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In an era of school violence, substance abuse, high accountability, and other similar issues, educational reform is inevitable. In the last 20 years, bullying in schools has stirred up broad public alarm (Weissbourd & Jones, 2012). Thirty percent of students are physically or verbally abused on schools grounds alone (National Center for Statistics, 2011; Shetgiri, Lin, Avila, & Flores, 2012). These stressful and sometimes negative behaviors often take a toll on both students and teachers. In recent years, there has been a rise in children's depression and other emotional related illnesses (McCombs, 2004). According to the US Department of Human Services (2007), one of the leading causes of death among youth in the US is suicide. Teachers report that they feel stressed by classroom management problems, unsatisfactory working conditions, and poor relationships with colleagues, parents, and students (Garner, 2010; Jalongo & Heider, 2006; Luther & Richman, 2009). In response to the many difficulties affecting our schools, teacher education programs around the country are changing their instructional models to include social-emotional learning (SEL).

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Social Emotional Learning

Peter Salovey and John Mayer first used the term social-emotional learning in 1990. They described emotional intelligence "as the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). SEL is the process through which individuals develop the necessary skills, attitudes, and values to acquire social-emotional competence (Elias et al., 1997;

McCombs, 2004). The common element among schools reporting academic success is that they all have a systematic process for promoting students' social-emotional skills (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2001; Elias et al., 2004; Elias et al., 1997; Goleman, 1995; Mindess, Chen, & Brenner, 2008). In these schools, students tend to be caring and feel empathy for others. They are more likely to make responsible decisions and handle challenging situations constructively and ethically. As a result, they have better relationships with their classmates and teachers (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004).

Brain research shows that there is a direct correlation between students' emotional state and their academic performance. This is due to the fact that emotions can hinder or support learning (Mindess et al., 2008; Sousa, 1998). Sylwester (2006) refers to emotion and attention as our brain's activation systems because our brain only responds to emotionally arousing phenomena. Then, it frames and focuses on the important elements that led to the arousal. Thus, "emotion drives attention and attention drives responsive decisions and behaviors" (Sylwester, 2006, p. 35). Our emotions alert us if there is a problem or a threatening situation. In this case, the rational thinking part of the brain is less effective because negative emotions can overshadow cognition (Garner, 2012; Jensen, 2001). This is the reason why students who do not feel good about themselves tend to disengage, act out and consequently do poorly academically (Cohen, Lotan, Scarloss, & Arellano, 1999). Conversely, when students feel welcomed, and have positive relationships with their peers and teachers, they are more likely to excel in school (Banks, 2001). Thus, the school environment must be physically and psychologically safe for optimal learning to occur (Elias, 2004; Sylwester, 2000).

SEL-qualified programs should be school-wide and must be integrated throughout the curriculum (Zins et al., 2004). The programs must include students, teachers, family, and the community. Some schools currently have programs that address a particular issue such as bullying, drugs, alcohol, or other social problems. Nevertheless, short-term isolated efforts to promote SEL have not been found to be effective (Zins et al., 2004). Where, then, should teachers learn how to teach and implement SEL? It is critical that teacher candidates learn these skills in their teacher preparation programs (Elias et al., 1997). This way when they enter the teaching profession they will know how to foster students' academic achievement and well-being.

Language arts courses provide an appropriate context in which to introduce SEL for two main reasons. First, readings and other activities can serve as an avenue to discuss, write, and learn how to implement SEL across the curriculum. Second, language arts instruction is in dire need of restructuring. Most current language and literacy programs are approached from a cognitive-only model. This is particularly true in scripted reading programs such *Success for All*, *Open Court,* and other similar programs. How students and teachers feel is not taken into account. Many school districts adopted these systems as a way to comply with state and federal mandates, and to streamline a more efficient way for students to

learn to read (Dresser, 2012; Griffith, 2008; Milosovic, 2007). This move from teacher-led instruction to scripted instruction has, however, left teachers, who are required to use these programs, feeling overwhelmed and powerless (MacGillivray, Ardell, Curwen, & Palma, 2004). Similarly, students have little ownership about the books they read and the work they do. As a result, they tend not to enjoy language arts. Sometimes they can even dislike reading and writing altogether (Freeman & Freeman, 2004).

Even though the movement to integrate SEL into education is expanding, many programs still lack this important component. This, coupled with the fact that there is limited research focused on teachers as agents of emotional socialization (Garner, 2010), served as a catalyst for this study. This article begins with a brief overview of some of the unintended consequences of the No Child Left Behind (2002) mandates and the impact of scripted reading programs on students and teachers. The latter sections of this paper include the study, final thoughts, and recommendations for further studies.

Unintended Consequences of No Child Left Behind

Even though the aim of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the comprehensive school reform act of 2002, was to enhance education for children in this country, its implications went further than student achievement (Griffith, 2008; Milosovic, 2007). This legislation and the push for high-stakes testing are clear examples of the little attention we sometimes give to the emotional aspects of learning. This is specifically evident in language and literacy instruction. In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) released a study supporting systematic phonics and phonemic awareness instruction in early grades (McIntyre, Rightmyer, & Petrosko, 2008; Milosovic, 2007; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Service, 2000). The panel did not recommend a specific reading program and warned that additional research had to be conducted in this area (Au, 2009; Cummins, 2007). Nevertheless, the findings of the NRP were used as platform for endorsing *Reading First* under Title I of NCLB (Griffith, 2008). *Reading First* states that research-based programs and materials must be utilized to ensure that all children will be able to read at grade level by the end of third grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). As reported by Cummins (2007), *Reading First* received "appropriations of close to $1 billion per year between 2002 and 2007" (p. 565). In response to this legislation and to be eligible for funding, school districts around the country replaced contemporary reading approaches with *Success for All*, *Open Court,* and other scripted reading programs (Cummins, 2007; Duncan-Owens, 2009; Milsovic, 2007). The main goal of these pre-packaged highly controlled language and literacy programs is to increase students' tests scores (Au, 2009 & Milosovic, 2007). Unfortunately, there are many problems associated with scripted reading instruction.

The assertion that these programs are "scientifically based" is questionable. Most of the studies claiming their effectiveness were conducted by the same developers

and associates who published them in the first place (Moustafa & Land, 2001; Pogrow, 2002). Other researchers found quite opposite results. Children in scripted reading programs lagged behind students in schools where teachers were able to use their professional judgment and design instruction based on their students' needs (Au, 2011; Milosovic, 2007; Moustafa & Land, 2002; Pogrow, 2002). Even though the NRP reported that phonics instruction in grades 2-6 for under-performing and low-achieving students was not found to be effective, policymakers ignored these findings and applied the statement "scientifically based reading" to policy and practice (Cummins, 2007).

Cummins (2007) noted that a large majority of the children in schools with prepacked programs come from low-income families. Thus, he defines scripted instruction as "Pedagogies for the Poor" because poor children are more likely to spend more time learning basic reading skills (e.g., phonics and decoding) and not enough time developing higher order thinking skills (e.g., synthesizing and evaluating) (p. 564). This leaves students unprepared for the academic and linguistic challenges they will face in the upper grades. These practices also have served to exacerbate class and racial inequality in education (Au, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2007). In 2008, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) found that high school dropouts were twice as likely to be living below the poverty line.

The main goal of prepackaged programs is to increase the test scores of the students. Au (2011) metaphorically described schools as a "factory assembly line" (p. 27). Children are viewed as raw material that must be tailored to meet standards and objectives. Teachers are workers who use effective practices to make sure students meet the preselected standards and objectives. Administrators are the managers who decide and tell the teachers what are the most effective practices in this production process. The social and affective aspects of learning do not fit well into an assembly line model. For example, the fact that the readings in these programs are preselected can itself be problematic. If students are not given choices, they tend to become disengaged and stressed (Zins et al., 2004). In contrast, when children can select what they read they tend to be more engaged and interested (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Krashen, 2005). For instance, Hawaiian students might be drawn to books such as *Call it Courage* by Armstrong Sperry or *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell because they deal with life in an island. The same students might be less interested in reading selections about the Alaskan tundra. Not all of the books students read have to be culturally relevant. It is important that students read a variety of books because this can open up new worlds for them (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Neuman, 1999; Norton, 2003). However, a well-balanced reading program should include required as well as student-selected readings.

Scripted curricula take a large portion of the day leaving little time for other subjects such as physical education and art (Milosovic, 2007; Moustafa & Land, 2002). This is contrary to best known teaching practices. Physical activity has been found to have a strong positive effect on cognition function and mood

> There is ample evidence that the teacher, not the program, is the most influential factor in student academic achievement.

regulation (Jensen, 2000, 2008). Children also need ample opportunities to participate in creative activities such as music and drama. Through the arts, students can learn problem solving, creative thinking, and social skills (Eisner, 2009; Lazaros, 2012; Russell-Bowie, 2012; Schönau, 2012).

Many teachers feel in discord between their own views of education and that of their schools (Au, 2011; MacGillivray et al., 2004). They do not like the fact that scripted programs treat teaching like a cooking recipe (Au, 2011; Cummins, 2007; Dresser, 2012), which they must follow, whether or not children are learning (Griffith, 2008). The program dictates not only what teachers teach, say, and do, but also the pace of the lesson (MacGillivray et al., 2004). Teachers who do not follow the program verbatim are often reprimanded (MacGillivray et al., 2004). This can create a narrowing of the curriculum because teachers, pressured by the district mandates, shape the content to match that of the tests (Au, 2011).

There is ample evidence that the teacher, not the program, is the most influential factor in student academic achievement (Banks, 2001; Freeman & Freeman, 2003; Gándara, 2004; Peregoy & Boyle, 2005; Pressiey et al., 2001). So instead of expensive commercially designed reading programs, it is essential that teachers receive enough preparation and support to be able to effectively teach their students (Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008; Hamos et al., 2009). Teachers are already overwhelmed with crowded classrooms and the pressure for students to do well in standardized tests. If they are also stripped from their role as educators, many of them will leave the teaching profession. Currently, the teacher attrition in the first five years is almost 50% (Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2005; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). The large turnover of teachers is not only detrimental to student academic performance, but also very costly to the country. It is estimated that the national cost of teacher turnover in the public schools is close to seven billion dollars a year (NCTAF, 2007).

Many teacher education preparation programs around the country mirror what school districts are doing. Language arts courses are usually more extensive and more packed with content than other courses. Teacher candidates must not only complete and pass all courses in the program, but in some states they must also pass a reading instruction state exam. In California, for example, teacher candidates must pass the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) to be able to teach in this state. Other states such as Connecticut and Wisconsin require similar tests for teacher candidates. The main goal of these tests is to assess whether teacher candidates possess the necessary knowledge and skills to teach reading to students. So are students becoming better readers because we

have more scripted reading programs, allocate more time to language arts, and have increased requirements for teachers?

According to The National Education Association Nation's Report Card Results (2010), there was no increase in fourth grade reading scores and only a 1-point increase in eighth grade reading scores from 2007. Some students made little gain in their reading test scores, others actually went backwards. The gap between minority students and white students increased in the last decade and the reading scores of the lowest quartile declined (Pogrow, 2002).

The Study

The goal for this qualitative study was to explore the effects of embedding social-emotional learning (SEL) into a language arts course. The principal research question that guided this study was: How do teacher candidates' understanding of their own emotions and SEL impact how they teach language and literacy to their students? Data were collected throughout 15 weeks during the 2012 spring semester. It included a pre- and post-reflection paper, reading autobiography, thematic unit, videotapes, and class discussion notes.

Participants

Nineteen teacher candidates enrolled in my language arts course participated in this study. These teacher candidates were also enrolled in their first semester (Phase I) of student teaching. All of them were placed in urban elementary schools (K-5) around Santa Clara Valley, California. They were in their placements for three consecutive mornings during 15 weeks. Five of the 19 were English/Spanish bilingual teacher candidates. These candidates were in bilingual classrooms. All of the participants had at least three English learners in their classrooms. Seventy-six percent of the teacher candidates were in schools with scripted reading programs. The remaining 24% used more eclectic reading programs. These candidates were allowed to deviate from their reading programs and integrate literature-based and whole-language approaches. Teacher candidates experience working with children ranged from five months to three years.

In this paper, student teachers are referred to as teacher candidates. Students are the children in the schools. All of the names were changed to protect the privacy of the participants.

Embedding SEL into the Language Arts Curriculum

There were five main steps that had to be put in place to embed SEL into the curriculum. The first step was to identify the main components of the course. This six-unit course contained 14 main language and literacy components. They are: (a) theory and research; (b) reading skills (e.g., phonemic awareness and phonics); (c) vocabulary; (d) reading comprehension; (e) reading and writing workshops; (f)

use of textbooks and other resources; (g) assessment; (h) data analysis; (i) reading and writing across the curriculum; (j) differentiation of instruction; (k) student diversity and literacy; (l) multicultural literature; (m) technology as a tool for instruction; and (n) family and literacy. Bilingual teacher candidates also had to learn how design and deliver theory and research-based instruction in Spanish.

The second step, to make the task of weaving SEL into the language arts curriculum more manageable, was to group the 14 components into six units. These units were assessment, methodology, theory, research, technology and family. Assessments included student self-assessment, teacher assessment, and standardized tests. Methodology included tasks, methods, techniques, and teaching tools. Theory dealt with SEL and language-related theories. Research included teacher candidates' own investigations and assigned readings. Technology (e.g., iPad and computers) was used as a tool for instruction and to promote interest. *The Family* was the title of the last unit of study. In this section, the class read and studied ways to collaborate with parents and the community to: (a) increase student academic achievement; (b) enhance social-emotional skills; and (c) design collaborative literacy projects.

The thirdstep, Zins et al.'s (2004) adapted *Evidence-Based SEL Programing Paths to Success in School and in Life* framework was used as a foundation to study school-wide SEL qualified programs. This framework outlines the connections between evidence-based SEL programing and higher academic performance and success in school and life in general. A visual of this path is found in Figure 1. It shows that SEL skills and interventions need to be taught to students in a safe environment, thus, creating opportunities for reward while SEL competencies are developed and reinforced. These skills provide more gains and greater attachment and engagement in school. The result is higher performance in school, and life in general.
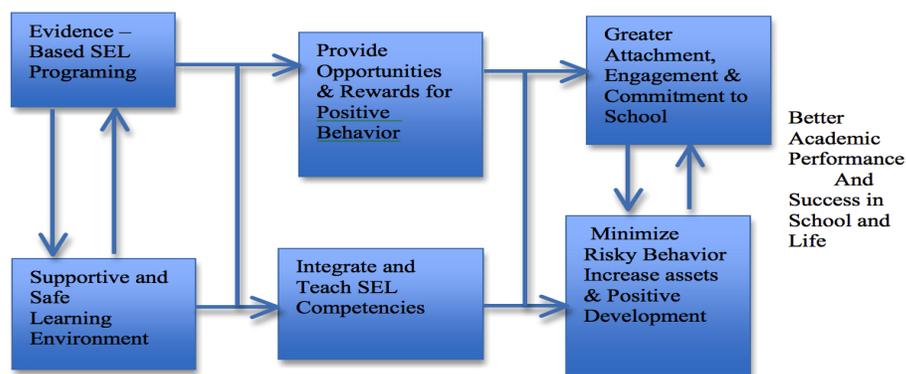

Figure 1.

The five SEL competencies addressed in this project can be found in the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a non-profit which advocates for social and emotional learning. They are: self-

management, self-awareness, responsible decision making, relationships skills, and social awareness.

Self-management: Impulse control and stress management; self-motivation, confidence, and perseverance; goal setting, organization, and follow-through

Self-awareness: Identify and recognize emotions; recognize strengths, needs, and values; accurate self-perception; self efficacy

Responsible Decision Making: Social-emotional problem identification and analysis; social or emotional problem solving; evaluation and reflection; personal, moral, and ethical responsibility

Relationship Skills: Form positive relationships; working cooperatively; conflict management; help seeking and providing

Social Awareness: Empathy for others; appreciate diversity; respect for others; understand group dynamics

The fourth step, two main assignments were adapted for this project. They were the *Reading Autobiography* and a *Language Arts/SEL Thematic Unit*. The goal for the reading autobiography was for teacher candidates to reflect on their own development as readers. This included reflecting upon both the positive and negative experiences they had when they were children learning to read. Once they had identified both the positive and negative events, they created a list of recommendations for classroom teachers based on the implications of these experiences. The goal for the thematic unit was for teacher candidates to plan and teach a series of five lessons integrating language arts and SEL. The teacher candidates videotaped one lesson and submitted the DVD as evidence.

The fifth step, modeling was an important component of this project. Every class session we spent time sharing "things that were working and challenging issues." The teacher candidates who did not feel comfortable sharing their feelings in front of the class had an option to write their comments on a yellow pad, which was always circulating around the classroom. That same day or the next class session I addressed their concerns and comments without revealing the author's name. Several videos from the section titled *Program in Action*, found on the CASEL website, were utilized to show real class examples on how to implement SEL in schools. These videos provided the context to discuss some of the difficulties teacher candidates were experiencing in their placements and in our course. It also provided an opportunity to discuss possible solutions and to seek the support of others.

Data Analysis

The pre- and post-reflection paper, reading autobiography, thematic unit, videotapes, and class discussion notes were analyzed using Creswell's (2008) data

analysis procedures. From these voluminous data, 22 themes emerged. These were: friendship, reaction, exploration, interest, adverse situations, community, culture, generosity, connections, adaptation, creativity, outcome from positive behavior, discipline, bullying, empathy, hardships, making connections, overcoming adversity, family, injustice, friendship, and error correction. As recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2010), the data were later interpreted and reduced to more specific categories. The categories found in this process were: (a) affective aspects of language learning; (b) personal and world adversity; (c) managing relationships; and (e) making connections.

Findings

Most novice teachers have not had adequate preparation on the relationship between emotions and learning (Garner, 2010; Sousa, 1998). This became evident in this study. The pretest indicated that 78% of the teacher candidates had some superficial understanding of the importance of emotions in student achievement. Rita's comment illustrates what this group of teacher candidates knew about SEL. She wrote:

> I believe that schools should focus on educating the child as a whole and not simply drilling academics into them. We need to teach them to be healthy, happy citizens as much as we need to impart them with other countless learning.

Even though these teacher candidates had some understanding of the relationship between emotions and academic development, all of them responded that they did not know how to teach social-emotional skills to children. The other 22% of the teacher candidates mentioned that they knew little about SEL. All of the teacher candidates mentioned that they were interested in learning how teach social and emotional skills to their students.

Affective Aspects of Language Learning

The findings of this study are clearly aligned with the literature on brain research. There is a connection between students' emotional state and their academic performance (Sousa, 1998; Wolfe, 2001). I have been teaching language and literacy courses to teacher candidates and master's students for over 10 years. The common negative experience struggling readers had in school was reading aloud because of how insecure it made them feel. This group of participating teacher candidates was no different. Teachers often use *Round Robin Reading* and similar oral methods with the intent to promote reading fluency and comprehension (Allington, 2011). However, these practices have been found to be ineffective (Ash, Kuhn, & Walpole, 2009; Hilden & Jones, 2012). Many students feel anxious and embarrassed, and as a result they tend to become disengaged or angry (Garner, 2010). These negative emotions can interfere with their ability to read fluently and comprehend the text. The following quote exemplifies some of the

comments teacher candidates wrote about their experiences learning to read. Linda wrote:

> I dreaded the day the teacher called on me to read in front of the entire class. I had a hard time pronouncing the words. I felt stupid and embarrassed. Reading became a task and was no longer exciting to me. I had to read a page over and over to understand [the text].

To ensure students were successful reading aloud, all 12 candidates who embedded oral reading into their lessons assigned the readings one or two days before students were asked to read. This way the students had enough time to practice and develop reading fluency. Reading the same selection several times has been found to increase reading fluency (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). Teacher candidates used *Narrow Reading* to promote vocabulary development and content knowledge. This approach is effective because students read books from the same author, theme, or genre for an extended period of time (Cho, Ahn, & Krashen, 2005; Schmitt & Carter, 2000). This gives students multiple opportunities to: (a) become used to the author's writing style; (b) read about the same concept from different perspectives; and (c) use the same vocabulary in different contexts. Lastly, teacher candidates modeled and taught seven techniques proficient readers use before, during, and after reading. These effective reading techniques were as follows: activate background knowledge; make mental images; focus on important words; question the text; assess comprehension and take remedial action when necessary; synthesize the material and make connections (Baker, 2002; Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Joshi, 2007; Brown & Palincsar, 1985).

Error correction sometimes can interfere with reading comprehension and fluency. If teachers make students feel that they are somehow damaged and in need of repair, their anxiety can worsen. This is specifically true for students learning English. It can take English learners (ELs) five to seven years to become proficient in the language native (Cummins, 1984). During this time, many ELs complain that other children make fun of them or that the teacher corrects every error they make (Dresser, 2012). This can create a tremendous amount of anxiety, which is associated with a fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). For example, learning English was not easy for Robert. This Vietnamese teacher candidate wrote in his autobiography, "I felt ashamed because Mr. Mills corrected every other word I read. I felt ashamed because everyone had to wait for me as I tried to sound out each syllable."

The fact that teacher candidates were able to reflect on some of their own challenges helped them better understand their roles as teachers and leaders. They became more aware of their students' feelings. Therefore, the teacher candidates found ways to highlight their students' strengths instead of their needs. Razfar (2010) argued that for students to be able to learn, they must have *confianza*, or

trust. This occurs when there is respect and empathy between teacher-students and student-student. In a videotaped lesson, Maria is reading in Spanish with a group of second grade struggling readers. Instead of sitting on a chair, Maria sits on the carpet with the children and they work together as a team. If the students make an error that changes the meaning of the word, she restates the word and the student keeps reading. Instead of correcting every error, she focuses on meaning making and recall. Meaning making is the ability of the reader to extract meaning from text through interaction and involvement (Baker, 2002; Boulware-Gooden et al., 2007). Recall can be improved with visualization, songs, semantic maps, and other similar strategies (Baker, 2002). Other teacher candidates saw themselves more as coaches. Amanda, for example, helped a student edit a paragraph by first commenting on what he did well. Later she focused on what was still missing. She said, "Good, you have four complete sentences; now you need one more to go. You also need a few more descriptive words from your chart."

Students are attuned to their teacher's emotional state. Neuroscientists have found that emotional states are contagious. This means that one person's brain adjusts itself to that of the person with whom they are interacting (Goleman, 2006). Early in the semester, Jorge shared in class that he was so busy student teaching during the day and taking evening classes that all he read were required readings. Most of the class agreed with him. Only a third of the teacher candidates mentioned that they read for enjoyment. But can we help our students become readers if we don't like to read? This became our research question for the following class sessions. After reading a few articles on related topics and watching several videos from the CASEL website, the class unanimously agreed that for students to become motivated about reading, teachers must enjoy reading too (e.g., reading, writing). At the end of the semester, teacher candidates were reading an array of narrative and expository books with their children. Teacher candidates using scripted reading programs did their best to bring the required stories alive. Some of them changed the tone of their voice to show students that another character was speaking. They made additional adaptations to include movement, pictures, and songs.

Questioning was another technique used to promote interest and participation. Teacher candidates posed questions that dealt with emotions and that promoted higher order thinking skills. Some of the questions they used were: "How would you have felt if..." "What do you think the tree (in *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein) should do?" "Should he give more wood to the man even if he does not have much left?" "Can we just take and take from others without giving anything back?" Some teacher candidates extended the questioning activity to a study of words. They studied terms found in the readings and later utilized them for writing activities. The following were some of the terms they studied: love, respect, sharing, support, generous, kind, caring, nice, compliments, happy, and respect.

Personal and World Adversity

Children are more likely to become interested in topics that are relevant to them. Thus, most teacher candidates used readings that dealt with issues such as: name calling, harassment, teasing, and other forms of bullying. Marcela mentioned that she had her students shared how they felt when they were bullied. One of her students said she was unhappy when her friends ignored her or pushed her. This conversation provided an opportunity for Marcela's class to discuss social awareness. For the following activity, the children completed a flip chart on friendship. The first layer had the word *Friendship* as a title. When one turns the page there is a phrase that reads, "a quality or condition of being friends." The next title was *Characteristics*. The next page reads, "I want to play with you." The next title was *Nonexamples*. The following page reads, "I don't want to play with you." The student drew a picture of two girls on the opposite side of the page. One is throwing something to the other. It is evident that the definition of what friendship is was copied from the teacher's sample. However, from the pictures and the comments, it is clear that these young students understood the meaning of friendship and bullying. Marcela's following lessons focused on appreciation and respect for others.

Managing Relationships

Teaching students how to work cooperatively with others is often a challenge for many beginning teachers. A few students do the work while the rest of the children tend to take a more passive role. They become observers instead of participants. To address relation management issues, Kerry focused the whole unit on "Ways to Work Cooperatively and Respectfully." The book she selected was *Two Bad Ants* by Chris Van Allsburg. In this book, two very greedy ants leave the group and eat sugar until they fall asleep. They are awakened when they fall into boiling coffee. After encountering many problems, they go back and join the other ants. John, another teacher candidate, read with his class the book titled *Chopsticks* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal. Later he brought chopsticks and grapes to his class. He had students work with a partner. Each child had one chopstick and only one grape for the two of them. Students were asked to use the chopsticks to pick up the grape. They were not allowed to puncture the grape with their chopsticks. Finally, some students realized that the only way they were able to succeed was if they worked together and used both chopsticks to pick up the grape. Although these were different activities, both teachers were able to successfully show their students the importance of working cooperatively. Aside from teaching SEL skills, these teacher candidates used these rich descriptive books to teach language arts (e.g., adjectives, synonyms). One student creatively wrote, "The blue clear water dripped from the white silver faucet."

Making Connections

An effective way to promote reading comprehension is to teach students how to make connections. Nevertheless, this skill can be very challenging for young students and students learning English. Young children often do not have the prior knowledge to be able to easily make connections. Beginning English learners might know the concept (e.g., immigration-emigration) but oftentimes do not have the linguistic skills to be able demonstrate their knowledge. Thematic instruction can assist students in learning language and content within a meaningful context (Gardner, 2008; Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). As a way to address students' needs, teacher candidates not only integrated SEL into their lessons, but also incorporated another subject such as social studies and sciences. One class, for example, studied homelessness. Carla and her students read a book titled *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting. In this story, a boy lives with his father at the airport. The following conversation shows how Carla helped young students (some of whom were ELs) make connections with previous stories:

> One of the most important findings in this study was that teacher candidates became cognizant of the impact of negative experiences on student academic achievement.

Carla: Do you remember another story that deals with the same topic?
Student 1: We read a book about car people.
Carla: How is that story similar to the one we just read?
Student 2: They don't have a lot of food.
Student 1: Sometimes they need to eat garbage.
Student 3: Don't have a house.
Student 2: People don't like them.

According to Carla's notes, there were three main goals for this lesson. First, help students understand that different groups of people can have similar problems (in this case homelessness). Second, it is important that we have empathy for people with fewer resources. Third, it is important for us to help one another.

Final Thoughts and Recommendations

Overall, the results of this study were very positive in that all of the participating candidates integrated SEL into language and literacy instruction. One of the most important findings in this study was that teacher candidates became cognizant of the impact of negative experiences on student academic achievement. Alexandra wrote, "Negative emotions directly correlate with [students'] ability to learn new concepts and confidence at school." Conversely, "positive feelings about learning and school give students a better chance to succeed," commented Heather.

Therefore, all of the teacher candidates made sure to establish a friendly and safe classroom environment. To this end, they made an effort to get to know their students well (backgrounds, linguistic and cultural; interests; and experiences). They used this information and SEL to make lessons relevant and interesting for their students. They mainly focused on what David described as "attainable, smaller goals–one at a time–for students to reach." All of them used children's literature as the main avenue to introduce SEL. The teacher candidates addressed many of the SEL competencies, but focused mainly on social awareness, relationship skills, and self-management. Teacher candidates became overwhelmed with the many competencies, and as a result they decided to narrow them down in order to be effective.

All candidates understood the importance of their role as teachers. Steve wrote, "I realized that the teacher is key to success in the classroom. No matter how much money is spent on stuff [reading programs], it is the teacher's attitude and true desire for students to learn that affects students' learning." Teacher candidates' feelings about current legislation and state mandates were aligned with the literature. Teachers often feel trapped into scripted reading programs, which many times they do not find to be effective (Duncan-Owens, 2009; Griffith, 2008). This was very evident in this study. Teacher candidates using these programs shared that they were disappointed because they would have liked to embed more effective practices into their lessons, but they were afraid they would "run out of time." This mirrors what other researchers have found. Some novice teachers are apprehensive to take class time to teach social-emotional skills because they cannot show immediate benefits to their students' academic progress as reflected in their test scores (Zins et al., 2004).

The fact that this study lasted for only 15 weeks was one of the limitations. As mentioned earlier, language and literacy courses are packed with content. Therefore, teaching how to embed SEL into the curriculum felt a little rushed for some teacher candidates. For example, the class read and discussed several articles on how to promote parental involvement and similar topics. However, there was not enough time for teacher candidates to work with parents and the community. A longitudinal study is recommended because teacher candidates would have time to implement SEL into a school-wide program and work with the parents and the community. Another limitation of this study is that not all of the courses in the teacher preparation program addressed SEL. A language arts course cannot be the only place where teacher candidates learn these skills. Social-emotional learning needs to be embedded throughout all courses. This way, when teacher candidates leave the program, they not only know how to embed SEL into the curriculum, but also how to implement a school-wide program.

Lastly, in their final reflections, the teacher candidates wrote that one of the most important pieces of this experience was how they felt in our class and the strong relationships they formed among themselves. They felt supported and respected,

making some of the difficult challenges they faced in their student teaching placement manageable. They also felt that they learned invaluable lessons about teaching and learning from a cognitive and affective integrated model.

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