

The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in the Primary Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This project aims to analyse how SEL affects students' emotional life and academic performance. The contribution of this work is presented as follows: 1) the whole process system construction of SEL in primary school classroom teaching; 2) practical significance of SEL in primary school classroom teaching; 3) the practical effect of SEL in primary school classroom on students' academic improvement.

Keywords: Social and Emotional Learning, emotional integration, intelligence quotient (IQ) and educational quotient (EQ), academic performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social and emotional learning has been widely adopted in the field of early child education. Limited open literature to date has reported in how SEL effected students' participation, academic performances and emotional intelligence. This project aims to analyse the influence of SEL on students' emotional life and academic performances. In the society where grades are the priority, it is a waste of time to spend time on social and emotional learning programs, that seem unrelated to grades. In fact, the early exposure to the Internet content would be a shock to student' mental health. Some students' parents are away for long periods of time, and the lack of family communication may also exacerbate their children's psychological problems. Therefore, the emotional problem is also an important part in children' education. This article explains the impact of SEL on mental health and academic performance, aiming to draw the attention to schools and teachers, and encourage them to apply SEL in their daily teaching process.

2. THE WHOLE PROCESS SYSTEM CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL EMOTION EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM TEACHING

Social Emotional Learning contains five components, including Self-awareness, Social-awareness, Responsible decision making, Self-management and Relationship-management. In order to cultivate these different elements, the Social and Emotional Education in primary school classroom teaching can be divided into some steps. The first one is morning greeting, then the class interaction and the last step is after-class emotional care. This process forms a complete Social and Emotional Learning teaching system, which is able to effectively train for students' physical and psychological comprehensively, and improve students' ability in many aspects, especially academic performance and class performance. Teachers in primary school would play a role who imparts rudimentary knowledge to beginners. Therefore, the teacher's teaching method is particularly important for students at this stage. At present, most public schools in China do not apply social and emotional learning. They still follow spoon-feeding teaching and rely on indoctrinating thoughts to educate students. They pursue too much on academic performance and skills, hence neglecting students' physical and mental health. Also,

the school did not cooperate well with their parents, which added too heavy learning pressure and burden to students, even when the students are still in the primary school. At the same time, some teachers are not doing their duty to care for students, which is also a major factor leading to some students' socially harmful behavior and aggressive behavior. From a realistic point of view, in terms of the current situation of education in China, it is difficult to make a big change due to the large number of students. However, if SEL is utilized in the class, this current situation will be improved. The first step morning greeting can help teachers know students' emotions timely and cultivate students' independent emotional awareness. The second step class interaction is a way that integrate students into the classroom and develop their autonomous learning ability. The last step after-class emotional care is a pattern to add the communication between teachers and students, help students control their emotions and manage themselves. These three steps are combined together and form a closed-loop teaching mode of SEL, which fully show unforeseeing integrity, coherence and infinity of SEL.

2.1. The Role of Emotional Cultivation at The Beginning of Teaching Activities

According to a real teaching video recorded by SanBdoCitySchools, the teacher greets the students at the door before they enter the class, and she let each student choose the forms of greeting that they want according to their own ideas [1]. Greetings can shorten the distance between teachers and students and enhance students' emotion of learning [2]. This ingenious greeting mode in the video is very suitable for our research group because of their young age, which makes them feel the care of the teacher before entering the class and firmly captures their hearts. Meanwhile, students who feels the geniality from the teacher would rely on the teacher more and integrate into the teacher's class. In the morning meeting, the teacher in the video did a feeling check to know about students' feeling for the day, which helps her prevent students from being distracted by their emotions, and make sure they are ready for the class. In fact, Social and Emotional Learning is accompanied throughout a student's life, so it is important to reinforce student learning on this aspect. At the same time, the teacher let the students know their feelings are natural and teach them how to handle these feelings properly, which helps students learn more about the self-management part in the SEL. Also, greetings can arouse students' awareness of participation and facilitate teachers to timely regulate teaching [2]. If a student does not have the awareness of independent participation in the class throughout, it is hardly possible for the teacher to motivate them. Therefore, cultivating students' consciousness of

independent participation is an necessary skill for teachers and an essential segment in the SEL. Under the accurate guidance of the teacher, students would be more willing to share their feelings and ideas with others in class.

2.2. Practical Significance of Emotional Integration in the Teaching Process of Primary School Classroom Teaching

Teaching is the key part in the whole Social Emotional Education system. Teachers' emotional integration will affect and drive students. Class with SEL and without SEL has a large difference.

2.2.1. The Current Situation of Some Social and Emotional Learning Classes that are not Applied in China

The classroom atmosphere is inactive, the participation in the class is not high, and the number of students answering questions is small. Students sometimes avoid the expression in teacher's eyes. Teachers can only give lectures alone without any response. Teachers gradually lose their passion in class and can only talk about knowledge blindly, which cannot let students accept knowledge. As a result, students are often distracted in class and can't always focus on the teacher or what they said. Therefore, it is difficult to improve students' class participation and academic achievement.

2.2.2. The Class When Social and Emotional Learning is Applied

The teacher is emotionally integrated, the classroom atmosphere is very active, and the students actively answer the teacher's questions. In addition, they listen to other classmates' answers and respect their ideas. In this case, teachers can integrate emotion into class better, so as to make the class more efficiently, and students' classroom participation and academic performance would be considerably improved under this situation.

2.3. Closed Loop Whole Process Emotional Teaching System of Care After Class in Primary School Classroom Teaching

Teacher's after-class caring is an indispensable part in Social and Emotional Learning education system. After-school care promotes understanding and trust between teachers and students. If a teacher wants to gain the trust of students, what he should do firstly is to give students sufficient respect and trust, cultivate enough patience to communicate with students, understand their learning situation, and make reasonable plans to help students further enhance their ability according to the

different status quo of different students. Furthermore, enough after-class concern and love can make teachers timely notice students' emotions, and make corresponding measures in time once students' emotions are found to fluctuate. Moreover, keeping communication with parents all the time, which is able to ensure the harmony of students' family relations, so as to prevent students' emotion from being subjected to excessive family burden or family contradictions. Schools, teachers and parents work together to give children a better growth environment and help adjust students' mood in time. This would also help cultivate their ability of autonomous emotion regulation. In the theoretical framework of Social Emotional Learning, the ability of emotion regulation is in an irreplaceable position, it plays an important role in students' internal and external comprehensive and coordinated development [3]. Self-regulating emotion can make students keep a good emotional state all the time, it not only guarantees students' mental health, but also contributes to their attention and learning in class. Thus it can be seen that teacher's concern and love after class plays a vital role in improving students' physical and psychological health and class performance.

3. PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM TEACHING

In the traditional teaching method, teachers focused on the subject material itself, rather than students' emotional experiences and learning environment. Learning for the subject is the teaching purpose of the majority of Chinese public primary schools. Nevertheless, students should not study merely for the sake of passing exams. Learning for learning's sake is an outdated concept. Until now, Social-Emotional education provides a new perspective for the teacher of their teaching. Implementing social-emotional learning techniques into a classroom may at first seem overwhelming to teachers, who are already used to not having enough time in the day to get through the material. Though it may take a few extra minutes throughout the class in the beginning, the benefits of instilling these behaviors in students early on more than makeup for the hard work at the beginning. According to Schonert-Reichl, research in the field of SEL has grown dramatically these years [5]. In the SEL environment, the teacher focused on students' emotional life, even though it is just mild mood swings. Teachers respect and care for students, have a sense of trust/expectation of students to do a good sense of responsibility and emotional words and deeds, triggering the emotional experience of students. In this mode of teaching, teachers pay more attention to students' emotional experience than to subject knowledge. Thus the practical significance of social-

emotional education in primary school classroom teaching can: 1. Promote the synchronous development of students' IQ and EQ. 2. Realize the development of students' sound personalities. 3. Establish students' correct and stable thinking mode of personal development.

3.1. Promote the Synchronous Development of Students' IQ and EQ

Human psychology occurs and develops in the interaction between the subject and the surrounding environment. Teachers are the direct creation of the teaching surrounding environment, students in the process of interaction with teachers and classmates will produce different emotions. Students in SEL's learning environment produce more positive attitudes than in traditional classrooms, which can help students develop intelligence quotient (IQ) and educational quotient (EQ). Teachers use different categories of scaffolding such as interactive and graphic in their teaching. They use sense organ to help understanding complex theories or concepts. For instance, manipulating objects in a science lab. Students also learning subject by collaborating with others and teacher ask them to use language to explain ideas. Moreover, using charts, tables to visualize the data and number like using world map in geography class is another category of scaffolding. In this SEL teaching method, students learned how to cooperate with classmates and teachers from the group teamwork and class meeting. Every student feels his/her opinion is respected. From the intelligence quotient (IQ) point of view: high participation in the classroom, will let the child's self-confidence to a certain extent, which will make students more willing to learn. When the motivation to learn increases, students' ability to learn independently will also be strengthened. To sum up, the roles of EQ and IQ are mutual.

3.2. realize the development of students' sound personality

In early childhood, child development is particularly important. They are influenced by the outside world to develop their personality. In school, the teacher's respect and love for the students, the trust of the students expect a sense of responsibility will affect the personal development of students. Using encouraging words can close the distance between teachers and students. In the form of teaching through the use of student cooperation, group learning way to discuss, exchange and cooperative learning form to cultivate a spirit of cooperation. SEL can help children build a positive personality. As Elias points out, "SEL theory shows that group interventions afford important opportunities for building skills necessary for effective social interaction and relationships; multimodal interventions provide a greater likelihood of positive results, which

mobilize greater confidence and hope” [6]. In the Social Emotional Learning classroom, Students can build self-cognition ability. Through the SEL course, students can learn how to recognize their inner feelings and cognitive emotions, and how to deal with strong emotions and impulses. It helps students calm down, think again, and act in their emotions, thinking twice. Students will learn to recognize other people's feelings and perspectives, to think differently, and to build empathy and understanding of others. This will be vital in life and in life.

3.3. Establish Students' Correct and Stable Thinking Mode of Personal Development

Children between the age of 3 and 12 are in the most curious and understanding of gender, birth, and social role. Moreover, students are the first stage of initial exploration and understanding of emotions. Therefore, teachers need to understand in depth and correctly understand the meaning of children's emotional education. The psychology of students may change from a center of family attention in infancy to a large school group. In SEL teaching, teachers guide students to establish correct and stable thinking mode of personal development. Many SEL courses take a preventive-oriented approach, teaching students skills to regulate their emotions and interact appropriately with others. By accurately expressing and distinguishing between "want" and "need", students learn to solve problems peacefully. SEL teaching form independent and healthy personality and perfect personality characteristics. Develop the ability of emotional self-regulation and respect. It promotes peer-to-peer communication. Life gets better when children learn to make responsible decisions about themselves and the future.

4. THE PRACTICAL EFFECT OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT

Whatever age the students are in, they are affected by their social and emotional environment surrounding them. They acquire new knowledge at school through the collaboration with teachers and peers [7]. According to Blair (2002), poor emotion regulation interferes some of the requirements of learning, especially these related to cognition, like remembering new concepts, planning and completing the homework [8]. These behaviors demand the ability to concentrate, memorize and plan, which are easily affected by their emotions. Social and emotional problems may have long term effect on students' development. According to Blum and Libbey (2004), many students have difficulties in dealing with social and emotional problems since their primary school, and the situation exaggerate when get older [9].

This leads to the disconnection between them and their schools, which significantly influence their academic performance. In the research conducted by Durlak et al. (2011), SEL program has significant positive effects on social-emotional competences, students' prosocial behaviors and their academic performance. Durlak et al. (2011) use multiple test grades to examine the result, including standardized reading or math scores from Stanford Achievement Test or Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and school grades. On average, students have an 11% increase in their achievements [7]. This section explains how the academic performance is promoted through SEL program. It argues that the SEL is helpful for the harmonious teacher-student relationship, and it contributes to the students' internal drive to the study and their emotion-regulation ability. All the 3 aspects have benefit effects on students' academic performance.

4.1. Positive Power of Harmonious Teacher-student Relationship on Students' Studies

The teacher-student relationship is a two-way process. On the one hand, teachers' attitude could influence the initiative of the students; on the other hand, students' adaptation to the school environment and their deficit in emotion regulation may also depress their teachers, which eventually affects the teacher-student relationship [10]. Therefore, the friendly relationship between teacher and students are of vital importance to the classroom. Since teachers must face to all the students, the attitudes of the former have a greater impact on the whole class. Teachers' personal characteristics, like their emotions, are the foundation of their attitudes toward students and their ability in creating a harmonious class atmosphere [11]. Therefore, the training to the teacher before they give SEL programs to the students set the premise to their emotions and attitudes to the students in the campus. They could not be easily controlled by their emotions, which ensures the environment that the students are in. The teachers' non-negative emotion helps to create a harmonious teacher-student environment. With the assistance of better learning environment, teachers could show their capability in SEL and teach students how to manage their emotions and deal with emotional problems. This is Gunter et al.'s argument that SEL in the classroom is based on the secure teacher-student relationship [12]. Students' attitude to learning sometimes reflect their attitude to the teacher. Only when students feel happy and respected in the class, can they fully engage in the learning process and have a promotion in academic performance.

4.2. The Empowering Force of Students' Engagement in the School on Their Studies.

Students' engagement to the class could directly influence the academic performance, because without

focusing on the class, students can hardly understand what teachers say and apply it to their homework and tests. Not only the academic performances, students who suffer from disengagement seriously could also drop out of the school [13]. Students' engagement could be generally classified into two categories, behavioral engagement and emotional engagement. Behavioral engagement includes a range of behaviors at schools, like the participation in the learning process, students' active response to the school rules and their participation to the nonacademic activities [13]. This is why besides normal class, with less academic pressure, some primary schools organize school sports meet and spring/autumn outing to create an environment that is relax for students to make friends and strengthen their friendship. In fact, the behavioral engagement and the emotional engagement have interactions with each other. If students spend more time at school, they have more chance to build up friendship with classmates, thus to feel a sense of emotional engagement. At the same time, the poor emotional engagement could also depress people from attending group activities. In a survey researching students who dropped out of school, the primary reason for dropping out is the emotional disengagement with the school [14]. Another study of around 200 Mexican high school students who studied in USA found that the sense of belonging at school is highly associated with their GPA [15]. Both emotional engagement and behavioral engagement at school have influence on students' academic performance, especially the emotional engagement which could affect students' behavior at school.

4.3. Good Emotional Self-control Has a Great Impact on the Improvement of Students' Academic Self-discipline

Emotion regulation is an important part of SEL program, because the improvement in managing their emotions will eventually increase their internal drive in learning. Self-regulation includes 2 parts: (1) the ability to identify emotions, monitor, modify and handle them, which helps students to figure out problems, (2) expressing emotions in an appropriate way [16]. The two parts help students to make friends at school and build up friendship with classmates, which is part of their school life and of vital importance to their academic achievements. On the one hand, their ability in identifying and handling emotions is useful in the communication with others, because they can change their attitude towards people who have emotional changes and choose the best way to deal with it. When students have emotional problems, these abilities could also help them to control their mood and keep their own steps. For example, students with high goals can motivate themselves and manage their stress when facing obstacles. In this case, their success rate increased significantly [18]. On the other hand, the

capability in expressing emotions properly is beneficial for them to have friendly conversation with their peers, because the it is hard for people to understand the irrational and emotional conversation. The friendly conversations set the base of their friendship, where they could receive academic support from friends who are good at study, and receive comfort when they have emotional problems, which guarantees the harmonious learning environment.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has dressed three questions, including how SEL works in the primary school classroom teaching and how it affects students' personal development. According to our data, we found that closed-loop SEL teaching starts from multiple aspects to educate and cultivate students' emotional regulation ability, so as to achieve the purpose of improving students' academic level and performance. Also, teacher used feeling sharing to build students' self-cognition ability. It promotes the understanding between the teacher and the students. It also helps students learn more about the self-management and make students more willing to share their feelings. This shows that the SEL promote the synchronous development of students' IQ and EQ, personality and established students' correct and stable thinking mode. Moreover, many data show the effectiveness of SEL at school. To be specific, the teacher-student relationship influences both students' attitude in learning and teachers' teaching efficiency. Therefore, teacher-student relationship plays an important role in promoting students' academic performances. Students' engagement at school also affect their learning efficiency because students may refuse to go to school and have class if they feel disengaged at school. Moreover, emotional self-control contributes when students have emotional troubles in achieving their goals. They know how to manage their emotions so to calm themselves down when have difficulties and spend more energy in solving problems.

Children in different ages have different cognitive abilities. It is more difficult for that age area's children to control basic instincts. However, our research scope is all on children 8-14. To better understand the implications of these result, we suggest the future researchers that they can investigate more children of different ages such as kindergarten, primary school and high school, and may lead to undeveloped area of the research.

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