Teachers' Social-Emotional Learning: From Necessity to Possibility

Nurit Wolf, Carmen (M) Cretu

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Nurit Wolf [a*], Carmen (M) Cretu [a]

[a] Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Iasi, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", Iasi, Romania

*Corresponding author: nurit869@gmail.com

Abstract

Keywords:
game-based learning; Socio-emotional competencies; SEL; Teachers' development.

This article aims to present the construction and characteristics of social-emotional game-based learning (SEGBL) - an intervention program for teachers, which aims to promote teachers' socio-emotional learning (SEL). The program is supported by the positive effects of SEL on students and leans on research claiming a direct and significant correlation between teachers' socio-emotional competencies (SEC), and the advancement of students' SEL. The program method is game-based learning, which by its very nature calls for experience, social interaction and emotional reflection and is particularly suitable for promoting SEL. Teachers' role in developing lifelong learners corresponds to the infrastructure of education systems that have been able to place students' mental health as a primary goal contributing not only to their mental well-being but also to their academic achievements. The Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) has united these streams into a comprehensive definition of SEL including five domains constituting educational concepts and ways of working. Teachers, who are responsible for imparting SEL skills to their students, must have knowledge of SEL and develop personal SEL skills. Few studies target how to cultivate SEL for adults. This intervention program will try to bridge this gap. This program will be evaluated further in the frame of empirical research.

Zusammenfasung

Schlüsselworte:
Spielbasiertes Lernen; Sozio-emotionale Kompetenzen; SEL; Entwicklung der Lehrer.

Dieser Artikel zielt darauf ab, die Konstruktion und Merkmale des sozial-emotionalen spielbasierten Lernens (SEGBL) vorzustellen - ein Interventionsprogramm für Lehrer, das darauf abzielt, das sozial-emotionale Lernen (SEL) der Lehrer zu fördern. Das Programm wird durch die positiven Auswirkungen von SEL auf Schüler unterstützt und stützt sich auf Forschungsergebnisse, die einen direkten und signifikanten Zusammenhang zwischen den sozial-emotionalen Kompetenzen (SEC) der Lehrer und der Weiterentwicklung des SEL der Schüler behaupten. Die Programm-Methode ist spielbasiertes Lernen, das aufgrund seiner Natur Erfahrung, soziale Interaktion und emotionale Reflexion erfordert und sich besonders zur Förderung von SEL eignet. Die Rolle der Lehrer bei der Entwicklung lebenslanger Lernender entspricht der Infrastruktur von Bildungssystemen, die es geschafft haben, die psychische Gesundheit der Schüler als vorrangiges Ziel zu platzieren, was nicht nur zu ihrem mentalen Wohlbefinden, sondern auch zu ihren akademischen Leistungen beiträgt. Das Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) hat diese Strömungen zu einer umfassenden Definition von SEL vereint, die fünf Bereiche umfasst, die Bildungskonzepte und Arbeitsweisen darstellen. Lehrer, die für die Vermittlung von SEL-Fähigkeiten an ihre Schüler verantwortlich sind, müssen über Kenntnisse zu SEL verfügen und persönliche SEL-Fähigkeiten entwickeln. Nur wenige Studien befassen sich damit, wie SEL bei Erwachsenen entwickelt werden kann. Dieses Interventionsprogramm wird versuchen, diese Lücke zu schließen. Das Programm wird im Rahmen empirischer Forschung weiter evaluiert.

1. Introduction

Teachers enter their classrooms, carrying life experiences, strengths, life challenges, personalities, beliefs, and abilities. How can they teach and direct their students to face challenges in their lives without knowing themselves? strengths and challenges of who they are, and the tools and skills to help them face difficulties, without using and developing their own social and emotional skills?

Research shows that successful teachers are those with high socio-emotional competencies (SEC) that help them integrate into school and succeed in their teaching work (Colle & Perry, 2019). From a student's perspective, optimal mastery of SEL competencies correlates closely with learning success and social and emotional functioning that continues in their adult lives as people and citizens (Jones et al., 2017).

These understandings are part of the process educational systems have undergone over the years, leading to established educational perceptions that place students' emotional and social aspects at the center of educational work (DeJaeghere & Murphy-Graham, 2022). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL,2020) united these perceptions into a comprehensive definition of social and emotional learning – SEL, increasingly occupies a central place in and leads educational

system policy. SEL stands for a combination of developmental and applied sciences (Jones et al., 2019) and is defined as the process by which children and adults acquire knowledge, concepts, and skills (CASEL, 2020). It includes three domains: emotional processes, social/interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation, each encompassing different competencies (Jones et al., 2013).

Teachers are responsible for imparting SEL competencies at school and are required to have both knowledge and competencies in the subject as well as developed personal SEL skills (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Yet, even though research has shown a positive correlation between teachers' SEC and promoting students' SEL (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021), research about teachers' SEL is deficient (Collie & Perry, 2019). Research conducted in several US states, which aimed to investigate and collect data on teachers' SEL, found that most teachers testified to a lack of SEL knowledge, and most schools did not have resources and training for teachers to teach SEL (Schepe-Tiska et. al., 2021). This gap explains the broad consensus that the next generation of research should include a better understanding of the ways to train teachers in SEL frameworks, which would lead to quality implementation of SEL in educational systems (Schonert-Reichl, 2019).

This article discusses the socio-emotional game-based learning (SEGBL) training program, which was constructed to provide an answer and bridge this gap: on the one hand, the need for teachers with high SEC to lead high-quality SEL in educational framework, and on the other hand, the lack of programs focused on the development of teachers' SEL (Gimbert et al., 2023).

1.1. Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL)

There is broad, international consensus among educators, governments, and organizations that non-academic skills and competencies are necessary for the development of learning, health, and general well-being (DeJaeghere & Murphy-Graham, 2022). SEL is based on the understanding that the personal and social complexities facing students and their families (economic and social pressures, bilingual and multicultural communities, exposure to media and technology) require educational systems to expand their perspective beyond academic achievements to enable students to succeed (Greenberg et al., 2017). CASEL identified five social and emotional core competencies forming an umbrella for SEL skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness,

relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These five clusters contain thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors (Greenberg et al., 2017).

According to the SEL concept, the space in which people acquire SEC is through relationships they develop with others and through their subjective interpretations and responses to these interpersonal experiences (Oliveira et al., 2021). SEL competencies are not only innate skills and can be acquired and developed through programs and practices (Jones et al., 2019). SEL interventions aim to promote SEC through explicit instruction of core intra- and interpersonal skills, often using learner-centered approaches (Oliveira et al., 2021), so they can be used in diverse situations and everyday behaviors (Durlak et al., 2015). Cultivating teachers' SEC is expressed in developing their knowledge and skills to help their personal success, being a model for their students, and teaching SEL effectively (Collie & Perry 2019). Programs designed to develop teachers' SEC should include theoretical knowledge and strategies for teaching SEL, developing teachers' personal skills, and supportive feedback from both peers and administrators (Durlak et al., 2015). This framework is also the framework of the SEBGL program, developed by this author, which is based on a central axis of SEL, and its method is game-based learning.

1.2. Game-based learning as an infrastructure for teaching SEL

Game-based learning is a teaching approach (Pyle & Danniels, 2017) where a game is a fundamental learning resource (Mardell et al., 2019). Wu et al. (2012) identified components in a game from four learning theories:

1. Cognitive: stimulates the thinking and processing of information.

2. Humanistic: uses experience to reflect on learning.

3. Constructive: a social learning process relying on the interaction between participants.

4. Behavioral: deals with motivation for learning based on reward and pleasure and can even drive behavioral change.

Research shows that learning through play improves cognitive skills such as problem-solving, strategies, and creative thinking, and meta-cognitive skills such as implicit interpretation, feedback, reflection, and meta-cognitive strategies (Ke et al., 2015). In addition, playing games involves the

development of social and emotional skills (Singer et al., 2006). They encourage a sense of competence, self-regulation, empathy, and risk-taking (Ke et al., 2015). They also reduce problems of introversion and extroversion (Mardell et al., 2019). Social interaction that occurs during a game allows participants to expand their previous knowledge and skills, which creates a close connection between the nature of the game on its components to SEL development (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). This connection and all the effects mentioned, together with transactions between people within the social settings of the game (Dyson et al., 2020), constitute a platform and infrastructure, making game-based learning a suitable method for teaching and practicing SEL.

1.3. Gap in Knowledge

The literature is replete with SEL programs for students aiming to promote SEL, academic achievement, social aspects, and emotional aspects (Ferreira et al., 2020; Gimbert et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2018), literature on programs analysis and their effects (Barnes, 2019; Jones et al., 2021), reviews of specific programs (Al-Jbouri et al., 2022), and reviews of programs according to criteria such as sorting the skills they emphasize (Jones et al., 2017; Kats Gold et al., 2020).

Most existing SEL programs designed for teachers are one of two types:

1. Methods for teaching SEL, accompanied by mentoring and/or instruction (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

2. SEL programs from psychological domains such as mindfulness (Schonert-Reichl, 2017) that do not deal with explicit SEL (Schonert-Reichl, 2017), when mindfulness-type programs may develop mindfulness as specific content and not necessarily as SEC development (Oliveira et al., 2021).

2. The Socio-Emotional Game-Based Learning (SEGBL) Training Program

Placing SEL at the center of educational consciousness should include teachers who are at the forefront of educational activities. SEL is not limited to knowledge content that must be known or memorized. SEL is an internal process (related to the acquisition of skills and tools) that determines patterns of thinking, behaviour, and a way of life. These two assumptions are the engine for the construction of the SEGBL intervention program.

2.1 Rationale

The SEGBL program is supported by the positive effects of SEL on students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017) and leans on research claiming a direct and significant correlation between teachers' SEC and the advancement of students' SEL (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021). Teachers who are responsible for imparting SEL skills to their students must have knowledge of SEL and develop personal SEL skills (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Almost no programs target how to cultivate SEL for adults (Gimbert et al., 2023). This program will attempt to bridge this gap.

The program is designed for teachers and intended as learning through personal experience. It is based on a game-based learning methodology, whose characteristics are related to social interaction and emotional reflection, and therefore is particularly suitable to promote SEL (Hromek & Roffey, 2009).

2.2. Program aims

The aims of this program are related to the field of SEL, but also include goals for teachers' personal development and school staff development, as a group:

1. Teacher training in SEL knowledge/skills/strategies.

2. Promoting teachers' SEL

3. Enhancing teachers' personal development in areas of self-efficacy, resilience, and well-being

4. Enhancing the development of the teachers' collective efficacy and producing a uniform school SEL language.

2.3. Participants

The program is intended for an elementary school's educational team (children aged 6-12, grades 1-6): teachers, officials, and all those responsible for education in the school.

2.4. Structure and Operation

The program is conducted as a workshop using a game-based learning method, combining knowledge, experience, and reflection processes. The main content area is SEL's explicit knowledge and strategies, emphasizing its five components. The program takes place as part of school training, at the school, with the entire educational staff and it is implemented by a facilitator specializing in SEL and trained in the

program. The program duration is thirty academic hours, with ten sessions of three academic hours each.

Phases and Contents

Sessions 1-2:   Program presentation, theoretical framework, knowledge of SEL and game-based learning.

Sessions 3-12: In-depth learning, strategies, and training of the five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Sessions 13-14:   SEL implementation and instruction in the classroom.

Sessions 15: Program's and SEL's contribution to individuals and the group.

2.5. Program Originality

The SEGBL program's originality lies on two central axes related to and coordinated with each other combining the content of the program, participants, and method. The first axis is related to the content:

▪ The program's content is explicit SEL instruction. Developing SEC skills through SEL knowledge bases, strategies, tools, and skills.

▪ The program's target population is teachers. The program is focused on teachers as people, and not as mediators for teaching SEL to students or implementing SEL in classrooms.

▪ The program's method is game-based learning. In this program, game-based learning is not an approach, and the game is not taught as a tool to teach or learn in classrooms. The physical, social, and emotional space where the game takes place constitutes an infrastructure in which SEL skills are practiced. The game is intended for teachers as a learning space and reflective tool, both for learning SEL and deepening their personal and group self-awareness.

The second axis is a process axis related to the teachers' personal and group development.

Personal development: The program intends to develop teachers as people and professionals. These two parts are intertwined and related to each other.

1. Personal development including reflective ability and self-observation to deepen awareness of the forces that motivate or inhibit them and the development of social and emotional skills to help them deal with life's challenges.

2. Professional development including reflective ability and self-observation as teachers to deepen awareness of forces that motivate and hinder them in classrooms and in front of students. Developing social and emotional skills to help them deal with challenges in the classroom, discipline problems, or challenging students, and creating benevolent, healthy, and encouraging relationships with students to make their teaching work easier.

These two axes, one in the visible layer and the other in the hidden layer create processes constituting the program's goals, as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The SEGBL training program

3. Conclusions

Education systems' goals in the coming years should start with teachers' development since they are both at the forefront of the educational process and those who shape graduates of the educational framework. Teachers' abilities, skills, character, and inner strength are not the same. Teachers' emotional and social competencies may empower and promote students but may block and even cause damage.

The initial experience when entering a classroom during an activity opens a window to what is happening in it and bears witness to the classroom climate: relationships between a teacher and students, relationships between students, classroom atmosphere, emotional climate, and learning experience. All of these can demonstrate to teachers themselves: their abilities to navigate, mediate, identify students' needs, be empathetic, and of course, teach.

The educational language that SEL bring to the educational world may also dictate what climate prevails in classrooms and schools, what is the degree of student's well-being, and what their contribution to society in the future as adults could be. Education focused on students' emotional and social well-being is an education that produces a desire for learning, development, and self-realization.

The SEGBL program's purpose is to try and complete the missing part in teachers' creation of an educational language of SEL. The program was designed as part of educational research aimed to examine the effects of teachers' SEL development on their well-being, sense of coherence in teaching, self-efficacy, and collective efficacy. The assumption of the research is that the development of teachers' SEL will also contribute to their resilience, personal awareness, and abilities, both on an individual level and as a team, which may make them quality teachers for their students.

Authors note:

Nurit Wolf has been serving in the field of education for over 30 years. For the last 17 years, she has served as a primary school principal in Israel and conducts further training on pedagogical and emotional issues at her school. She is a mentor for master's degree students in educational systems management at Haifa University. She holds an education bachelor's degree from Bar Ilan University and a history master's degree from Haifa University (Israel). Currently, a doctoral student in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the "El. I. Cuza" the University of Iasi conducting research examining the effect of a social-emotional learning (SEL) intervention program, designed for teachers, on their self-efficacy, well-being, resilience, and collective efficacy. Her research interests include SEL, game-based learning, and teachers' development.

Carmen (M) Cretu is a Professor Ph.D. at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Iasi, Romania.

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