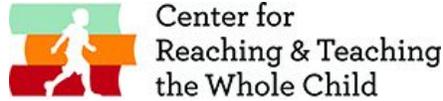


***Social and Emotional Learning and Cultural Competence in
Teacher Education:
Where Are We and Where Do We Need to Go?***

prepared by Suzanne Bouffard, Ph.D.
for
The Center for Reaching & Teaching the Whole Child
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In June 2016, California’s Commission on Teacher Credentialing adopted major revisions to the California Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs). The TPEs now require an understanding of mental health, social-emotional competencies, and health needs of students in addition to expectations related to trauma, cultural responsiveness, racism, and implicit and explicit bias. These changes also ensure candidates are trained in the foundations of positive interventions and supports, restorative justice, and conflict resolution practices to foster a caring community where each student is treated fairly and respectfully by adults and peers.

To gather information about the current status of social-emotional learning (SEL) and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in teacher education programs in California, and the needs for training and support, The Commission, the Center for Reaching & Teaching the Whole Child (CRTWC), and Children Now conducted a survey of teacher preparation institutions in the state. (The survey is included in Appendix B of this report.) It included questions about program administrators’ knowledge of SEL and CRT, current activities to train teacher candidates, and needs for professional development to boost the presence of these skills among programs, faculty, and candidates. Its primary goal was to support the Commission’s work in providing support to programs as they implement SEL/CRT, including planning regional conferences, workshops, other forms of support, and resources.

The survey (whose methods and sample are described in the Appendix) was sent to deans, directors of teacher education, and credential analysts at all 95 institutions approved by the Commission to offer Multiple Subject, Single Subject, and/or Special Education programs. Responses summarized across the 78 completed surveys illuminate several themes relevant to the Commission’s work going forward. This report describes those themes and their implications for improving teacher education.

Themes

1) Recognizing the importance of SEL and CRT

The majority of respondents said that it is a priority to find “additional ways to integrate” SEL and CRT competencies into their programs now that the TPEs include these areas. Approximately 26% said this was their top priority, and another 60% said it is one of the top 3 current priorities. Only 13% said it was not a priority at present. Although only 34 respondents provided additional explanation of their responses, these were illuminating. Nine said they are currently working to redesign courses and programs with SEL and/or CRT in mind, while 13 said these areas have always been a top priority. (Some of the latter indicated that it is even more of a priority now because of the new standards.) Only 3 perceived that they were already addressing SEL and CRT adequately. It is also worth noting that 5

pointed out that other new standards are also a priority and impact their ability to focus on SEL and CRT. A few said that, because of this, SEL is “way down the list” or hard to prioritize because “it all feels like a priority.”

These findings support our anecdotal experience that institutions’ programmatic priorities are heavily influenced by the TPEs and suggest that the Commission is taking an important step forward with the new standards. However, it should be noted that one administrator shared a perception that more should be done: “[SEL and CRT] has to be in the TPA (Teaching Performance Assessment) ... since testing manages the curriculum and until that is changed nothing will change.”

2) Defining and understanding SEL

Throughout the survey, respondents repeatedly raised the need for more clarity in the TPEs about how the Commission defines SEL and what programs are specifically expected to do. To establish more clarity, respondents expressed concerns about multiple SEL frameworks in programs and cooperating school districts, the need for specific articles and curriculum models, and the desire for professional development with guidance on where and how to cover SEL in the curriculum. A few administrators also raised questions about how to assess students’ competence or mastery in SEL, and concerns about whether programs will take the SEL TPEs seriously if they are not included on the teacher performance assessment (TPA).

Nonetheless, respondents had fairly consistent and accurate responses to the question, “How do you define social-emotional learning?” Roughly equal numbers of responses mentioned managing emotions, building social skills or competence, and setting goals or taking thoughtful action (24, 20, and 20, respectively). (Note that those themes were not mutually exclusive.) Encouragingly, 22 responses mentioned a connection between SEL and academic success, while only 2 suggested that SEL should be developed outside of school or as part of “the second curriculum.”

Nearly one-third of responses (26) referenced the CASEL definition and framework, suggesting some level of familiarity with SEL and a common foundation or jumping-off point. Several respondents appeared to have pasted CASEL’s definition verbatim from its website, but even that action suggests CASEL’s name recognition and probable influence. Furthermore, in a subsequent question, a consistent number of respondents reported using CASEL’s framework in their programs (25). (It should be noted, however, that an even larger number, 28, reported that they are not currently using any SEL framework.)

Taken together, these responses suggest that even those program administrators familiar with SEL desire more guidance from the Commission on where to focus their efforts. Additional themes about time pressures and competing priorities (described below) suggest a need for highly specific, actionable guidance.

3) Faculty knowledge and implementation of SEL

Survey respondents appeared to feel knowledgeable about SEL but to perceive their colleagues as lacking in knowledge and/or buy-in. The data do not make it possible to determine the accuracy of these perceptions, but they do suggest that building knowledge among faculty will be important moving forward. When asked about the biggest challenges to incorporating SEL competencies into their

programs, almost one-third of respondents (24) cited a lack of awareness or knowledge among faculty, and 4 more reported that colleagues were resistant or didn't value SEL.

A contradictory picture of current SEL implementation emerged. Twenty-nine respondents stated that their programs address all five dimensions of the CASEL SEL framework (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making) and nearly 30% believed they were integrating SEL "throughout course and field work." Yet when asked how many course syllabi mentioned SEL, most reported one course, and only two respondents said it is in all course syllabi. To a question about whether teacher candidates are asked to integrate SEL into a lesson plan or other product, approximately 60% responded yes, but the names and types of courses were so varied as to suggest a lack of consistency across programs and, in many cases, within programs.

These findings raise a question about whether programs are truly integrating SEL or simply addressing it in a "drive by" manner. Our anecdotal experience suggests that many programs may believe they are addressing SEL adequately but, in reality, are not giving it the attention it requires or erroneously assuming that crucial SEL competencies will be acquired organically and implicitly.

4) Challenges and needs in moving SEL forward

Respondents named several challenges to making SEL a priority and meeting the new TPEs in their programs. The most common type of challenge related to time constraints. Common concerns were similar to these: "The challenge we face is one of competing priorities. There is just so much for new teachers to learn," and, "We have a limited amount of courses to teach a lot of objectives and we want to do more than just 'drop' it in - that would be like 'heroes and holidays' instead of true integration - which needs to happen."

There may well be a connection between the time challenges and the faculty knowledge challenge described above. A large number of competing priorities, tightly packed curriculum, and chock-full faculty meetings make it difficult to provide professional development and training for faculty on SEL. In turn, a lack of faculty awareness about the topic can lead to lack of buy-in or priority, making it unlikely that faculty will push for time and attention to SEL in the curriculum. If such a feedback loop is occurring, it may be important to address the two challenges together in a systemic way.

Student teaching placements also pose challenges that the Commission may be positioned to address. When asked how teacher educators could bring SEL into the TPEs, the most common response was to incorporate it into fieldwork and reflective supervision. In a different question, several respondents noted the challenge of teaching SEL when student fieldwork sites were using old-school behaviorist approaches. This topic didn't come up much in other questions, so it was somewhat striking that it was such a popular theme here. Four respondents cited the challenge that students' placements and cooperating teachers do not use SEL-informed approaches; two of those explained that teacher candidates see entrenched behaviorist approaches that undermine SEL, and another found it difficult to provide consistency since each partner district was using a different SEL program or framework.

The importance of supervisors and student teaching placements was summed up by a respondent who said: "Currently, we are working...to develop seminars to offer more on SEL, and how our candidates can support their future students. But this is only occurring in the university classroom. Much of teacher education and the shaping of a student teacher's perspective is determined by their mentor teacher and their practicum site. The onus of improving SEL in schools cannot be placed on teacher education

programs...The great professional development need is in current teachers, and, most importantly, school leadership. If there is not buy-in from top to bottom by school leaders and teachers, we cannot expect teacher candidates to develop fluency with SEL practices.” Another respondent put a more positive spin on this challenge, saying, “Every school has some kind of SEL program. They differ dramatically. This variability provides fertile ground for discussion at the university. Supervisors can be focusing on implementation of the SEL program during evaluations.”

These responses suggest a need and opportunity for the Commission to provide guidance and incentives on making time and space for SEL during both coursework and field placements. As several respondents noted, programs’ structures and components are directly shaped by the TPEs and accreditation visits. On one hand, that bodes well for increasing attention to SEL. On the other, respondents are clearly struggling with how to make SEL fit into curricula, syllabi, and assessment of teacher candidates. The need for concrete models and resources was a theme throughout the survey, and nine respondents specifically asked for resources like lesson plans, syllabi, case studies, video examples, and support for revising courses.

5) Building a culturally responsive foundation

When asked about their understanding of culturally responsive teaching (CRT), respondents most commonly utilized Gloria Ladson-Billings’s definition of acknowledging and incorporating students’ cultural references. A few mentioned other frameworks, such as those from CRTWC, Linda Darling-Hammond, Geneva Gay, and Django Paris. Respondents also commonly talked about the importance of recognizing all cultures’ strengths or funds of knowledge. Most of the responses to this question were quite general, with little detail about what culture is or how a teacher would incorporate culture. However, a few did include some details such as “incorporating... language, dress, religion, traditions, etc... that are reflective of student cultures.” Only 7 respondents mentioned teachers exploring assumptions and beliefs such as implicit bias and white privilege.

Almost 80% believed that SEL and CRT are “very” or “extremely” aligned. Some commented that teachers need SEL skills in order to do CRT, while others noted the opposite. One noted that both are student-centered and about “the whole child.” Another commented that “Institutional racism, sexism and other forms of bias are sometimes at the root of both emotional and social struggles for our students.” Yet some answers seemed to reflect a lack of understanding of the SEL/CRT connection, such as “SEL is the ‘what’ and CRT is the ‘how’” and the not-inaccurate but incomplete “Both focus on being open to others’ ideas.”

There appears to be a need for more training in, and understanding of the specifics of CRT, how it can be built, and how it can be integrated with SEL. As one respondent explained, “In the real world, I think [SEL and CRT] are strongly connected. In the laundry list of the TPEs, this connection is not made clear.” It is also interesting to note that responses to most of the open-ended survey questions focused on SEL and few addressed CRT.

6) Additional professional development needs

When asked about the kinds of support and professional development they would like to see, respondents provided a broad and thoughtful list. (Only 8 out of 78 reported not needing any professional development.) Suggestions included:

- Workshops/ webinars/ online PD sessions (10). Some respondents mentioned specific presenters or frameworks: Anthony Ceja workshops (1), the Virginia Hansen Symposium (1), and CASEL workshops (1).
- Lesson plans/ syllabi/ support for course revision/ case studies and video examples (9)
- State conference led by CTC or a panel explaining how to incorporate SEL into content areas (2)
- Training about how to align CRT with SEL (2)
- Secondary school SEL skills and implementation (1)
- Selecting a core curriculum/approach to use as an anchor (1)
- Data measurements to assess candidate growth (1)
- Faculty buyout from teaching for one faculty member to attend PD and then come back and share with others (1)
- Selecting a core curriculum/approach to use as an anchor (1)
- Guidance on addressing the fact that school districts need mentor teachers/supervising teachers who are using SEL (1)

Five respondents reiterated the need for more clarity and accountability from the Commission. One of these suggested that the Commission require programs or faculty participate in a module about SEL.

Another 13 said they were eager and open to any professional development related to SEL and CRT. The nonspecific nature of this response may suggest a fundamental need for training on the basics of SEL and incorporating it into teacher preparation.

Implications

1) *The Commission's leadership role is crucial*

Survey responses confirmed our anecdotal experience that teacher education programs and leaders value SEL and CRT but their willingness and ability to build these competencies is strongly influenced by requirements and guidance from the Commission. There is some evidence that the new TPEs are already spurring change in these areas (for example, one respondent noted that her program is “Not [incorporating SEL into syllabi] at this point, but after taking this assessment I am already thinking of how easy it would be for me to formally incorporate it into the Multicultural course”), and that the opportunity to shape SEL/CRT in teaching is clear and current.

2) *Programs need concrete, actionable resources*

Teacher education leaders who responded to our survey consistently asked for resources that go deeper than explaining the concept and importance of SEL to help faculty make it live and breathe in their programs. Respondents gave many suggestions for such resources, including webinars, model curricula and syllabi, and guidance and incentives for fitting this topic to an already-packed curriculum. Respondents seemed to grasp the value of this kind of support. As one commented, “SEL is a HUGE topic and sometimes 'a little bit of information can be a dangerous thing'. If you are going to have teachers address these sometimes painful and complex issues, they need to be trained well in the nuances of how to interact with students around this.”

3) *Accreditation team support*

Because programs are highly responsive to the CTC accreditation process, it is vital that accreditation visits address SEL and CRT and do so in a way that is informed and meaningful. And because these topics

are new to the standards and accreditation process, accreditation teams would benefit from training in what to look for during their visits; that is, actions and artifacts that demonstrate integration of SEL and CRT competencies. Both accreditors and teacher preparation programs should be given concrete information about what will count as evidence of attention to the SEL/CRT teacher performance expectations.

Appendix: Survey design and methods

The survey was based on one created by the Massachusetts Consortium for Social-Emotional Learning in Teacher Education (SEL-TEd)* and administered to higher education institutions in Massachusetts. The current survey was modified to reflect the specific priorities and requirements of the California Teacher Performance Expectations. It included both quantitative and open-ended qualitative questions with the intent of building a detailed knowledge base about SEL and CRT in teacher education.

The survey was sent, using a secure, anonymous online tool (SurveyMonkey), to deans, directors of teacher education, and credential analysts at all 95 California higher education institutions approved by CTC to offer Multiple Subject, Single Subject, and Special Education credential programs. These roles were chosen because they have direct and significant influence over teacher education programs. A link to the online survey was sent, along with an explanation for its purpose, by the director of the professional services division of the Commission, which is coordinated and overseen by the governor's office.

Responses were received from 78 individuals. Because of the anonymous nature of the survey, it is not possible to determine which institution each represented and whether there were multiple respondents from the same institution. Approximately 46% represented a private or independent institution of higher education, approximately 30% a California State University campus, approximately 12% a University of California campus, approximately 8% a K-12 LEA sponsored credential program, and 5% other type of institution. Respondents typically represented programs offering more than one type of credential: about three-quarters offered a multiple subject (K-8) credential and a similar percentage offered a single subject (secondary) credential. A little less than half offered a special education credential, and about 13% another type of credential.

Respondents represented a range of roles in their programs, including: department chair (32%), director of teacher education (21%), dean or associate dean (14%), credential analyst (6%), faculty member (5%), program staff (4%). A small number held other roles such as assistant director, intern coordinator, or executive director.

** We wish to thank the Massachusetts Consortium for Social-Emotional Learning for generously sharing their state teacher educator survey form and report with us.*

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