ethical principles and guidelines for living? How do they make decisions? Prager acts primarily as a facilitator of discussions concerning topics such as lying, stealing, plagiarism, abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, animal rights, the environment, spirituality, homelessness and poverty, homophobia, and racism. Students are encouraged to vocalize their opinions and to listen to one another. Prager bases his discussion methods on the assertions of Ronald Galbraith and Thomas Jones (1976):
Individuals may develop their moral reasoning by engaging in discussions of moral problems. Students need the opportunity to confront difficult decision reasons for selecting their positions; and they need to hear the reasoning used by others on the same problem (In Prager, pg. 21).

Other methods used by Prager include students' reading articles and reacting to authors' assertions, playing a computer simulation game called Decisions, Decisions (Dockterman et al. 1990), doing oral presentations in small groups, and researching and analyzing an ethical issue or system of choice. Students also write several papers which discuss an ethical dilemma in their lives, discuss some behavior they have changed based on moral grounds, apply different viewpoints to making a moral decision, and research and discuss the ethics of a public figure. For the final course project, students define their ethical principles and explain how they would apply them.

Students' evaluation of the course has been mostly positive including the following responses:

- I discovered a lot about myself. I thought about my principles, which I'd never thought about before.
- There should be more courses like this where we discuss issues affecting our lives. It gets boring when we always study the past.
- For one period in the day, you get to think for yourself. It's as easy or as hard as you make it, and this was one of my hardest courses ever.

Wynne and Walberg (1985) suggest that schools that emphasize either scholarly achievement or responsible behavior without focusing on both, shortchange society and their students. These researchers contend that the development in student character greatly depends on the school treating its academic program seriously. This means that teachers should assign relevant homework, give tests and other
assessments, and provide a sound curriculum that treats academic learning as important. Without challenging academic activities, students see that their school time is not being treated purposefully, and they conclude that the adults employed in the school are irresponsible. An important element of acquiring character is learning how to be committed and to strive toward excellence. The goal is to cultivate motivation, commitment, hard work, interpersonal skills, and a high level of interest in the students which requires the development of learning activities whereby students construct meaningful connections that lead to learning.
Chapter 3

The Design of the Study

The Intern administered a social and emotional learning curriculum to her classes with the intention of developing student awareness of self and others, promoting positive student attitudes and values, supporting responsible and collaborative decision making, fostering student social interaction, and increasing academic performance. Once a week, a lesson was taught that addressed both students' development of SEL skills, as well as skills that support CES principles, using ones' minds well and encouraging a tone of respect and decency in our school. Much of the curricula focused on building the five pillars of Character Education: respect, responsibility, trust, caring and citizenship into an American Government curriculum. The intern used a variety of learning activities to teach the content including cooperative learning, role plays, research, writing, presentations, reflective decision making, and collaborative problem solving.

Site and Population Selection

The environment in which the study took place included the library, the classroom, and time spent on task outside of school. One hundred and five college preparatory students participated in the study. The sample was selected based on random assignment of college preparatory students by the Guidance Department to the intern's class roster for the school year September 2001 to June 2002. This group of subjects would most conveniently provide data demonstrating the relationship between SEL and academic achievement. The sample consisted of four classes or groups of students, SEL 2, SEL 4, SEL 5, and SEL 8. The classes included periods 2, 4, 5, and 8 College Preparatory United States History students. SEL 2 consisted of 27
students, SEL 4, 29 students, SEL 5, 23 students, and SEL 8, 26 students. All students received a pre-test survey which measured their personal perceptions of their level of social and emotional education at the current time. The intent of the survey was to measure the students’ perceptions of their kindergarten to 10th grade experiences in the school and classroom environment, as being conducive and supportive to learning. A 10 lesson unit, designed to support the achievement of state mandated Core Curriculum Content Standards as well as Millville High School’s Core Requirements in Social Studies was administered combining SEL and American Government. Various forms of assessment were used to measure learning and to demonstrate improvement or lack of improvement in academic achievement over the course of the study. Finally, a post test was given to the population sample to assess students’ perceptions of the curriculum’s effect on both their SEL skills and their academic achievement.

**Primary Data Gathering Technique**

The intern was motivated to develop and design research instruments that reflected behavior indicative of Character Education due to a survey that was administered at the high school during the 2000-2001 school year. On May 30, 2001, a student needs assessment was given in the cafeteria during first and second period to 239 sophomores, juniors and seniors. A copy of the survey was developed by the intern with input from the CES Task Force. A sample of students representing diversity in race and ethnic group, socioeconomic status, and academic achievement were selected to participate in the needs assessment. The results of our student survey motivated the intern to develop a curriculum that would address our obvious shortfall in the character education of our high school students. The results of this survey are discussed in Chapter 4.
The initial data gathering instrument, Student Survey of Social and Emotional Learning was developed using the Brooks Educational Quality Indicators project, District No. 2092, Edmonton, Alberta (1993). Their findings reinforce the belief that the development of character and intellect go hand in hand. The collection of data from the community, former students, staff, and administration indicate that Brooks schools have better than average children’s behavior in school, and better than average examination success, and lower delinquency rates (1993). See Appendix A for a copy of the research instrument which was administered to 105 students on the first day of school, September 4, 2001.

A ten lesson curriculum (Appendix A) was developed to measure students' higher level thinking skills, depth of knowledge and application of knowledge, cooperative learning skills, attitude, interest and motivation in the subject, leadership skills, and self control. The goals and objectives of each lesson were based on the Core Curriculum Content Standards as outlined by the State Department of Education. Each lesson also incorporated SEL skills such as respect, caring, cooperation, citizenship, fairness, responsibility, and trustworthiness.

The curriculum content included American Government principles, concepts, and practices in a building block approach beginning with the foundations of American Government, then the study of the three separate branches of State and Federal Government.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data collection was ongoing throughout the course of the project and was organized according to the lesson objective and the measurement tool used to assess skill development. Numerical grades were recorded for each assignment reflecting objective and subjective criteria and entered into a database. Rubrics were used for all projects, both group and individual, with the final grade entered into the data.
Survey results were calculated and comparison results from the pre and post surveys were tabulated. A rubric was used to quantify the results of the three open-ended questions on the final survey. All student latenesses to class or acts of insubordination were recorded in the intern's grade book. Journal notations were made throughout the course of the study paying particular attention to the ability of students' to work cooperatively, to demonstrate positive attitudes and values, show confidence in public speaking, and evidence of respect for self and others. The intern reflected on her own teaching throughout the study being mindful to demonstrate sensitivity to students' needs, to actively listen, to give clear and specific directions to all assignments, to be fair and consistent with discipline, and to model respect, responsibility, and helpfulness. Open discussions regarding topics of interest were held throughout the course of the study and student participation was noted in the grade book.
Chapter 4

Presentation of Research Findings

The action research project began in September the first week of school and concluded by the Christmas break in December. The data demonstrated students' mastery of the lesson objectives. Observations of students' behaviors were noted, including discipline concerns as well as those behaviors indicating increased confidence and cooperation. A survey was administered at the end of the research project to assess students' values, and attitudes toward themselves, their classmates, their teacher, and their school. Students' perception of their individual class performance was also assessed.

As noted in Chapter 3, on May 30, 2001, a student needs assessment was given in the cafeteria during first and second period to 239 sophomores, juniors and seniors. The survey was designed to measure students' perceptions of teaching methods, curriculum, content relevancy, Character Education, safety, scheduling, career counseling, course selection, and many other aspects of the environment at Millville Senior High. The intern specifically focused in on the results of two statements concerning Character Education.

As indicated in the following two tables, the results of the statement, "students exhibit positive behavior indicative of Character Education," are in Table 1. Out of 230 responses, only 18% of the students strongly agreed or agreed, that students in our school exhibit positive behavior indicative of Character Education. Of the remaining responses, 30% were neutral, 18% disagreed, 16% strongly disagreed, and 18% did not know how they felt about the statement.
Table 1

Students exhibit positive behavior indicative of character education

Table 2

Adequate Character Education Instruction
Table 2, indicates students responses to the statement, “students are provided with adequate instruction in Character Education.” Out of 236 responses, 23% of the students either strongly agreed or agreed that adequate instruction in Character Education is taking place in our high school. Additionally, 25% of the students were neutral, 25% disagreed, 15% strongly disagreed, and 12% did not know whether there was adequate Character Education Instruction taking place at the high school.

The results of our student survey motivated the intern to develop a curriculum that would address our students’ perceived shortfall in Character Education.

The SEL pre- survey which was given the first day of school in September requested students respond as though they were assessing their entire school experience, grades k-10. The survey was administered to the intern's periods 2,4,5 and 8, the experimental population used in this study. The post- survey requested that students assess their current class experience, that is, Ms. Langford's College Preparatory United States History class this year. The results of the survey questions which demonstrated notable change from the presurvey to the post survey data are shown graphically as follows:

Table 3, Pre Survey

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<th>Students who misbehaved were dealt with properly</th>
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<td>Responses</td>
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32
The results of Table 3 demonstrate that out of 103 students surveyed, 39% of the students either strongly agreed or agreed that students who misbehaved were dealt with properly, while 18% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Table 4 demonstrates that out of 90 students surveyed, 66% of the students either strongly agreed or agreed that students who misbehaved were dealt with properly, while only 5% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.
Table 5, Pre Survey

Students respected the property of others

Table 6, Post Survey

Students respected the property of others in this class
Referring to Tables 5 and 6, in the pre survey, students were asked to assess their experiences regarding the respect for the property of others while in school. Out of 104 responses, 16% either strongly agreed or agreed that students' respected the property of others. Sixty percent of students' responded that they disagreed and strongly disagreed that students respected the property of others. In the post survey, students' responded to the question, "in this classroom, students' respected the property of others. After administration of the SEL curriculum, 81% of the students strongly agreed and agreed that students demonstrated respect for property, while only 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The following set of bar charts compare students' responses to the questions, “my teachers treated me with respect,” in the pre survey, and “my teacher treated me with respect,” in the post survey. The student responses indicated that in both the pre and post survey, an equal number of students felt that their teacher respected them, however in the strongly agree category, the pre survey demonstrated 18% responses, and the post survey, 52% responses.

Table 7
Pre Survey
Tables 9 and 10 demonstrate students responses regarding the purposefulness of time spent in the classroom. In the pre survey, 58% of the students either strongly agreed or agreed that classroom time was spent purposefully, while in the post survey, 80% of the students felt that their time was spent purposefully in the classroom.
The Social and Emotional Curriculum

Five of the 10 lessons facilitated generated student results in a quantitative grade point average. The measurement of academic achievement for each of these lessons was calculated by class, then compiled as an average for all four groups. The results of the 5 lessons are as follows:

1. Social Contract 97.9%
2. Democracy Posters 96.0%
3. Political Cartoons 89.7%
4. Election 2001 87.0%
5. Writing a Bill 90.6%
The other five lessons facilitated involved class discussion, cooperative analysis and discussion and oral presentations. In the Post SEL Survey, the question was posed, "Which assignments caused you to do your best work in this course? Explain why in each case." Out of 92 respondents, 70 students preferred projects involving cooperative group learning. The reasons cited varied from explanations of students' working harder for the group, students' appreciating other students' knowledge and input, and simply enjoying learning.

The intern kept a reflective journal throughout the study noting students' cooperation, self control, and participation. The following journal entries were noteworthy:

Sept. 6, 2001. We completed our first lesson on establishing expectations for academic and behavioral performance. The activity went well, all classes with the exception of 8th period worked cooperatively. Several students in 8th, needed to be spoken to for excessive talking. I was assertive with my demands for respect and cooperation.

Sept. 14, 2001. The social contract activity went well. Students worked cooperatively in groups compiling their ideas. One member of the group presented their findings. All students' listened attentively, completed the assignment enthusiastically and clapped at the end of the presentation.

Sept. 19, 2001. My lesson on respect for others required reading an article and students' listing ways to show respect to others and self. All students participated, offering suggestions on how they show respect for self and others, and most wanted an opportunity to read. All students appeared to be interested and listening. Period 8, which seems to be the most difficult to manage is certainly a challenge. Many students appear to demonstrate the need for constant attention. Consequently, they are talkative and at times, disruptive.
Sept. 25, 2001. Students worked cooperatively making posters that represented one of the five basic concepts of democracy. Students in all classes were task oriented with no behavioral problems noted. After it was over, I asked students what they had learned from the activity. Many said that they thought it was fun and learned the content more in depth. I was very proud of several students in my 8th period. One student conducted a survey and facilitated a discussion on majority rule and minority rights. She had an interesting dialogue going with the class. It appeared that the class discussion seemed to bring the students together facilitating tolerance and cooperation. All students were eager to listen and where necessary, respond to each others' ideas and feelings on the issue.

Oct. 9, 2001. Students worked on the political cartoon commentary. Students had many questions getting started and felt it was a difficult assignment. I gave them several examples of political cartoons from both the 18th century and today. Students were given a long weekend to think about the cartoon. Second period came in ready to work and progressed quietly on the project. I believe this is a sophisticated lesson requiring critical thinking, creativity, and deep understanding of the content area.

Oct. 16-19, 2001. Students' answered a questionnaire requesting their opinion on 17 specific beliefs about government. In cooperative groups they attempted to develop agreement on the beliefs and prioritized their opinions. The questions generated much discussion, for example, “in the things that really matter, one person counts for just as much as another.” This was a thought provoking and unifying lesson. The students learned that they shared many of the same values and beliefs regarding a democratic system.

Oct. 25-31, 2001. Students worked well together on the Election 2001 project and no discipline problems were noted. I am pleased with their focus. The assignment is creative and informative allowing them an opportunity to look at the candidates.
running in the state election. The presentations were excellent. Almost every student
gave an oral presentation sharing their particular section. All listened quietly while
their classmates spoke. I was very proud of their work, their behavior and their attitude.
They were cooperative with and respectful of each other. Many students mentioned to
me that they know more about the candidates and the issues than their parents.

**Discussion of Reflective Journal Notations**

Overall, from the beginning to the end of the study, students progressed
cooperatively toward the achievement of the project goals. Each class had a distinct
personality that evolved naturally over the period of the research. Certain
differentiation can perhaps be attributed to the time of day for each class as well as the
individual differences of the students, their relationship to each other, and their interest
in the content.

Period 8 was the most difficult class to manage. My journal notations indicate a
quite diverse population with regard to interests, personality, ethnicity, and motivation.
These students willingly participated in all class discussions. They seemed to not only
have a curiosity for knowledge, but verbally reacted to all dialogue that took place,
often out of context, creating a discipline situation. The class was the last period of the
day, one where students are notoriously restless and tired. Many requested the use of
the pass for the lavatory or nurse. Several students regularly came to class without
their book. My reaction was to give them zeros for being unprepared for class rather
then loan them a book. Overall, however, my journal notations indicated that all
classes were eager to tackle each assignment and discipline concerns were minimal.

**Students' perceived grade earned**

When asked the question (Appendix A, Post Survey), “What grade did you earn for
the work you accomplished and effort you put into this course?” Out of a total of 87
responses, 41% of the students gave themselves an A, 46% of the students gave
themselves a B, 5% of the students gave themselves a C, and 7% of the students did not record any grade. Consequently, 87% of the students gave themselves either an A or a B for the marking period. After averaging all the grades for the first marking period, 87% of the students received an A or a B as their final grade, 8% received C’s, 3% received D’s, and 1% received a failing grade (this student was on home instruction and failed to hand in any work). The students’ perceived grade earned was quite accurate based on the results.

**SEL and Discipline**

With regard to discipline, the following offenses were recorded for all four classes.

A. Lateness to class: 22 total latenesses
B. Reprimands for talking or not following directions: 4 (Noteworthy, whereby students were warned they would receive detention if they continued with the behavior).
C. Students sent out of class for disruptive conduct: 1
D. Number of detentions served: 4

**Suggestions for Change**

On the Post Survey, question number 17 was, “Do you have any comments, pleas, or words of wisdom for your teacher at this point in the course?” The intern recorded the following suggestions and the number of responses elicited for each.

1. Vary the method of cooperative group selection. Total responses: 5
2. Demonstrate patience and understanding of students’ developmental needs. Total responses: 1
3. Longer time frame needed to complete projects. Total responses: 1
4. More extensive explanations: Total responses: 2
5. More videos. Total responses: 2
6. More group work. Total responses: 4
7. Less group work. Total responses: 3
8. Eliminate worksheets. Total responses: 1
9. Provide study sheets before a test. Total responses: 1
10. Avoid text whenever possible. Total responses: 1
11. Less or no projects. Total responses: 2
12. Less note taking from board. Total responses: 1
13. Go on field trips. Total responses: 1
14. Try to peak interest of students who are uninterested in the subject. Total responses: 1.
15. Present material in a more relaxed/laid back fashion. Total responses: 1
16. Bring more students into class discussion. Total responses: 1

All other comments related to question number 17 were very positive with regard to the teacher and the class experience thus far. Notable statements include the following:

“I enjoy the class.” “You are doing a good job.” “I think Ms. Langford is a wonderful teacher. She teaches you well, and treats every student the same and with respect.”

“Ms. Langford, keep up the awesome work. You really are a fair teacher, and look for what’s best for you students, thanks.” “You are a well organized teacher which is good.” “I feel you are a great teacher, that you give us challenging and different assignments and I feel like I learn alot from being in your class.” “This class is very interactive and keeps us alert to what is going on.” “I like how you treat us as adults. You appreciate our opinions and let us have them. I also like how you take time for small debates over current issues and such.” These statements indicated an overall positive response to the learning experience.
Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

If our goal as educators is for students to be responsible, caring, and intelligent individuals, then knowledge, skills, values and attitudes must work together and be nurtured within a supportive classroom environment. Carl Rogers (1980) suggests that learning takes place by the whole person, including three separate domains: cognitive, feeling and experiential. Cognitive learning is the intellect working at top speed while the feeling component is learning with passion, excitement and curiosity. The experiential component of the learner includes caution, self-discipline, self-control, and the thrill of discovery. Students' construction of personal meaning and purpose are key to identity formation. The development of identity evolves from decision making, problem solving, listening, self expression and assertiveness.

Facilitating the SEL curriculum in this study called upon the intern to model those behaviors, attitudes and values expected of the students. The intern created a nurturing, risk free environment, while communicating high expectations for academic achievement. Teaching practices respected each student as a responsible and active learner. The learning activities called on a variety of intelligences which cultivated the strengths of the learners. The intern demonstrated fairness in grading, positive feedback both written and verbal, encouraging students at all times to take control of their own learning.

The cooperative projects fostered trust as well as recognition of and sensitivity to other’s perspectives. They encouraged sharing, waiting, and giving and receiving criticism. The group work offered individuals opportunities to exercise leadership. The majority of the students expressed their preference for group work in the post survey.
Group participation skills were noted by observation and journal notation and fostered a meaningful classroom community in all class sections of the study.

As reflected in the pre survey and post survey tabular data presented in Chapter 4, the following conclusions are noted. After administering the SEL curriculum to the experimental population, students' responses to the statement, "students who misbehaved were dealt with properly," demonstrated a 27% increase in the agree and strongly agree categories combined. The data demonstrated a 34% decrease in the disagree and strongly disagree categories combined. It can be concluded that students' perceived that discipline was handled more consistently and perhaps better in this class than had been previously experienced in their k-9 education.

Substantial perceived improvement was recorded for the statement, "students respected the property of others." The data demonstrated that after the curriculum, there was a 65% increase in the agree and strongly agree categories. Students' demonstrated that they trusted others to respect their property in this class environment.

When asked to respond to the statement, "my teacher treated me with respect," students' responses demonstrated a 34% increase from the pre to the post survey in the strongly agree category. Conclusively, students' perceived greater respect from their teacher in this classroom than in their previous class experiences.

Lastly, with regards to the surveys, students' perception of the statement, "my classroom time was spent purposefully," the data demonstrated a 22% increase after the SEL curriculum in the agree and strongly agree categories combined. Students perceptions that meaningful tasks were being performed is evidenced by the data.

In interpreting the data, it would appear that students' perceptions of being treated respectfully as well as respecting other's property, improved over the course of the study. Additionally, students' perception of teacher discipline showed improvement as
well as their perception of their time being spent in a purposeful manner.

With regards to classroom management, only four noteworthy reprimands took place from September to December. Students' were consistently on task, prepared to work in class and generally eager to contribute to discussions. The atmosphere in the classroom became cooperative and respectful. Students willingly listened to one another and were nonjudgmental. I believe that my behavior influenced the students. I modeled respect at all times and encouraged open discussion surrounding content objectives. Our classroom was non-threatening. For example, one student commented in her post survey that she felt “comfy” giving oral presentations. Together we created a safe, predictable environment with high expectations for academic achievement.

The SEL curriculum facilitated academic achievement. Both actual grade point averages and perceived grade point averages were in the 80-90% range, or an A or B on the student's report card. This correlation demonstrates students' control over their own learning and knowledge of their progress. Before having received their report card, students knew what to expect based on their perceived effort in completing the assigned tasks. The 87% average demonstrates varied methodology, sensitivity to individual learning styles, positive feedback and fairness in grading. Clearly, the effects of an SEL curriculum on academic performance was positive.

Future research in this area could incorporate the application of an SEL curriculum across content areas. My suggestions, based on the results to questions concerning Character Education in the CES Teacher and Student Surveys (The Student Survey motivated the intern to complete this action research), would be to create a Whole School Reform Initiative within the school district to implement an SEL curriculum. An SEL Curriculum Committee drawing members from our currently existing Character Education Committee, Discipline Committee, ACI Curriculum Committee, the CES
Task Force, and the FES Task Force would articulate an interdisciplinary curriculum that integrates SEL into the content and meets the state mandated Core Curriculum Content Standards. Teachers would be provided with an inservice facilitated by members of the SEL Committee. The inservice would provide a forum for cooperative networking across disciplines in methodology, teaching practices as well as survey materials to be used by staff in conducting their own action research and assessment. Data would be collected by teachers using several classroom samples after administering an SEL curriculum. The data would be analyzed to determine the significance of the curriculum on academic achievement, student behavior in the classroom, and social and emotional skills. Later, test scores on the state mandated tests, ESPA, GEPA, and HSPA could be analyzed to determine if students’ test scores are effected by the curriculum.

Donna Kortvelesy, our Character Education Professional Development Coordinator would be consulted and invited to participate in our teacher inservice. Teachers’ suggestions and feedback would be reviewed and tabulated by means of a survey which would be created for the purposes of reporting out to the entire staff at the faculty meeting. Modifications in goals, objectives, assessment tools, and SEL methodology would be completed based on teacher feedback. The curriculum could be personalized to the receiving population of students with teacher style and creativity encouraged in the administration of the curriculum.

My vision for this project is to reach out to all educators such that their students can experience the benefits of Social and Emotional Learning. In cultivating motivation, commitment, and high levels of interest, we can foster life long learning only if students enjoy what they are doing and see the relevance of our instruction to their current lives and to their future.
References


Kikuchi, J. (Fall 1988). “Rhode Island Develops Successful Intervention Program for Adolescents.” National Coalition Against Sexual Assault Newsletter.


Appendix

Research Instruments and
Unit Curriculum
### Student Survey of Social and Emotional Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>SA</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Students received satisfactory recognition for socially responsible behavior (e.g. telling the truth, keeping notebooks and lockers clean, cooperating well with others).</td>
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<td>2. The school has done a good job of helping students understand their moral and ethical responsibilities.</td>
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<td>3. The school expected students to behave in an acceptable manner.</td>
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<td>4. Students who misbehaved were dealt with properly in the classroom</td>
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<td>5. If I had a problem, there were people available for me to talk to.</td>
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<td>6. Students knew what was expected of them in school.</td>
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<td>7. Teachers liked children and were fair when dealing with them.</td>
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<td>8. I received satisfactory recognition for academic accomplishments.</td>
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<td>9. I received satisfactory recognition for extracurricular accomplishments.</td>
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10. Our school has demonstrated high expectations for academic achievement.

SA..........................A...........U................... DA..........................SD

11. Students' respected the property of others.

SA..........................A...........U................... DA..........................SD

12. Appropriate emphasis was placed on the social development of students.

SA..........................A...........U................... DA..........................SD

13. The values being taught in the school were satisfactory.

SA..........................A...........U................... DA..........................SD

14. The students should spend more time on homework and home study per night.

SA..........................A...........U................... DA..........................SD

15. The school maintained a satisfactory appearance.

SA..........................A...........U................... DA..........................SD

16. My teachers treated me with respect.

SA..........................A...........U................... DA..........................SD

17. The individual encouragement received by my teachers helped me to learn and develop.

SA..........................A...........U................... DA..........................SD

18. The student activities that I participated in such as clubs, sports, music, etc. were a benefit to my social development.

SA..........................A...........U................... DA..........................SD

19. My classroom time was spent purposefully with serious attention given to the academic program.

SA..........................A...........U................... DA..........................SD

53
20. I was taught important life lessons in my classes.

SA..........................A..................U............... DA..........................SD

21. Overall, my education has been a positive experience thus far.

SA..........................A..................U............... DA..........................SD
Student Survey of Social and Emotional Learning
“post action”

SA=Strongly Agree
A=Agree
U=Undecided
DA=Disagree
SD=Strongly Disagree

1. Students received satisfactory recognition for socially responsible behavior.

   SA.................. A........... U................. DA........................ SD

2. The teacher expected students to behave in an acceptable manner.

   SA.................. A........... U................. DA........................ SD

3. Students who misbehaved were dealt with properly in the classroom

   SA.................. A........... U................. DA........................ SD

4. Students knew what was expected of them in class.

   SA.................. A........... U................. DA........................ SD

5. The teacher liked children and was fair when dealing with them.

   SA.................. A........... U................. DA........................ SD

6. I received satisfactory recognition for academic accomplishments.

   SA.................. A........... U................. DA........................ SD

7. My teacher has demonstrated high expectations for academic achievement.

   SA.................. A........... U................. DA........................ SD
8. In this classroom, students' respected the property of others.

SA..........................A............U............. DA..........................SD

9. The values being taught in the class were satisfactory.

SA..........................A............U............. DA..........................SD

10. My teacher treated me with respect.

SA..........................A............U............. DA..........................SD

11. The individual encouragement received by my teacher helped me to learn and develop.

SA..........................A............U............. DA..........................SD

12. My classroom time was spent purposefully with serious attention given to the academic program.

SA..........................A............U............. DA..........................SD

13. I was taught important life lessons in my class.

SA..........................A............U............. DA..........................SD

14. Overall, my class experience has been a positive experience thus far.

SA..........................A............U............. DA..........................SD

Please complete the following short answer questions.

15. Which assignments caused you to do your best work in this course? Explain why in each case.
16. What grade did you earn for the work you accomplished and effort you put into this course? Justify your choice.

17. Do you have any comments, pleas, or words of wisdom for your teacher at this point in the course?
Ten Lesson Curriculum

1. Students will individually list both academic and behavioral expectations for their classroom. In cooperative groups, consensus will be reached regarding 5 top priority expectations. The result is a list of academic and behavioral rules for each class.

2. Students will develop a social contract. Working in cooperative groups, students will identify citizens responsibilities, and that which the government should provide. They will construct a preamble, or over-arching theme for their social contract. After they are done compiling their ideas, one member of the group will present their work.

3. Students will complete a lesson on Respect for Others. They will list ways to show respect for others and self in school, at home, and in their community.

4. Students will make posters that represent one of the five basic concepts of democracy; the fundamental worth of the individual, equality of all persons, majority rule/minority rights, the necessity of compromise, and individual freedom. They will use construction paper, colored pencils, newspaper and magazine clippings, and their own creative art work to illustrate one of the five concepts. Each cooperative group will present their poster to the class.

5. Students will read and discuss an article from the Sunday, September 30, 2001 Press of Atlantic City, "Putting Names on the Dead, DNA technology gets test in rubble of Trade Center." The article discussed the responsibilities of the federal Disaster Mortuary Operations Response Team in scrutinizing the remains of the 5,641 people lost in the collapsed twin towers of the World Trade Center. The article explained that this will be the largest, most traumatic DNA identification project in history. The students read the article out loud as a class. We discussed the importance of it, the meaning of it, and how it effects them.
6. Students will complete a political cartoon commentary. Each will draw a political cartoon that illustrates the concept of a constitution. In conjunction with the cartoon, they will state the following:
   
   - Key background information.
   - Four questions that direct the reader to comment on aspects of the cartoon.
   - The theme of the cartoon.
   - Ask a question that directs the reader to discuss the theme.
   - Provide answers to all the questions.

7. Students will be given a questionnaire stating their opinion regarding 17 specific government beliefs. In groups of 4-5, they will develop consensus regarding their opinions, prioritize their opinions and present them. The students will learn that they share many of the same values and beliefs regarding a democratic system.

8. Students will work in groups on an Election 2001 project. The project will include 6 component parts: identification of candidates, researching their background and experience, finding political cartoons, excerpts from speeches, and campaign literature. Using a rubric, their projects will be graded based on organization, content accuracy, research, creativity, and presentation mechanics. We will spend a period in the library researching, using magazines, articles and the internet.

9. Students will select a class leader by participating in a mock nominating convention. They will poll the student body about issues of concern, analyze poll results, draw up a party platform, nominate a candidate who will give a speech to the class, and vote for one of several nominees.

10. Students will write a bill which demonstrates clarity, feasibility, and controversy. The bill will include a mandate, enforcement, penalty, and funding. Students will present their bills to the class. A majority vote will be taken after students have had an opportunity to participate in limited debate of the bill.
Biographical Data

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Undergraduate
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