

Chapter 6

Creating Inclusive Classroom Communities Through Social and Emotional Learning to Reduce Social Marginalization Among Students

June L. Preast

University of Missouri, USA

Nicky Bowman

University of Missouri, USA

Chad A. Rose

University of Missouri, USA

ABSTRACT

A student's social and emotional skills are related to how well equipped they are to address and adapt to the academic, behavioral, and functional demands of the classroom. With the increased attention on academic outcomes, the opportunities to teach social and emotional learning (SEL) are limited. However, SEL approaches have demonstrated increases in functional, behavioral, and academic outcomes for school aged youth. This chapter is designed to identify the key components of SEL, provide guidance in implementation, and describe how SEL can help reduce the social marginalization among youth with disabilities and those at-risk for disability identification.

INTRODUCTION

A student's social and emotional skills are related to how well equipped they are to address and adapt to the academic, behavioral, and functional demands of the classroom (CASEL, 2012; Espelage, Rose, & Polanin, 2015, 2016). Students with age-appropriate social and emotional skills tend to acquire and maintain friendships and appropriately manage social problems more efficiently than those that do

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not possess these skills (Merrell & Gimpel, 1998). Effective implementation of appropriate social and emotional learning can be directly affected by school factors (CASEL, 2012), yet social and emotional instruction that extends beyond the classroom supports improved skill development for school-aged youth (Tolan, Guerra, & Kendall, 1995). However, to facilitate more inclusive classroom practices, the adoption of prosocial goals and supports is important to social and emotional development of school-aged youth with and without disabilities (Erdley & Asher, 1999).

While social and emotional development is critical for all students, specific implementation of a social and emotional curriculum may be more germane for individuals with disabilities (Espelage et al., 2015, 2016). Specifically, due to the varying degrees of educational support based upon individual needs, students with disabilities may receive different educational experiences and social opportunities in comparison to their peers without disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEIA], 2004; Maag & Katsiyannis, 2012; Yell, Shriver, & Katsiyannis, 2006). While these educational experiences may vary, the prevalence of students with disabilities who receive special education services within an inclusive environment continues to increase (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015; Rose, Simpson, & Moss, 2015). Unfortunately, students with disabilities are often viewed as outsiders, have fewer friends, and have lower quality of social interaction due, in part, to the restriction of educational and social opportunities (Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012), which may increase social marginalization. This level of marginalization may also be associated with social and communication skill deficits (Christensen, Fraynt, Neece, & Baker, 2012; Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011; Rose, Forber-Pratt, Espelage, & Aragon, 2013; Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, & Frerichs, 2012), where social and emotional learning programs have proved promising in reducing this overrepresentation (Espelage et al., 2015, 2016). The purpose of this chapter is to describe the central tenants of social and emotional learning, explain how social and emotional learning can be embedded within positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) framework, highlight the outcomes associated with social and emotional learning, underscore the importance of social and emotional learning as an approach to reducing social marginalization among youth with disabilities, and provide recommendations for social and emotional program implementation.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

“Social and emotional learning is the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others” (Zins & Elias, 2007, p. 234). A social and emotional learning approach is grounded in the notion that behaviors, both intrinsic and extrinsic, are linked to social and academic outcomes (Espelage et al., 2016; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Five cluster areas have been identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) that encompass cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies; self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2012). Addressing the five cluster areas, as well as, improving student beliefs about self, school and others is the foundation for students who are more prepared to meet academic and social demands (CASEL, 2012). CASEL (2012) provided direction and definitions for each of the domains that serve as the foundation for implementing school-based social and emotional learning approaches (*see* Table 1).

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