

FOSTERING CHILDREN'S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING THROUGH  
TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS AND PEER-BASED PARTNERSHIPS

by

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A GRADUATING PAPER IN THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

In

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Early Childhood Education)

We accept this graduating paper as conforming  
to the required standard

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

[April, 2016]

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## **Abstract**

In this project, I highlight the influential nature of social and emotional learning (SEL) and its role in supporting positive cognitive, social and emotional development in young children. I present the rationale and purpose for my exploration and the guiding questions I have posed, 1) what is the rationale that supports providing opportunities for SEL in early childhood education? 2) More specifically, what are ways educators can use SEL to support children who exhibit behaviours deemed less desirable on a regular basis? And 3) in what ways can prosocial skills (including self-management) be modeled using more-knowledgeable peers in the preschool to early Primary classrooms? I conduct a literature review that illustrates how SEL is influential in shaping young children's academic achievements and social relationships. Through the literature review, I elaborate on the positive influence SEL practices and programs have on the classroom atmosphere, specifically the teacher-student relationships, classroom management, and peer connections. I connect the examined research with strategies I have used in my practice, and more specifically how to support behaviours that are non-desirable and use peer mentoring, in order to promote social-emotional skills in the diverse preschool-early primary settings. I introduce the website I have created to support educators and parents in promoting social and emotional development. In conclusion, I confirm through the literature reviewed in this project the importance of early SEL in the home to support school readiness and for SEL practices and programs to be incorporated into ECE settings for preventative and intervention purposes. Finally, I outline some limitations and present my recommendations for future research and practice.

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## **Acknowledgments**

The completion of this capstone could not have been possible without the support and inspiration of many special individuals in my life. Mari, I thank you for your endless patience and true passion for the field of early childhood education. I felt your support in every step of the way.

I would not have completed this journey had it not been for my dedicated family and husband. I appreciate all the many ways you supported my success. I cannot thank you enough for the quiet hours of peace you provided me. I look forward to more quality time together as Weston continues to learn and grow.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

This capstone explores the role of social-emotional learning (SEL) and its influence on young children. *Social-emotional learning* (SEL) is the developmental process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills (or social and emotional skills, SES) necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2014). I investigate the ways in which educators can promote social and emotional skills in diverse preschool-early primary settings. In Chapter One, I share my personal background and introduce key terms, theories, and frameworks that guide the investigation of this topic.

### **Context and Personal Background**

My educational background is deeply rooted in my fascination of young children and their membership in the complex social world. My role as an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) has allowed me countless opportunities to observe, discuss and plan experiences for young children. Over the past six years, I have worked with young children as a Kindergarten and Grade One teacher in the same school district located in Western Canada, situated in a small urban community. I have also taught Ready, Set, Learn (Government of British Columbia (BC), 2015), a provincial program for preschool children that builds positive connections between families and the schools prior to children's entrance into Kindergarten. As the program instructor, I provided families with play-based activities and developmental information to support an active role in their child's early learning and development. Across these ECE roles, I have observed how SEL skills are directly influential in shaping student's behaviour and interactions within the classroom environment. I have sought to find the balance between the

over-arching academic pressure set out by British Columbia's Ministry of Education and my desire to foster social and emotional competencies through child-driven, play-based curriculum. I am concerned that several teaching frameworks and Primary teaching practices do not address the influential role that social-emotional skills can have on school readiness, social relationships and academic achievement (Government of BC, 2015). However, I do believe that a few provincial documents are beginning to acknowledge the value of SEL in early development. Curriculum frameworks, such as the BC Full-Day Kindergarten Guide (BC Ministry of Education, 2010) and the BC Primary Program: Framework (BC Ministry of Education, 2000) introduce practical ways educator's can incorporate SEL through instruction, daily routines and collaborative learning.

Early in my preservice teacher's training, I began to see the value and influence SEL had within the classroom. However, it was my unique experiences at an inner city school the past two years that became the inspiration for this capstone. The school is located in Western Canada, situated in a small urban community with a predominantly low income demographic. The children within this neighbourhood have been identified as more vulnerable than the provincial vulnerability average (Human Early Learning Partnership, 2016). Programs and resources are available for the children and families within the community. The school runs a breakfast and lunch program through the support of volunteers and donations to ensure that these children are fed. Other examples of community support include the clothing supply room, the *Boys and Girls Club* and free bread donations. While teaching in this community, I have witnessed behaviours including ignoring other's personal space, calling out during instructional periods, difficulty listening and speaking thoughtfully to peers. These behaviours demonstrate some difficulty in one or more of the competencies: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness,

responsible decision-making, and/or relationship skills (CASEL, 2014). In connecting with the vulnerability of this neighbourhood and the social and emotional difficulties I have observed in these children, I sought to understand how I could best address the needs of this community. More specifically, I became interested in the short-term and long-term benefits of SEL. This in turn, drove my inquiry into the research on SEL and its role in early childhood development. I seek to understand the role educators and peers play in the development of social-emotional competence. I begin by defining the key terms that are relevant within this capstone.

### **Key Terms**

The definitions I describe here strengthen the organization of this capstone. I have separated the terms into two categories, “Social Emotional Development,” and “Educational Characteristics.”

#### **Social and Emotional Development**

The interconnected competencies of SEL (CASEL, 2014) include self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making and relationship skills (see Appendix A). *Social and emotional skills* (SES) are the cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills that develop out of practice and experience with the competencies of SEL (CASEL, 2014). SES, the product of SEL, involves a clearer understanding of the self and others in the social context. The literature on SEL includes some terms that may overlap in meaning with the term SES used throughout this project.

The term *prosocial skills* refers to the specific skills that promote healthy relationships in children and adults. These include positive self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills (CASEL, 2014). Prosocial skills can help individuals navigate challenging social conflicts, communicate effectively and consider the unique viewpoints of others (Yoder, 2014).

*Emotional literacy* is defined as a child's ability to identify the emotions of self and others and the appropriate actions they take on these feelings (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003). The social-emotional competencies involved within emotional literacy hold power in determining how well children interact with others and manage their own thoughts and feelings (Fox et al., 2003).

*Social responsibility*, a curricular unit developed by the BC Ministry of Education in 2001, includes four components that support social growth and expectations of educators and families: 1) contributing to the learning community, 2) problem solving in a peaceful manner, 3) honouring diversity and rights, and 4) exercising rights and responsibility (BC Ministry of Education, 2015c).

### **Educational Characteristics**

In this project the term, *at-risk* refers to the children who already exhibit difficulties with SEL with the classroom. They may be considered vulnerable students and demonstrate warning signs for depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and self-destructive behaviours (BC Ministry of Education, 2015b).

The terms *desired behaviour* and *less desirable behaviour* are used in this project to describe the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviour educators see as acceptable and those deemed not acceptable in the learning environment. For example, desired behaviour may include a number of prosocial skills including treating adults, peers, and school property respectfully, being responsible in individual and group tasks, and demonstrating kindness to others. The less desirable behaviours are characterized by difficulty in all or some areas of the social emotional competencies (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012). For example, name-calling, arguing during playtime, touching other classmate's property, not respecting other's personal

boundaries, and calling out at instructional periods. These behaviour examples are considered undesirable in the classroom because educators have observed how disruptive they may be, and the negative impact they have on the individual, their peers, the classroom community and the overall learning environment.

*Diverse* classroom refers to the variety of learning styles and needs that exist within the preschool-early primary settings. The manner in which children differ from one another may be visible (e.g. race, and learning ability) or less visible (e.g., language, socio-economic background, gender, and sexual orientation) (BC Ministry of Education, 2008).

*School readiness skills* consist of a child's ability to practice self-care, emotional and behaviour regulation, ability to communicate needs and feelings, motivation to learn, motor skills and cognitive knowledge as they transition into preschool and the early Primary Grades (Ritblatt, Longstreth, Hokoda, Cannon, & Weston, 2013).

### **Overview of the Theoretical Background**

My capstone is informed by the theoretical frameworks of theorists: Lev Vygotsky, and Albert Bandura. Specifically, it is the social constructivist theory by Vygotsky (1978), and the social learning theory by Bandura (1989) that have guided my research. The topic of SEL will be examined through the lens of the social constructivist epistemology. The social constructivist theory by Vygotsky's (1978) explored the notion that learning and development cannot be separated from their social context. He argued that play provides the ideal context for children to learn the rules of behaviour. Vygotsky based his developmental assumptions on the concepts of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). ZPD is defined as what the learner can achieve independently compared with what they could potentially learn with the support of a more capable peer or adult (Vygotsky, 1978). This more capable or skilled

individual is termed the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). In his social learning theory, Bandura (1989) suggested that learning is a socially driven phenomenon based heavily on the concept of modeling. It is this concept of modeling that will be explored further as a positive strategy for teaching SES to young children in a social environment.

In this project, I also present the curriculum frameworks that reflect the significance SEL holds in the early childhood educational setting. These include the BC Performance Standards for Social Responsibility (BC Ministry of Education, 2015c), the BC Primary Program Framework (BC Ministry of Education, 2000), the BC Full-Day Kindergarten Guide (BC Ministry of Education, 2010), and the BC Core Competencies (BC Ministry of Education, 2015a). The curriculum guides demonstrate the growing interest and significance social and emotional competence has in early childhood development. I introduce the review of the literature next.

### **Introduction to the Literature Review**

The literature review includes research that has investigated the role that SEL plays in development (Arlan, Durmuşoğlu-Saltali, & Yilmaz, 2011; Denham & Brown, 2010) and the benefits of SEL in early childhood curriculum and instruction (Abbott, Hawkins, Kosterman, Hill, & Catalano, 1999; Cefai & Cooper, 2008; Corso, 2007; Greenberg et al., 2003). I expand on the positive impact that has been documented for SEL on school readiness, and social relationships (Rhoades, Warren, Domitrovich, & Greenberg, 2011). I address the secondary risk factors that are associated with children who exhibit low SES (Cook, Greenberg, & Kusche, 1994; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Minahan & Rappaport, 2012). I complete the review by presenting the effectiveness of SEL instructions and programs, concluding with an outline of the important considerations educators must uphold during

implementation (Abbott et al., 1999; Cefai & Cooper, 2008; Durlak & Weissberg, 2011; Elias & Arnold, 2006). In the following section, I provide the rationale and importance for explain this topic within the field of Early Childhood Education.

### **Rationale and Importance**

I believe that social and emotional skills are a critical aspect of early childhood development, therefore social emotional learning (SEL) must begin within the home and continue in the Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings (CASEL, 2014). Caregivers have the opportunity to introduce early concepts of SEL through teaching children how to recognize their emotions, express them appropriately, and understand how they affect their own behaviour as well as the behaviour of others. I have seen a positive relationship between opportunities for SEL in the home and the development of emotional literacy and prosocial skills. These social and emotional competencies support and prepare children for the new experiences school has to offer (Arslan et al., 2011; McClelland, Acock, & Morrison, 2006). I resonate with Denham and Brown's (2010) view that SEL contributes to school readiness, and this, in turn, supports a successful transition into formal schooling. If students have difficulties with social skills and self-awareness, this undermines their ability to focus and participate in many learning opportunities (Arslan et al., 2011; Cook et al., 1994; McClelland et al., 2006; Rhoades et al., 2011). These children often miss the learning content and task instructions due to their difficulty in managing impulses and communicating their needs (Ritblatt et al., 2013). Growing research in the field of SEL has demonstrated that high-quality SEL programs appear to target at-risk children and decrease their likeliness to practice aggressive, disruptive behaviours in the classroom (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). The presence of non-desirable behaviours can influence how adults perceive these children. When observing children who do not exhibit the

developmentally appropriate skills and/or behaviour for their age, some adults may interpret that these children are lacking in certain prosocial skills or impaired in one or more of the SEL competencies. Children low in SES often require extra support during instructional periods and their difficulties may challenge the educator's ability to manage the whole class environment. Consequently, early childhood educators have begun to emphasize the importance of SEL in preparing children for school and their adult lives (Ritblatt et al., 2013). Some educators have made a shift from a more academically driven curriculum to one that is more responsive to the present and future needs for SEL opportunities in the ELC settings. This demonstrates an interesting transition that acknowledges the powerful nature of emotions and their influence in learning and social relationships (Elias, Zins & Weissberg, 1997).

Specifically, the early attention skills and emotional knowledge a child demonstrates can be a predictor of their later academic competence (Denham & Brown, 2010; Rhoades et al., 2011). I have observed this occurrence while working in the same school for a number of years. Some teachers misuse informal terms like "school ready" and "behaviour student" (those children with low SES) to refer to children's social and emotional competencies. While these informal terms are not Ministry of Education designations, children often maintain these labels throughout their schooling experiences. A "behaviour student" label may have negative connotations and provide inaccurate assumptions about the student. In contrast, the "school ready" label suggests the presence of prosocial skills that appear to positively impact children's social relationships with adults and peers (Findlay, Girardi, & Coplan, 2006).

Furthermore, my observations and instructional practices have pointed to the need for greater focus of SEL in the early childhood curriculum. The formal report for early Primary grades does not reflect the importance of social-emotional skill development. Currently, the

social responsibility performance standard is the closest form of social and emotional skills that is contained in the ministry-mandated curriculum for British Columbia (BC Ministry of Education, 2015c). While some similarities within social responsibility and the competencies of SEL exist, I believe that greater emphasis needs to be placed on developing self-awareness and self-management in the present curriculum.

### **Purpose and Guiding Questions**

The purpose of this capstone project is to gain a deeper understanding of children who exhibit disruptive behaviours in their early Primary years while working individually, in small groups or within the whole class setting. This capstone project seeks to provide insight on these children's behaviours, and more specifically, through this project I seek to find ways educators can support children's academic and social and emotional development. I strive to find curriculum and instructional strategies that create learning opportunities for these children, deemed at-risk, to build upon their social and emotional skills, without allowing their difficulties to consume the educator's teaching focus. The questions guiding my investigation into the literature are:

1. What is the rationale that supports providing opportunities for SEL in early childhood education?
2. More specifically, what are ways educators can use SEL to support children who exhibit behaviours deemed less desirable on a regular basis?
3. In what ways can prosocial skills (including self-management) be modeled using MKO peers in the preschool to early Primary classrooms?

## **Chapter Summary and Organization of the Project**

In Chapter One, I have introduced the current topic and discussed my background as an educator, which has led to my interest in SEL. I outlined the theoretical frameworks that I will draw upon to inform the following sections. Last, I laid out the rationale and purpose of my topic that is reflected in the guiding questions that will be examined. In Chapter Two, I discuss the theoretical frameworks and review the literature on the impact SEL has on young children and their academic, and social lives. In addition, I summarize the ways educators can promote SEL in preschool-early Primary settings. In Chapter Three, I connect my observations with the examined literature in order to outline my recommendations for incorporating SEL into effective learning opportunities for young children. In Chapter Four, I draw conclusions on my project as a whole and explore the limitations and further directions for research and practice.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter Two, I further examine the theoretical perspectives that guide this project. I approach the topic of SEL with a social constructivist lens, which has led me to the past theories of Vygotsky (1978), and Bandura (1989). I present a review of the literature examining the role of SEL in development, and the evidence of its beneficial impact in early childhood curriculum and instruction.

### **Social Constructivist Theory**

As introduced in Chapter One, Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory identifies the powerful influence that social interactions have on children's learning and development. This theory informs my capstone by confirming that the social relationships within the classroom have the ability to shape a child's academic future and understanding of SEL. Vygotsky's concepts, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), play a vital role in the strategies educators use to promote SEL in the classroom. ZPD and MKO form the basis of collaborative learning and support the use of peer models in the early learning environment. The teacher-child relationship also facilitates children's learning through direct instruction and modeling. In addition, Vygotsky's theory emphasized the importance of early language skills in shaping cognitive development. During social interaction, the external communication heard between peers is defined as social speech. For example, conversations on the playground, problem solving during play, and peer dialogue that occurs during class lineups etc. Vygotsky defined private speech as the self-talk heard aloud, yet not intended for others. Vygotsky believed these externalized thoughts are an early form of self-regulation as children learn to communicate internally. This early presence of SEL, as discussed by Vygotsky,

contributes to the rationale for inclusion of SEL in the ECE context and informs the theoretical framework of this capstone.

Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory relates to my capstone by encouraging educators to utilize class peers that are more knowledgeable in prosocial skills. It strengthens the notion that children can learn from one another when educators foster collaborative environments. This theory argues the importance of early language skills in strengthening children's social and internalized speech. Vygotsky's theoretical framework has informed my topic by confirming my belief that peer and teacher modeling is a beneficial strategy for promoting SEL in the classroom. Additionally, the notions of ZPD and MKO acknowledge the diverse early learning environments and the range of abilities that exist within the preschool-early Primary settings. At the same time, these notions set forth, the view that educators need to create learning opportunities that appeal to all members of the classroom community and build upon all children's strengths and weaknesses.

### **Social Learning Theory**

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, Bandura (1989) emphasized the value of observing and modeling strategies to understand the behaviours, attitudes and emotional responses of others. Observational learning is an important component of Bandura's work. The social learning framework suggests that children carefully observe individuals throughout society such as their school peers, teachers, family and members throughout the community (Bandura, 1989). Bandura believed these individuals would serve as models for behaviour that the children may imitate at a later time. For example, children are more likely to focus on and imitate gender appropriate behaviours, but the manner in which others respond to the specific behaviour ultimately guides if it is repeated or not. Bandura described the different types of responses that

take place, including reinforcement and punishment. More specifically, is positive or negative reinforcement being used, and is the behaviour internally or externally driven. Children may be seeking the external praise from a teacher or the internal feeling of approval when they are testing out a behaviour they have observed from a model (Bandura, 1989). Furthermore, children may shift beyond acts of imitation to a higher degree of identification with the model. As they identify with the model, they adopt their attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours (Bandura, 1989). This theory demonstrates the complex and deliberate thinking process that occurs while children are observing and modeling the behaviours of others.

Lastly, social learning theory outlines the value of observing and modeling strategies as a means to understand the behaviour of others (Bandura, 1989). Bandura's theory connects to my capstone project's topic as it addresses the positive ways children can learn the behaviours or attitudes of their peers or teachers, and how these behaviours or attitudes are reinforced. Specifically, when children observe the positive responses their peers receive for practicing prosocial skills, they may in turn wish to develop those skills. The theories I have selected and described form the foundation of this capstone topic and strengthen my understanding of the powerful role SEL has in the lives of young children. Some theoretical frameworks, including Vygotsky's (1979) and Bandura's (1989), have addressed the importance of social interactions in early childhood development and this in turn, has supported the formation of curriculum frameworks for educators working with young children.

### **Curriculum Frameworks**

In spite of the need for greater focus on SEL in ECE (Elias & Arnold, 2006), only a few government documents have begun to acknowledge the importance of the early years in shaping children's social, emotional and academic futures. These insights are reflected in the curriculum

frameworks of the BC Performance Standards for Social Responsibility (BC Ministry of Education, 2015c), the BC Primary Program Framework (2000) and the BC Full-Day Kindergarten Guide (2010) and the recently released BC Core Competencies (2015a). I present the ways these BC documents have addressed SEL in the educational setting.

The BC Ministry of Education produced a voluntary framework that outlines the performance standards and grade level expectations for key learning areas (BC Ministry of Education, 2015c). The performance standards include writing, reading, numeracy, social responsibility, and healthy living. As previously introduced, social responsibility is the closest form of SEL outlined in this framework. The performance standard for social responsibility groups children from kindergarten to grade 3 within the same level expectations. This performance standard expands on the four areas of social responsibility, which includes contributing to the learning community, problem solving in a peaceful manner, honouring diversity and rights and lastly, exercising rights and responsibility (BC Ministry of Education, 2015c). These areas reflect some aspects of the interconnected competencies of SEL as outlined by CASEL including social awareness, responsible decision-making and relationship skills (CASEL, 2014). The framework advises social opportunities exist to learn social responsibility during small-group activities and whole-group activities and through daily routines, playground play, and larger school wide expectations. While these are important areas of social-emotional development, the BC Performance Standards for Social Responsibility does not reflect the value of self-awareness and self-management holds in children's lives. It is this missing piece regarding how children come to understand their own emotions, thoughts and behaviours that is driving my capstone research. The next framework is a supplementary resource for Primary teachers to accompany the performance standards.

The revised BC Primary Program Framework addresses the changing needs of British Columbia's children and recognizes the "individual and social nature of learning" (BC Ministry of Education, 2000, p.16). The document presents 5 influential areas that provide the foundation of development and addresses the needs of the whole child. These areas include aesthetic and artistic development, intellectual development, emotional and social development, physical development and well-being, and development of social responsibility. The framework clearly defines these areas and shares how they play a role in children's development with support from a wide and comprehensive research base. It addresses the importance of SEL in the learning process, and the varying abilities that are present in early childhood settings more effectively than the other two documents.

The BC Full-Day Kindergarten guide (2010) was released prior to the province wide implementation of full day kindergarten (FDK) in September 2011. The guide states the decision to implement FDK was based on the "considerable body of research demonstrating the importance of children's early years as the foundation for lifelong learning and success in school and beyond" (BC Ministry of Education, 2010, p.4). The introduction outlines the expectations for FDK, suggests effective teaching practices to use with young children, and outlines the current research on how young children learn and develop best. The FDK guide is a voluntary resource for kindergarten teachers to use in their practice. As a result of the non-mandatory use of the guidelines for FDK, there is no clear sense how many FDK teachers use the framework. Yet similar to the previously discussed frameworks, the FDK guide reflects the value and need for SEL in the early childhood context. This is evident in the discussions on social-emotional learning, play-based learning, emergent curriculum, and authentic, developmentally, culturally appropriate assessment. The guide successfully outlines effective ECE practices discussing the

need for individual and small group support during play and learning tasks, emergent curriculum driven by the student's interests, open communication with children's families and community, and child-centered, inclusive program. The routines and schedules section of the guide reflects the need to provide developmentally appropriate practice for kindergarten students. In practice, educators can promote success by providing a balance between teacher-initiated learning and child-initiated learning and also by providing hands on, play-based strategies during these opportunities. Additionally, it recommends that educators should be flexible within their planning and use emergent curriculum to benefit both kindergarten teachers and students. The FDK guide demonstrates the merge of elementary education and early childhood education. This "schoolification" of early learning can place educators under greater academic pressure and may result in less opportunity for SEL in the classroom (Gananathan, 2011). There is no specialized training for kindergarten teachers to understand the unique development and pedagogy for children under the age of 6 (OCED, 2006). Therefore, this connects to my capstone, as many educators must feel the pressure to find ways they can incorporate SEL into their pedagogy. The final document to be explored is the Core Competencies (BC Ministry of Education, 2015a).

The core competencies are the most recent curriculum guide that has evolved out of a province wide consultation involving 300 educators in 20 school districts. The Ministry of Education defines the core competencies as "a set of intellectual, personal and social competencies that students develop through the course of their schooling" (BC Ministry of Education, 2015a, p.2). The competencies are divided into three main areas: 1) Communication, 2) Thinking, and 3) Personal and Social. These areas mirror the interconnected competencies of SEL as defined in Chapter One. More specifically, the personal and social competencies reflect a similar set of abilities as outlined in the SEL competencies (see Appendix A). While in the

early stages of implementation, this curriculum redesign demonstrates the growing awareness by educators that SEL needs to have a greater focus in the early childhood curriculum. The current draft is available for voluntary use as a classroom resource for teacher assessment and student self-assessment, yet the Ministry intends to make it an official curriculum by the 2016/2017 school year.

The Ministry of Education documents I have reviewed demonstrate greater recognition of the importance of SEL opportunities in the classroom, yet the documents are inadequate in meeting the needs of today's students. These documents appear not to be mandated and, therefore provide only guidelines with an uncertainty of use. The BC Core Competencies (BC Ministry of Education, 2015a) document holds the most promise for engaging BC teachers in SEL as it reflects the current experiences and opinions of educators within the province. The next section explores the benefits of incorporating SEL into early childhood curriculum and instruction, and the effectiveness of SEL programs in practice.

### **Review of the Literature**

In this literature review, I explore the impact of SEL on school readiness and social relationships, as well as addresses the risk factors associated with low social and emotional competence. In the next section, I examine the influence SEL has on the social relationships taking place within the school environment.

### **Influence of SEL on Social Relationships**

Upon entering the early learning environment, children begin to demonstrate their SES as they engage in new social relationships. The new relationships include teacher-student relationships, similar-aged peers relationships and older peer relationships. Current research has determined that children with SEL strengths have greater emotional knowledge that supports

positive interpersonal skills, social problem solving and social confidence (Arslan et al., 2011; Denham & Brown, 2010; Elias & Arnold, 2006). These social skills play an important role in children's view of relationships and further supports their understanding of healthy interactions in their home and learning environments (Arslan et al., 2011). It has been documented that specific social traits, such as empathy, have been linked to increased social sensitivity (Findlay et al., 2006). The social sensitivity and SES that support children and adults in maintaining healthy relationships are labeled as prosocial skills. As described earlier, prosocial skills can help individuals navigate challenging social conflicts, communicate effectively and consider the unique viewpoints of others (Yoder, 2014). Rhoades et al. (2011) documented that emotionally competent children are more liked by their peers and more often labeled prosocial by their teachers. It is believed that their effective interactions with peers and adults are the result of their prosocial skills (Rhoades et al., 2011). Children with prosocial skills and emotional literacy are able to sustain friendships and create a reliable social world; in turn promotes their resiliency to overcome hardships and encourages successful learning (Denham & Brown, 2010; Elias & Arnold, 2006). The following section addresses the difficulties that may arise when children do not meet their age-appropriate SES expectations.

### **Low Social-Emotional Skills and Risk Factors**

A substantial body of research has demonstrated that underdeveloped SEL and low prosocial behaviour have been linked to poor school adjustment (Denham & Brown, 2010; Durlak et al., 2011), disruptive or problem behaviour (Cook et al., 1994) and anxiety in the classroom (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012). Cefai and Cooper's study (2008) examined the link between poor social interaction among children and their further disengagement from school. The study revealed that children with low SES frequently experienced negative social

interactions, which lead to further peer rejection and greater separation from the school community. This disengagement can be expressed through acting out (e.g., aggression and bullying) and acting in (e.g. depression and withdrawn behaviour) (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2007). When children do not meet the developmental expectations for their age, their behaviour appears problematic and immature when compared to the behaviour of their same-aged peers. This negative perception can affect how they are viewed and treated by their peers and teachers. Recent research by Minahan and Rappaport (2012) sought to identify the triggers for less desirable behaviours in children including those with Asperger syndrome. They found that most children demonstrated inappropriate behaviours as the result of anxiety and underdeveloped skills including self-regulation, thought stopping/interruption, executive functioning, flexible thinking and social skills. Their research reiterated the preventative nature of SEL programs and their ability to ease the anxiety of children through developing their self-monitoring and self-regulation skills. Therefore, the difficulties discussed in this section demonstrate the frustration and disconnect children low in SEL may feel toward school and peer relationships. The next section addresses how educators can engage children that are at-risk due to low SES. It expands on the positive impact SEL can have for all students when it is incorporated into early childhood curriculum and instruction.

### **Benefits of SEL in Early Childhood Curriculum and Instruction**

Growing research in the field of SEL has demonstrated that high-quality SEL programs appear to target at-risk children and decrease their likeliness to practice aggressive, disruptive behaviours in the classroom (Cook et al., 1994; Durlak et al., 2011; Schonert-Reichl, Smith, Zaidman-Zait, & Hertzman, 2011; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). SEL programs should form the foundation of the early childhood curriculum as they complement all types of learners and

can be integrated with other areas of curriculum (Durlak et al., 2011; Elias & Arnold, 2006). For many educators and policy-makers, academic learning and SEL are now the pillars for what they believe children should acquire from their formal schooling experiences (Elias & Arnold, 2006). Furthermore, educators have less classroom management issues when they create a learning environment that allows children to apply their SEL knowledge as they engage with others and take responsibility for their actions (Cook et al., 1994; Denham & Brown, 2010; Elias & Arnold, 2006). The following section discusses how educators can incorporate SEL programs into their daily routines while complementing other academic areas within the early childhood curriculum.

### **Connections with SEL and Other Classroom Routines and Academic Areas**

Several research studies have recommended that educators should provide a wide variety of opportunities throughout the school day to develop and enhance the interconnected competencies of SEL (Cefai & Cooper, 2008; Cook et al., 1994; Denham & Brown, 2010; Elias & Arnold, 2006). This research suggests that classroom routines and instruction can foster SEL through providing children time to observe, model and demonstrate these skills from both peers and adults. More specifically, these included the “special helper” job, classroom meetings, small group work, whole group work and extracurricular activities. These examples provide important opportunities for children to practice and develop their SEL. Additional research has echoed the need for SEL to be integrated throughout the ECE curriculum. When SEL is incorporated within literacy, music, and play-based activities, it provides children with the opportunity to exercise their social-emotional knowledge while interacting with peers and other adults (Berk, Mann, & Ogan, 2006; Daunic et al., 2013; Eades, 2006; Minahan & Rappaport, 2012; Nicolcpoulou, McDowell, & Brockmeyer, 2006). In the early childhood classroom, there are many opportunities to use play-based techniques in SEL practices and interventions. For example,

Singer, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff's (2006) study expanded on the notion that play-based techniques promote meaningful connections and allow children to gain experience with the rules for social interaction. Similarly, the research of Christie and Roskos (2006) argued that play-based techniques are a powerful tool for developing emergent literacy, oral language, phonological awareness, and print awareness. It is these daily experiences that encourage the development of emotional literacy and SEL in the classroom. The following subsection expands on the notion that children experience both short-term and long-term benefits for their participation in SEL instruction and programs.

### **Evidence of Beneficial Outcomes for Children Participating in SEL Instruction and Intervention Programs**

Growing research examining children's exposure to SEL instruction and programs has documented the positive impact it has across multiple areas of early childhood development. This section discusses the beneficial outcomes for children participating in SEL instruction and programs. When children are given many opportunities to develop their SES through direct instruction, intervention, and opportunities to practice, they are strengthening their emotional literacy. Fox et al. (2003) discussed how emotional literacy is developed through learning to identify the emotions of self and others and learning to act upon these feelings appropriately. Figueroa-Sánchez (2008) described emotional literacy as the early literacy development that occurs along side the social-emotional development within the home and school environments. Specifically, learning activities (e.g., songs, poems, games, chants and storytelling) that provide engaging interactions and rich experiences with emotions, vocabulary, and sequencing (Figueroa-Sánchez, 2008). Moving forward, I discuss the effectiveness of preventative measures compared with the explicit instruction of some SEL instruction and programs.

SEL offers preventative measures for children that are more likely to exhibit risky behaviours and experience difficulty throughout their schooling (Abbott et al., 1999; Cefai & Cooper, 2008; Durlak & Weissberg, 2011; Elias & Arnold, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2003; Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abbott, 2005). These preventive measures included establishing supportive, nurturing relationships with parents as well as educators, and offering high quality ECE environments that fosters cognitive, affective, and academic development (Dunlap et al., 2006). In support of this, Cefai and Cooper (2008) found that positive teacher-student connections are established through meaningful relationships that discuss children's emotions and encourage their achievements. Similarly, Corso (2007) echoed the importance of supportive teacher-student relationships in supporting SEL. Corso outlined that in practice supportive relationships are responsive to children's needs, place equal value on different perspectives and acknowledge how the educator's own beliefs may influence their interactions with children. These characteristics foster effective communication between teachers and students, contributing to a supportive learning environment. An earlier study by Abbott et al. (1999) examined how supportive relationships form the basis of proactive classrooms. Abbott et al. documented that proactive classrooms have clear expectations for behaviour, resulting in calmer, more supportive environments where children can learn better. This illustrates how the supportive classroom, as described by Abbott et al. leads to deeper engagement with learning, and more attachment to school. The preventative nature of SEL and its role in long-term life success has been documented as reaching far beyond children's preschool-early Primary years (Elias et al., 1997; Hawkins, Kosterman, Hill, Abbott, & Catalano, 2008). The earlier research of Elias et al. (1997) argued that children cannot attain true academic and personal success in their adulthood without having SEL. They concluded that promoting SEL in early childhood is

the key to supporting young children's resiliency against drug use, teen pregnancy, suicide, violent crimes and failure to complete school. Further work by Hawkins et al. (2008) confirmed the long-term effects of SEL interventions at the elementary level in promoting positive well being in school, work, and community, as well as preventing mental health problems, risky sexual behavior, substance misuse, and crime. While prevention is a critical piece in developing SES and creating prosocial classrooms, early intervention has also proven to be effective in increasing SEL and addressing the less desirable behaviours that often result from low SES within the preschool-early Primary settings.

With regards to early intervention, a large-scale meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2011) examined the outcomes of 213 school-based SEL programs. The review examined the effects of SEL programs in regards to SES, positive social behaviour, presence of problem behaviour, attitudes towards self and others, emotional distress, and academic achievement. The results confirmed that post-intervention participants demonstrated greater SES, positive social behaviour and decreased conduct problems. These findings were further discussed by Durlak and Weissberg (2011) who summarized and described the major findings of their large-scale review. In this summary, Durlak and Weissberg reiterated that school-based SEL programs are one of the best strategies for enhancing academic achievement, improving SES, and a significant reduction of disruptive behaviours and emotional distress. Similarly, Fox et al. (2003) in their study examining evidence-based SEL interventions, found that the explicit instruction of SEL used in SEL programs appeared to target at-risk children and decrease their likeliness to practice aggressive, disruptive behaviours in the classroom. I now turn to the specific research conducted on the intervention programs, MindUP, Roots of Empathy, and PATHS.

Schonert-Reichl's (2008) study examined the effectiveness of the Mindfulness Education (ME) program and later titled the MindUP program. The MindUP curriculum (2011) is an evidence-based program that promotes mindful attention for oneself and others, develops a tolerance for differences, and encourages individual growth. Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor's (2010) evaluative study found that following the MindUP intervention, teachers reported that children were more attentive, exhibited greater emotional regulation and social-emotional competence. The CASEL (2012) guide examining the effectiveness of SEL programs reported that the MindUP program promotes and reinforces SEL classroom-wide, offers opportunities to practice SEL, and provides children with monitoring tools such as self-report.

In addition, Schonert-Reichl et al. (2011) began to explore the effectiveness of the SEL program, Roots of Empathy (ROE), in preventing aggressive behaviours, increasing social-emotional competence, and allowing opportunities for prosocial development. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2011) examined the effects of the ROE program that uses an infant and their caregiver(s) as the platform for lessons on emotional understanding, prosocial skills, infant development and responsive caregiving relationships. The findings revealed that children who participated in the classroom-based program had a clearer understanding of infant emotions, a significant increase in prosocial skills, compared to the control group whom experienced an increase in proactive aggression. While no significant changes were documented for children's self-reported empathy and perspective taking, the findings support the positive impact of teaching SEL across children's overall behaviours and social understanding.

Similar findings were echoed in the research of Sheard, Ross and Cheung (2012) who examined the impact felt in both the home and school environments for children that participated in Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), a SEL intervention program that uses

explicit skill instruction and integration into academic curriculum. Following the intervention, teachers reported that their students demonstrated greater self-esteem, self-awareness, self-expression of emotions, and exhibited an increase in positive behaviour. The parents reported similar observations stating they observed growth in their child's self-esteem. This was demonstrated in an increased desire to resolve conflicts, manage frustrations at home, and express emotions with their family members. The CASEL (2012) guide acknowledged the effectiveness of the PATHS program through its ability to promote and reinforce SEL in the home, classroom and school. The program offers opportunities to practice SEL, and provides children with monitoring tools such as self-report, observations, and measurements to document behavioural growth. The research of Sheard et al. (2012) and CASEL (2012) strengthens the rationale for incorporating SEL practices and programs in early childhood curriculum. These findings also acknowledge the effectiveness of the specific SEL programs I discussed and the positive influence they have on the lives of children in both the school and home context. Consequently, it is important to understand the characteristics that are present in effective SEL programs.

In Chapter Two I have discussed the guiding theoretical frameworks and the review of literature confirming the influential role SEL has in early childhood and the beneficial impact of implementing SEL in the educational setting. In Chapter Three, I describe and illustrate the connections between the extant research and practice.

## **CHAPTER THREE: CONNECTIONS TO PRACTICE**

In Chapter Three, I connect my teaching experiences with the theoretical and curriculum frameworks along with the literature examined in Chapter Two. The documented research supports my recommendations for effective ways educators can incorporate SEL into their teaching instruction and curriculum. I share my professional experiences with the implementation of SEL practices through two classroom scenarios and expand on the positive impact I have observed as a result of teaching social-emotional skills.

As discussed in Chapter One, I am an early childhood educator that has observed the changing needs of my students many of which struggle daily with the social-emotional competencies. I believe the growing pressure for academic skill development and the desire for high achievement has overshadowed the importance of social-emotional skills in early childhood. Based on my informal discussions with fellow educators and my professional experiences, I see the urgency for greater emphasis of SEL in the preschool-early Primary settings.

In this chapter I divide the pedagogical strategies and the evidence-based programs I have used into two sections, Supporting Behaviour Needs Using SEL and Peer Mentoring to Develop SES. Through connecting these experiences with the reviewed literature discussed in Chapter Two, I revisit the guiding questions within this capstone. Specifically, why is it important to teach SES in the early childhood setting and how can SEL support children who exhibit non-desirable behaviours? In addition, how can educators use peer modeling as a means to develop SES in the preschool to early Primary classrooms?

### **Supporting Behaviour Needs Using SEL**

Through reflecting on my own practice and my informal communication with

colleagues, I believe that most educators strive to create a safe, nurturing classroom that supports all its learners equally. The difficulty lies in the time and energy it takes to address and support the needs of a few students that display less desirable behaviours. For many educators, dealing with this difficult behaviour can feel like a daunting task amongst the many responsibilities teachers are already expected to fulfill in their educational role. It is for these reasons that I began to explore the use of SEL as a means to support the social-emotional development of my students as well as a tool to prevent the pervasiveness of less desirable behaviours (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012). In the following scenario, I describe a past student that struggled with SES and how I used my knowledge of SEL to create learning opportunities that supported him as well as the rest of my students.

Scenario 1: Sam was an energetic, creative kindergarten student that loved playtime. His size, both in height and weight, and his interest in mature video games, specifically Grand Theft Auto, prompted other children to believe he was an older child. Each morning, I would prepare our “shape-of-the-day” that outlined our planned activities and routines for the school day. The cards had both the name and an image for the activities so that the children could have an expectation from what our day would look like. Most mornings as he arrived at school, he would run to our “shape-of-the-day” and say, “When is centre time, Mrs. Boyce?” He would scan our schedule until he saw the little card for centre time, often positioned near the end of the day. After a few weeks of questioning why we could not just play all day, he came to accept its place in our schedule. It was obvious Sam looked forward to playing with our classroom toys like the lego set, car track, and wooden blocks. Yet almost every day during these play opportunities inside the classroom and on the playground, he had

emotional outbursts, acts of aggression towards peers and adults, and difficulty problem solving. These events were often sparked by his difficulty in recognizing his emotions, communicating his feelings and understanding the perspectives of others. Sam was strong-willed and easily frustrated which hindered his ability to make friends. Children became fearful of his physical and emotional outbursts, which included flipping chairs, screaming and breaking toys. When I began to intervene in Sam's frequent conflicts, he resisted my support and showed very little interest in wanting to discuss the problem after it occurred.

Scenario Reflection: I sought to understand what was triggering these conflicts. I questioned how I could establish peer support within my class, and how I could offer Sam some small success throughout his school day. I connect my insights at that time with Denham and Brown's (2010) findings. Denham and Brown argued that learning cannot be removed from its social context. Similarly, their findings reflected the BC Primary Program Framework (BC Ministry of Education, 2000) that emphasized the individual and social nature of learning. I connect my feelings at that time with Cefai and Cooper's (2008) findings that examined the link between poor social interaction among children and the further disengagement from school. I realized that Sam's behaviour was showing very little improvement and in fact, I felt his aggression had sparked several incidents between other students in our class. I recognized that in order to build a reliable social world for Sam, he needed to gain greater awareness for his own emotions and behaviours as well as prosocial skills to support his peer interactions. I feared he would not gain peer acceptance, or the desire to attend school if these conflicts continued throughout the school year. I was able to form a relationship with Sam, and others like him, when I acknowledged and validated his perspective. In practice, this was a quiet

conversation much later after the incident had settled. With support, Sam could reflect about the conflict; yet he largely described what the others did to cause his anger. He would recall, “He stole my red car, the fast one” or “She broke my lego tower I spent forever building.” He rarely used I statements and it took him several months before his language shifted and he began to take some ownership in the conflict. By using expressions like “I don’t like when they take without asking” and “I would rather play alone.” These statements revealed the progress in Sam’s emotional literacy. These areas of emotional literacy, self-awareness and self-management, had to be fostered before he could successfully navigate the social relationships within his school context. In order to build upon these growing relationships, I had to create a supportive learning environment that taught him and his peers the acceptable and unacceptable ways these differing views could be expressed in our school setting. This resonates with Cefai and Cooper’s (2008) findings that suggested educators can build positive connections through discussing and expressing emotions, as well as, supporting and encouraging their students’ achievements. Early on in my teaching career and in my experiences with Sam, I discovered the power of creating positive teacher-student relationships. This awareness connects with Corso (2007) who discussed the time and effort it takes to form positive teacher-student relationships through modeling respectful, responsive and reciprocal interactions with your students. His findings addressed how supportive learning environments are created through implementing practices that promote children’s engagement, and clearly outline what is expected of them in different environments. The model represented in Appendix B depicts the similar steps I have used to promote the development of SES and to reduce the less desirable behaviours present in my classroom. The foundation of the model is the positive relationships educators’ form with children, families and school colleagues and the

high quality supportive environment these relationships help form. The model draws from Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory that recognized the power of social relationships within the classroom and their ability to shape the social-emotional development and academic future of children.

I have observed that my students are most successful when I provide them with many opportunities throughout the school day to develop and enhance the interconnected competencies of SEL through classroom routines and academic instruction. This part of my pedagogy is reflected in the second and third stages of the model, which includes targeted social-emotional supports and interventions (see Appendix B). These social-emotional principals help create a proactive classroom. This connects with the findings of Abbott et al. (1999) who examined how supportive environments form the basis of proactive classrooms by providing clear expectations for behaviour, resulting in calmer environments where children can learn better. At that time, I explored a number of SEL programs and blogs of early childhood educators. Once I reviewed the resources available, I decided to implement the MindUP curriculum (2011). I was amazed by the programs' ability to ease the most agitated students, its way of simplifying the complex neural system, and allowing children to take ownership over their actions. Sam, among others, benefited enormously from the breathing exercises, understanding of emotional knowledge, and the discussion of being mindful across different situations. The positive influence MindUP has had on my students resonates with the findings of Fox et al. (2003) who found that explicit instruction of SEL programs appeared to target at-risk children and decrease their likeliness to practice aggressive, disruptive behaviours in the classroom. A similar positive outcome took place when I began to use the Roots of Empathy (ROE) program in my classroom. The ROE program, as described in Chapter Two,

takes the preventative approach to teaching prosocial skills through developing social-emotional understanding and reducing aggression. I observed Sam, and other impulsive students, improve their compassion and patience for others after learning about SEL themes from the ROE infant. The most powerful statements documented included “Yeah and just because a baby is crying doesn't mean they are a bad baby” and “I'm going to invite the baby over for a play date” and lastly “He worked hard to crawl, just like when I learned to ride my scooter.” The ROE program was a powerful teaching platform that benefited our classroom immensely. I connect my insights on this progress with the findings of Schonert-Reichl et al. (2011) who documented significant improvements following the ROE intervention across children's emotional understanding, peer reported prosocial skills and teacher reported proactive and relational aggression. The following section examines the use of peer mentoring as an approach to developing SES and utilizing the more knowledgeable peers in the early learning environment.

### **Peer Mentoring to Develop SES**

In my role as an educator, I have observed how the social relationships taking place in the classroom provide children with opportunities for learning and demonstrating their SES. I have documented the positive impact of peer modeling and its ability to utilize all types of learners. Driven by my past and present observations, I believe peer modeling is an important part of my pedagogical practice. In the following scenario, I describe a past student that served as a more knowledgeable peer for her classmates.

Scenario 2: Ava was a thoughtful grade one student. She arrived in September to her kindergarten/grade one class with the social-emotional and cognitive skills that supported her positive transition into formal schooling. She could demonstrate self-

regulation, share well during playtime, and express her feelings and ideas clearly. This emotional literacy and school readiness supported her academic and social success. Her fun-spirited nature attracted many children and made her a pleasure to teach. Her parents appeared to take an active role in her learning, often asking for further ways they could support her development at home (e.g. practicing high frequency words, seeking tips on how to teach her to tie her shoes). She naturally took on a leadership role guiding and mentoring the kindergarten students in her k/1 split. She often asked, “Can I help with anything? Do you have any jobs for me?” Her desire to please others appeared intrinsically motivated, as she never expected anything in return for her hard work. I appreciated her enthusiasm for learning. She often wanted to hear my favourite book titles so she could sign them out at Library. Ava had a vivid imagination and loved to play in our veterinarian centre. She would show her peers how to gently care for the pretend animals, wrapping their wounds, giving them medicine and returning them to their happy owners. Her patient, caring nature made her a wonderful mentor. I found myself choosing her to model activities for our class and was impressed with how many children responded well to her modeling and verbal instructions.

Scenario Reflection: I concluded the best way to utilize her prosocial skills would be to allow her, and others like her, to support the at-risk students through a variety of learning opportunities. I connect my strategy at that time with the BC Full-Day Kindergarten Guide (BC Ministry of Education, 2010). The guide suggested the use of small group work and hands-on, play-based techniques as effective ECE practices. I have found success with creating peer based learning opportunities in my classroom. I have included some pictures depicting this peer support in my classroom (see Appendix C). This resonates with Cefai and Cooper’s

(2008) findings that highlighted the strategies educators could use to develop SES using peer modeling throughout the typical school day. Cefai and Cooper recommended peer support in the form of peer tutors, play-based scaffolding, and group conflict resolution. I began to explore how my daily routines and instructional practices could be supported through the use of peer modeling. I enlisted these strategies during my school year with Ava. My insights at that time connect with Vygotsky (1979) and Bandura's (1989) theories. Vygotsky's work theorized that the more knowledgeable peer would serve as model for behaviour that other children could imitate. I connect my observations with Bandura's (1989) theory on social learning that outlines the value of observing and modeling strategies as a means to understand the behaviour of others. My insights on the topic of peer mentoring resonate with Bandura's (1989) findings regarding how children observe the positive responses their peers receive for practicing prosocial skills, and how this may result in their adoption of these skills. These findings are reflected in my belief that at-risk children can learn from their peers when given opportunities to work collaboratively. I agree that these findings support the need for peer modeling opportunities in early education.

In addition, it was important for me to consider how family involvement and early home experiences contributed to Ava's confidence and prosocial development. My feelings at that time resonate with the findings of Arslan et al. (2011). They revealed that children's SES appear to shape their view of relationships, further establishing their understanding of healthy interactions in the home and school environments. In my discussions with her guardians, they described Ava's early love for fairytale and nursery rhyme books, the countless play dates she had with her cousins and how, by the age of 3, she expressed many feelings through songs and play experiences. It appeared her early experiences, specifically the abundance of play

opportunities and her frequent exposure to books portraying social-emotional themes, strengthened her emotional literacy and social relationship skills. My insights at that time connect with Vygotsky's (1978) findings. Vygotsky's theory emphasized the importance of early language skills in cognitive development and described the purpose of private and self-talk during social interactions. I believe that Ava's early home experiences provided the foundation for positive social-emotional development and school readiness skills. These reflections, with the support of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, demonstrate the importance of early social and emotional learning in the home and early childhood settings in developing school readiness. I have created a website with the goal of supporting the social and emotional development of young children by strengthening the home-school connection and providing parents and educators with SEL resources, described next.

### **Connections to Practice: A Website for Parents and Educators**

The purpose of the website is to provide strategies and social-emotional resources for adults working with young children. It is available to early childhood educators, primary teachers, educational assistants, and families of young children seeking to implement SEL into their curriculum planning, classroom management strategies, peer modeling opportunities, and home interactions. This tool offers proactive strategies that educators can use to create inclusive learning environments for students, including those deemed at-risk or more knowledgeable than others. The website also highlights the powerful nature SEL has in shaping the lives of young children. It provides the audience with the opportunity to learn what SEL is, why it is beneficial, and how it can be incorporated into their interactions with young children. The ways in which members of the early childhood community and the families of young children use the website may appear unique to their needs and goals. Yet my purpose

remains the same, to emphasize the importance of early SEL development and the many strategies and programs found to be effective in developing the social-emotional competencies. I believe the website has the potential to strengthen the audience's understanding of the influential role SEL plays in early development, and the benefits of SEL in early childhood curriculum, instruction, and interactions. The website's recommendations are rooted in the substantial evidence supporting the beneficial outcomes for children's participating in SEL programs.

### **Description and Characteristics**

I chose to build upon an existing website that I created in 2014 for a graduate level course titled, *Supporting Young Children's Social Emotional Learning in Early Childhood Programs*. The website method is cost-efficient and easily accessible for members of the early childhood community and the families of young children. The website uses children's literature as the cornerstone of teaching early social-emotional competence. It provides many examples and reviews of children's literature that connects with the interconnected competencies of SEL. It also has a comprehensive list of resources available for educators and families of young children. The resource list is divided into the types of resources: "Information" and "Hands-on Resources." The "Information" section directs the audience to valuable websites for SEL organizations and research (see Appendix D). The "Hands-On Resources" section provides educators and parents with activities they can use with young children. I have included a handout with my recommendations for practice in this section.

### **Summary**

In Chapter Three I connected theory into practice by linking my classroom observations, specifically supporting less desirable behaviours and the use of peer mentoring,

with the theoretical frameworks and literature reviewed in Chapter Two. In Chapter Four, I conclude with a brief summary of the findings connected with my guiding questions, consider the possible limitations within this project and present my recommendations for future research and practice.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS**

In this final chapter, I return to the guiding questions that have shaped this capstone, 1) what is the rationale that supports providing opportunities for SEL in early childhood education? 2) More specifically, what are ways educators can use SEL to support children who exhibit behaviours deemed less desirable on a regular basis?, and 3) in what ways can prosocial skills (including self-management) be modeled using MKO peers in the preschool to early Primary classrooms? In the next section, I present my reflections and concluding thoughts. I also propose recommendations for future study and research as well some limitations I experienced during my research.

### **Reflections and Concluding Thoughts**

My capstone project has highlighted the influential nature of SEL and its role in supporting positive cognitive, social and emotional development in young children. The literature and frameworks I reviewed strongly supported the use of SEL practices and early intervention programs in the early childhood context. There is a strong connection between social-emotional skills and academic achievement and school readiness skills. Children can attend to learning tasks much more successfully when they have strong self-awareness and self-management skills (Durlak et al., 2011). The interconnected competencies of SEL directly influence how well children engage in social relationships, and this in turn influences their resiliency to overcome hardships as well as their ability to form positive connections to school (Denham & Brown, 2010; Elias & Arnold, 2006). The literature reviewed through the project confirmed the preventative nature as well as the beneficial impact of SEL throughout the lives of young children. In addition, the literature elaborated on the positive influence SEL has on the

classroom atmosphere, specifically the teacher-student relationships, classroom management, and peer connections.

The examination of the extant literature has revealed the importance of SEL in early childhood education and its ability to shape all areas of child development. I have realized how the use of SEL practices and programs supports the positive development of children at all skill levels through reaching both the at-risk students as well as utilizing the more knowledgeable peers. Based on the findings of Abbott et al. (2011) and Corso (2007), I believe that educators can use SEL to minimize the less desirable behaviours in their classrooms and foster a positive classroom atmosphere. The research I reviewed found that children with age-appropriate SES have less behaviour problems (Cook et al., 1994; Cooper & Tiknaz, 2007), are more engaged in learning opportunities (Denham & Brown, 2010; Durlak et al., 2011), can regulate their emotions and focus better on tasks (Denham & Brown, 2010), and are labeled as school ready by their parents and teachers (Arslan et al., 2011; Denham & Brown, 2010; McClelland et al., 2006; Rhoades et al., 2011). In knowing this evidence, I feel that greater emphasis still needs to be placed on the importance of developing early SEL in the home and preschool-early Primary classroom settings. I believe that parents would provide earlier and more frequent opportunities for SEL if they were aware of its long lasting influence. Therefore, more resources should be accessible for educators and families to teach SEL and greater policy should be in place for province-wide implementation of SEL in ECE curriculum.

While the curriculum frameworks I examined reflect the growing awareness of the lasting implications for early SEL on later achievement, it is only the recent release of the BC Core Competencies (BC Ministry of Education, 2015a) that has found a place for developing personal and social competences within the curriculum. This curriculum redesign is a positive

advancement and it suggests that the Ministry of Education acknowledges that educators need revised resources that reflect the present needs of their students, their families and the communities they teach within. I have integrated the research into the website I have created, so that I can provide SEL resources to educators and parents of young children.

The completion of this capstone has provided me with a deeper understanding of the children who exhibit less desirable behaviours in the classroom. For example, through the examination of the link between underdeveloped SES and children who may exhibit disruptive behaviour and disengagement from school (Cefai & Cooper, 2008; Cook et al., 1994; Denham & Brown, 2010; Durlak et al., 2011). I have realized that these less desirable behaviours directly influence the teacher's ability to manage and teach the whole class (Morris, Millenky, Raver & Jones, 2013). Similarly, Morris et al. (2013) documented that SEL interventions positively impact the emotional atmosphere of classroom and teachers' ability to manage disruptive behaviours. I now understand that educators need to first identify and understand the children that are demonstrating the less desirable behaviours in the classroom. Denham and Brown (2010) acknowledged the need for comparing the children who are exhibiting the disruptive behaviours with the age-appropriate expectations commonly held for children of that age. This information has provided me with a clearer picture of the needs and goals for these target children and in turn, allows the educator to determine how they will support them in the classroom.

The research examined throughout this project demonstrated that high-quality SEL practices and programs appear to target at-risk children and decrease their likeliness to practice aggressive, disruptive behaviours in the classroom (Cook et al., 1994; Durlak et al., 2011; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2011; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). This lack of SEL can create

obstacles within children's peer relationships, academic learning and attachment to school (Denham et al., 2012). To promote positive outcomes for children, it is important for educators to follow the recommendations outlined within the SEL program along with the current research findings on the topic of social-emotional development. The effectiveness of SEL instruction and program can be negatively impacted during implementation if important details and programing implications are not followed. Ashdown and Bernard (2012) suggested the explicit and direct instructions included in many SEL programs support the proper teaching of social and emotional topics. They argued the complex nature of social-emotional development could be difficult to explain to young children without the support of lessons contained in well-researched SEL programs. Similarly, the research of Sheard et al. (2012) suggested educators should be trained in the programming and screening protocol of the selected program, in order to accurately deliver the methods and act with the desired responsiveness as outlined in the program details. Domitrovich, Gest, Jones, Gill, and DeRousie's (2010) findings suggested that programs would have an increase in the quality of implementation if educators received coaching and greater professional development time to examine the intervention program. Therefore, I find it important for SEL to form the foundation of the early childhood curriculum as it complements all types of learners and can be integrated with other areas of curriculum (Durlak et al., 2011; Elias & Arnold, 2006).

At the same time, completing this capstone has strengthened my knowledge and awareness of integrating SEL principles into my own teaching practice. SEL practices and programs allow teachers to build positive connections with their students through discussing and expressing emotions, as well as, supporting and encouraging their achievements (Cefai & Cooper, 2008). Furthermore, Elias et al. (1997) described the need for a responsive classroom

atmosphere that encourages children to express themselves and take learning risks. I realized these are important elements in the teacher-student relationship in order to develop trust and reciprocal respect for one another. Educators that create proactive environments have clear expectations for behaviour, resulting in calmer, more supportive classrooms where all children can learn better (Cefai & Cooper, 2008; Corso, 2007). Proactive classrooms have less prevalence of disruptive behaviours due to deeper engagement with learning and stronger attachment to school (Abbott et al., 1999; Hawkins et al., 2005). The responsive classroom can be achieved by using developmentally appropriate practices and through discussing the benefits of such practices with educators. Gasbarro (2008) discussed how ECE teachers must find the balance between creating high quality environments (e.g. learning materials and the esthetic appearance) and more on the interactive practices, teacher-child relationships and classroom atmosphere. I have compiled a list of strategies and recommendations for practice that educators and parents may find useful (see Appendix E).

Through this clearer understanding of what supportive educators look like, I reflected on my past experiences with building the home-school connection (Arslan et al., 2011). When there is a strong relationship between home and school, children feel the support across these important connections with their trusted adults, teachers and parents. I considered how I could use this new knowledge of SEL to strengthen my home-school relationships. Corso (2007) reiterated these findings in his model for promoting children's SEL and preventing less desirable behaviour. He addressed the need for creating meaningful home-school partnerships, modeling preferred social behaviour, and identifying problem behaviours and correcting them. I believe that the parents of young children would find this research valuable and attempt to use it in their interactions with their children. These feelings lead to the decision to build upon my website so

that it could serve as a resources for parents and educators' seeking to promote SEL in young children. The teacher-student relationship is a powerful platform for developing SES and establishing a positive learning environment with a strong home-school connection. This project also examined the use of peer partnerships as an effective method for fostering SES in the classroom.

Through the exploration of the literature and specific SEL intervention programs, I concluded that peer modeling was a valuable strategy for teaching SEL in the classroom. This decision was driven by the reoccurring theme that emphasized the strong relationship between children's learning and their social world. As theorized by Vygotsky (1978), the two contexts of learning and social interaction could not be separated. Drawing on the research of Singer et al. (2006), it became clear that peer partnerships and play-based techniques promoted meaningful connections and experiences for learning the rules for social interaction. The daily routines in preschool-early Primary classrooms serve as opportunities for children to observe, practice and develop SES from both peer and adult models (Cook et al., 1994; Denham & Brown, 2010; Elias & Arnold, 2006). Cefai & Cooper (2008) recommended using peer support in the form of peer tutors, play-based scaffolding, and group conflict resolution. I connect back with Vygotsky's (1978) concepts of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) that form the basis of collaborative learning and encourage the use of peer models in early learning. The classroom models or more knowledgeable peers, that is, those who are more capable or skilled in a specific area of knowledge, can be utilized to teach the children who struggle with SES. In connecting with the recent research of Pech (2013), I have come to the understanding that peer partnerships strengthen children communication skills, understanding of other's emotions, and an appreciation for other's perspectives and beliefs. While teaching SEL,

educators' need to be responsive and model awareness, holding frequent discussions to explore children's feelings and responsibilities for each other (Pech, 2013).

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research and Practice**

In the literature review, I was limited in my search by the scope and depth of research available on the interconnected competencies of SEL, including self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making and relationship skills (CASEL, 2014). The topic of SEL was so vast that I had to limit the amount of research I would review within this capstone. Early on in the formulation of my guiding questions, I had to determine which competencies would become my main focus. Based on my classroom observations, I held the greatest interest and experience with the competencies examining the self and their role in social and academic achievements, namely self-management, self-awareness, social awareness. Through focusing on my specific guiding questions, I had to remove the content that examined the impact of SEL on academic and cognitive development, and curriculum and implementation research.

### **Recommendations for Future Research and Practice**

While conducting my literature review, I documented the gaps that exist with the research on SEL. Currently, the research examining the presence of less desirable behaviour in the classroom, specifically the work of Cook et al. (1994), Cooper and Tikhaz (2007), Denham and Brown, 2010; Durlak et al., (2011) and, Minahan and Rappaport (2012) is limited in its scope. I recommend that future research be conducted on SEL as a strategy for supporting children whom exhibit behaviour that is less desirable in the classroom. Further studies are needed that examine the powerful role that peers play in modeling and reinforcing SES in the classroom and how educators can plan their instruction to utilize all members of the classroom community. As

discussed in the limitations, additional research linking the benefits of the Roots of Empathy (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2011) and MindUP programs (2011) and their ability to decrease behaviours that are less desirable would be beneficial to the early childhood community, as these programs are gaining popularity in the educational field.

Through the review of SEL and its role in shaping the lives and development of young children, I investigated the ways in which educators can promote social-emotional skills in the diverse preschool and early Primary settings. I have come to the understanding that children's emotional literacy and social relationships can have lasting effects throughout their lives well beyond their childhood years (Elias & Arnold, 2006). Children's social-emotional skills affect their day-to-day lives, their social worlds, their connections with adults, and many aspects in their futures (CASEL, 2014). With that said, I feel that greater effort is necessary to model for families, communities and schools the powerful role SEL plays in early child development. With this in mind, I propose that the government of BC could initiate this movement by emphasizing the importance of SEL in their government funded, early childhood development programs, including Mother Goose (BC Council For Families, 2016), StrongStart BC (Government of BC, 2016), and Ready, Set, Learn (Government of BC, 2015). These parent-participation based programs are excellent spaces to begin these conversations surrounding the importance of SEL in early childhood. In addition, teacher education programs have the opportunity to stress the importance of integrating SEL content into early childhood education and teaching practices (SEL T-ED, 2016). The more recent curriculum redesign, the Core Competencies (BC Ministry of Education, 2015a) reflects the changes taking place as educators reevaluate their classrooms and voice their concerns over the changing needs of British Columbia's children. With greater emphasis on academic preparation and less opportunities for

families to devote to SEL, the educational community may then find practical ways to promote and develop SES as outlined by this capstone. Greater in-service education, on site coaching for educators (Fox, Hemmeter, Snyder, Binder, & Clarke, 2011), and district-wide implementation of early intervention programs would be powerful statements in spreading the message that SEL positively impacts children. It is within this effort that I seek to share my website with early childhood educators, primary teachers, educational assistants, and families of young children (see Appendix D). In my role as an early childhood educator and through the use of this tool, I can facilitate the SEL content to my students' families and school colleagues on social-emotional learning.

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## APPENDIX A

# SEL Core Competencies

### Self-Management

- Regulating one's emotions
- Managing stress
- Self-control
- Self-motivation
- Setting and achieving goals

### Self-Awareness

- Labeling one's feelings
- Relating feelings and thoughts to behavior
- Accurate self-assessment of strengths and challenges
- Self-efficacy
- Optimism

### Social Awareness

- Perspective taking
- Empathy
- Respecting diversity
- Understanding social and ethical norms of behavior
- Recognizing family, school, and community supports

### Relationship Skills

- Building relationships with diverse individuals and groups
- Communicating clearly
- Working cooperatively
- Resolving conflicts
- Seeking help



### Responsible Decision-Making

- Considering the well-being of self and others
- Recognizing one's responsibility to behave ethically
- Basing decisions on safety, social and ethical considerations
- Evaluating realistic consequences of various actions
- Making constructive, safe choices for self, relationships and school

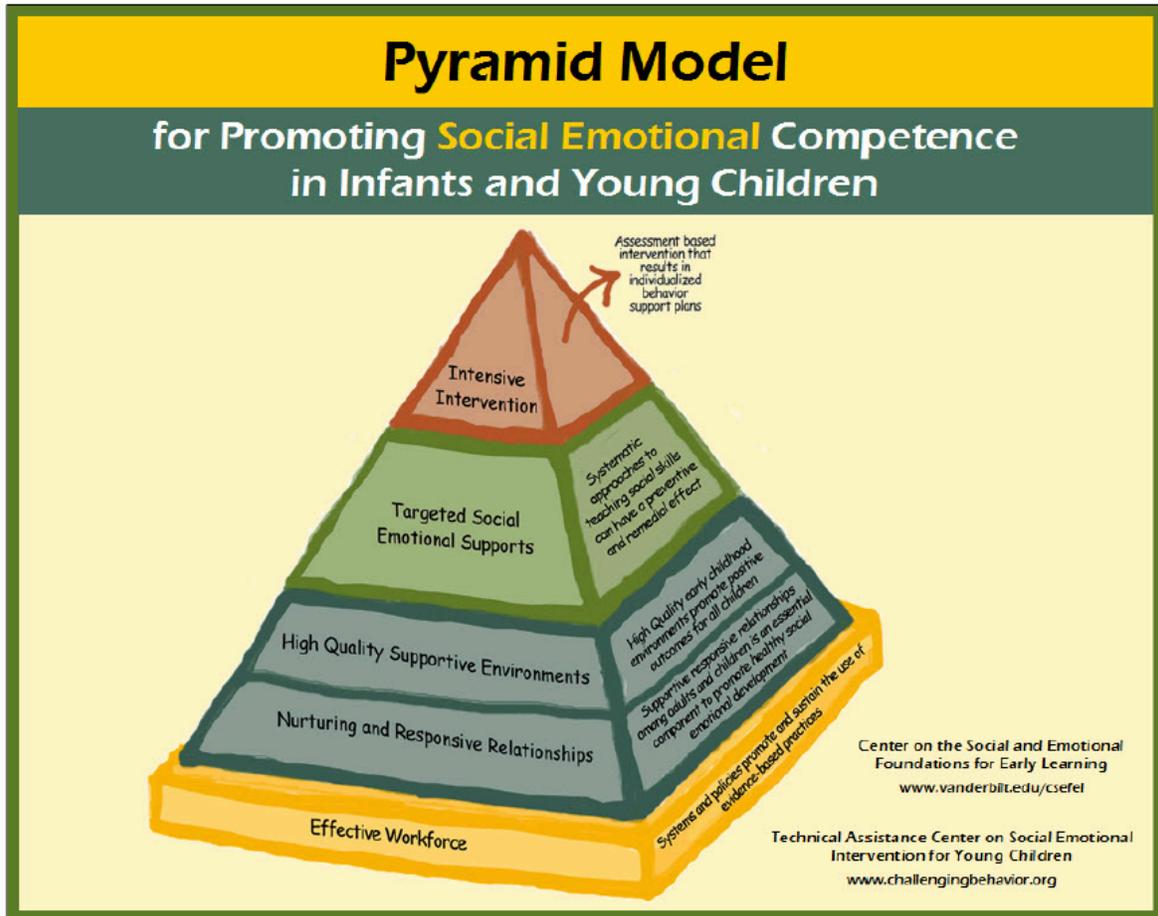
Sources: CASEL, Acknowledge Alliance



Source: <https://www.austinisd.org/academics/sel>

This image is used with permission from the Austin Independent School District.

## APPENDIX B



Source:

[http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/documents/pyramid\\_model\\_handout.pdf](http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/documents/pyramid_model_handout.pdf)

## APPENDIX C

### Images of Peer Support in the Classroom

The images shown here reflect the use of peer partnerships in the classroom. These images were taken during the winter of 2016. All images are used with permission and written consent. This is a template of the written consent form that was signed by the parents of my students.

January 5, 2016

As some of you may know, I am completing my Masters in Early Childhood Education at the University of British Columbia this month. My graduating project is on the topic of social-emotional development in young children. My project includes a research-based paper as well as a website I have created for educators and families. The website has a number of resources available for parents to support their child's social-emotional skills. This also includes the review of several children's picture books that parents can use to teach these topics.

With permission, I would like to include a few photographs I have taken in our classroom of the children working with their peers in our Daily 5 centres. These activities include the students reading in pairs, spelling with magnets, completing ABC puzzles together etc. I look forward to sharing my website with our families so that they can use its resources in their home environments.

Thank you for your support and partnership. Please do not hesitate to email me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Angela Boyce

anboyce@sd35.bc.ca

- 
- I consent that my child's photograph may be used within the paper and on the website discussed above.
  - Do not use my child's photograph for this project.

---

(Child's Full Name)

---

(Parent Name and Signature)

---

(Date)



1. Word Work: Writing high-frequency words on to wipe boards.



2. Word Work: Sorting magnetic letters alphabetically.



3. Word Work: Spelling names and high-frequency words with magnetic letters.



4. Read to Someone: "Sitting elbow to elbow, knee to knee, book in the middle so we both can see!"



5. Work on Writing: Making sentences with partners. These students are from different grades.



6. Building with pattern blocks during centre time.



7. Technology: Using ipad mini's to demonstrate numeral skills.

## APPENDIX D

### “Teaching Social-Emotional Competence Through Children’s Literature” Website

My capstone website address is [www.fosteringselinchildren.weebly.com](http://www.fosteringselinchildren.weebly.com)



### Purpose and Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this website is to share resources with parents, fellow educators and those interested in supporting the social emotional learning (SEL) of young children.

#### **Purpose:**

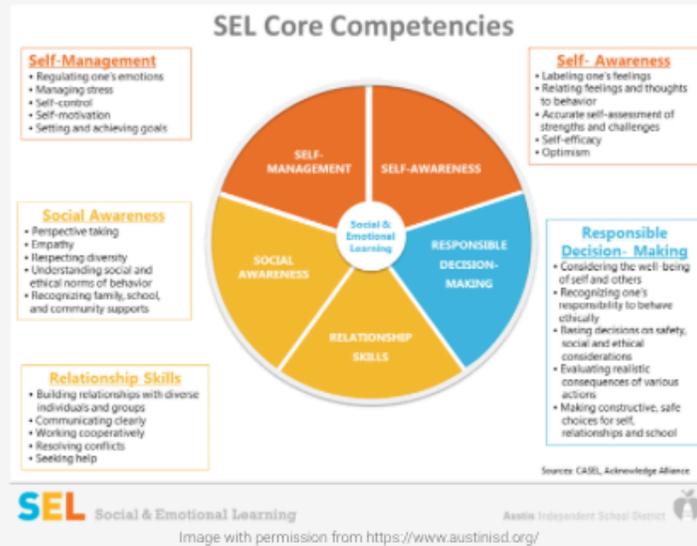
In my discussions with colleagues and parents within my community, I found there was a strong desire to develop and support children's social-emotional skills. Yet, many individuals did not know where to begin. This resource intends to provide families and educators with a review of children's literature that is aimed at teaching SEL as well as a variety of resources for home and school use. I also wish to share the resources I have found beneficial to my teaching practice. I encourage you to visit the "What is SEL?" page to gain a clearer understanding of SEL and its impact on the lives of young children.

#### **Theoretical Framework:**

This website is part of a capstone project for the University of British Columbia's Master of Education in Early Childhood Education. This project has been informed by the theoretical frameworks of theorists: Lev Vygotsky, and Albert Bandura. Specifically, it is the social constructivist theory by Vygotsky (1978), and the social learning theory by Bandura (1989) that have guided my research. The topic of SEL will be examined through the lens of the social constructivist epistemology. The social constructivist theory by Vygotsky's (1978) explored the notion that learning and development cannot be separated from their social context. He argued that play provides the ideal context for children to learn the rules of behaviour. Vygotsky based his developmental assumptions on the concepts of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). ZPD is defined as what the learner can achieve independently compared with what they could potentially learn with the support of a more capable peer or adult (Vygotsky, 1978). This more capable or skilled individual is termed the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). In his social learning theory, Bandura (1989) suggested that learning is a socially driven phenomenon based heavily on the concept of modeling. It is this concept of modeling that will be explored further as a positive strategy for teaching SEL to young children in a social environment.

## What is SEL?

**Social-emotional skills (SES) or social emotional learning (SEL)** is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2014). The interconnected competencies of SEL include self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making and relationship skills.



The early years of childhood mark a critical period of development that can have lasting effects across many areas of their lives. As children enter the preschool-early Primary settings, these difficulties can arise as they begin to expand their social relationships with school peers and teachers.

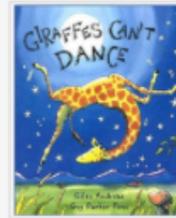
### Why Teach SEL?

Considerable research has revealed that children with age-appropriate SES have less behaviour problems (Cook, Greenberg, & Kusche, 1994; Cooper & Tinkaz, 2007), are more engaged in learning opportunities (Denham & Brown, 2010; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011), can regulate their emotions and focus better on tasks (Denham & Brown, 2010), and are labeled as school ready by their parents and teachers (Arslan et al., 2011; Denham & Brown, 2010; McClelland et al., 2006; Rhoades et al., 2011).

### What Does This Mean For Learning?

Andreae, G. & Parker-Rees, G. (Illustrator). (2001). *Giraffes Can't Dance*. USA: Orchard Books.

This book introduces a clumsy giraffe, named Gerald, who cannot find his place in the jungle. He notices that every jungle animal has their own special dance, yet he stands out as the one who cannot dance. The author explores a variety of emotions and thoughts within the main character including sadness, jealousy, pride and lastly happiness. It demonstrates how children can learn to understand and manage emotions in order to develop self-management and social awareness. The light-hearted, dancing animals make this a fun story for children.



Bang, M. (1999). *When Sophie Gets Angry-Really, Really Angry*. USA: Scholastic.

This book serves as an excellent model for teaching children how to manage difficult emotions such as anger. It begins with a typical playtime between siblings. Sophie can no longer handle the frustration she is feeling and it causes her to explode with anger. When she runs out of her house, it offers a good opportunity to discuss the safe ways we can express and manage our emotions. It allows the audience to explore how to express anger safely without harming oneself or others. There are opportunities for perspective taking throughout this story.



Carlson, N. (1988). *I Like Me*. USA: The Penguin Group.

This book introduces a sweet and colourful pig that proudly expresses her positive self-esteem. The author shares many positive statements that the audience could relate to, such as "I can ride fast!" and "I draw beautiful pictures". When the author shares feelings such as sadness and being discouraged, the mood is light-hearted. Children can easily relate to the experiences of this character. It offers an opportunity to discuss setting and achieving goals, as well as discuss what motivation looks like for children. It portrays the classic lesson of, "If I fall, I can get back up and try again".



Curtis, J.L. & Cornell, L. (Illustrator). (2004). *It's Hard to Be Five: Learning How to Work My Control Panel*. USA: Harper Collins Publisher.

This book explores the child's perspective of learning the difficult skills of self-control and how to manage one's emotions across different situations. The text describes the real life challenges many children can relate to including their bodies growing faster than their clothes, always being told "No", stay clean, and sit still at the carpet. There is a change in thinking midway through the book. The character begins to express their pride for what they have accomplished, such as walking independently and knowing when it is safe to cross the street. The audience is left with the final message that if they "mess up" it is all part of the learning process. This book teaches the value of having your own mind and heart to guide your decisions. It also promotes the development of self-awareness.



Curtis, J.L. & Cornell, L. (Illustrator). (1998). *Today I Feel Silly & Others Moods That Make My Day*. USA: Harper Collins Publisher.

This book explores the variety of emotions a child can feel from silly, lonely, angry and confused. The story is told through the child's perspective with humorous descriptions outlining when they felt those particular ways. Children as well as adults will surely recall a time when they felt one of the emotions discussed and this can spark some thoughtful classroom discussions. The book honours the belief that every child has a unique appearance and personality, which sends a



## Information

This section offers more information on the interconnected competencies of SEL and evidence-based programs. Select the area or organization you wish to explore further and this will launch the website link.

CASEL

IMPORTANCE OF FOSTERING SEL

CORE COMPETENCIES

ZERO TO THREE SEL

ROOTS OF EMPATHY

MINDUP

SEL AND PRESERVICE TEACHING STUDY



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## Hands On Resources

In this section, parents and educators can access resources and activities to use with children to develop and reinforce SEL.

FRASER VALLEY REGIONAL LIBRARY

APPS HELPING KIDS DEVELOP SEL

SELF-REGULATION GAMES

BC'S EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCES

PARENT RESOURCES FOR TEACHING EMOTIONS

PBS PARENT RESOURCES

PARENT TOOL KIT



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### Recommendations for Practice

Teaching practices that promote social-emotional learning (SEL) form a more collaborative, supportive learning atmosphere that connects children with their peers, teachers and schools. This positive atmosphere accepts all abilities and finds unique ways children can achieve success. I present the strategies I have found beneficial in my

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## APPENDIX E

### A Handout for Educators and Parents

This is located on my website resource page URL:

<http://fosteringselinchildren.weebly.com/resources.html>

#### Recommendations for Practice

Teaching practices that promote social-emotional learning (SEL) form a more collaborative, supportive learning atmosphere that connects children with their peers, teachers and schools. This positive atmosphere accepts all abilities and finds unique ways children can achieve success. I present the strategies I have found beneficial in my role as an early childhood educator. The following list outlines practical examples educators can use to foster social-emotional skills through positive teacher-student relationships, classroom routines and academic instruction, which provides children time to observe, model and demonstrate such skills.

- **Make meaningful connections** and recall important information about your students- “I remember you said you got a new bunny, how is Oreo doing?” or “I see you got your hair cut, I like it!”
- **Model respectful language and prosocial skills-** I sing the *Good Morning* song with my students for attendance. After this, I greet each student with “Good morning, Thomas” and they reply, “Good morning, Mrs. Boyce.”
- **Walk your students through peer conflicts-** give them the proper script to repair relationships and learn from their social challenges.
- **Model the expectations you hold for the students-** this includes demonstrating patience and kindness. I walk my students through my feelings and use clear language they understand. “I see almost all of you are ready. I appreciate those

of you that came to the carpet and were ready right away.”

- **Foster friendship skills** through building a strong classroom community through literature, positive reinforcement and peer mentoring.
- **Create predictable, well-planned routines** in order to build expectations of what behaviours are appropriate across different school environments.
- **Use breathing activities** during transitions to ease the stressful responses. When entering from outdoor to indoor, from group work to instruction at the carpet, from lively play-based learning to end of day routines (Refer to the MindUP program for more information)
- **Integrate SEL into the curriculum-** including SEL into literacy, music, and play-based activities allow children the opportunity to exercise their social-emotional knowledge during their interactions with peers and other adults.
- **Use visuals and verbal cues** to reinforce expectations and meet the needs of all learning styles.
- **Build the home-school connection-** I have had great success with a classroom website to build the home-school partnership, invite parents in for “Noisy Reading” at the beginning of the day, send home parent-child collaborative projects to complete, allow parents to share their expertise and professional background in the classroom.

This section outlines some strategies educators and parents can use to provide children time to observe, model and demonstrate SES through peer driven activities.

- **Create small peer groupings** that allow for natural scaffolding among members- this may include table groups, playtime groups, brainstorming pairs,

literacy or math groups (see Appendix C).

- **Provide children with a variety of play opportunities-** when children are learning to understand and express their emotions, providing a variety of playmates and environments can be beneficial to their self-awareness and social awareness.
- **Classroom jobs-** the special helper models calendar, how to line up, show and tell, and serves as a daily model for expected behaviours. The “Ask me” person allows children the opportunity to earn the leadership role and provide guidance to peers experiencing difficulty with tasks.
- **Friendship Circle-** A whole group discussion regarding peer-to-peer conflicts and successes lead by the educator. Similar to a classroom meeting that offers encouragement and solutions for the social challenges taking place in the lives of your students. Topic discussions include playing fair, apologizing, refusing to join other’s negative behaviour and cooperating.
- **Buddy Classes-** having a buddy classes, with older and younger peers, allows children to participate in the peer scaffolding process. When children interact with peers of different ages, they can build their confidence through being the more capable peer at times, and other times as the less skilled peer. This process promotes the learning process in children.

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Summary:

I have found these strategies helpful in supporting the social-emotional needs of my students. I believe these recommendations will support both educators and parents in the task

of promoting social-emotional learning in young children. By honouring SEL principals and being proactive, parents and educators can lessen the frequency of disruptive or less desirable behaviours seen from children low in SES. The use of peer mentoring is a beneficial approach to developing SES and utilizing the more skilled peers in the early learning environment. It is important to conclude with the notion that SEL can be integrated within all areas of education and teaching SEL should not be seen as “more work” for parents and/or educators.