

# Creating Caring Classroom and School Communities: Lessons Learned From Social and Emotional Learning Programs and Practices

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## INTRODUCTION

School and classroom contexts play a particularly potent role in shaping the developmental trajectories of children and youth (Hamre & Pianta, 2010). This is not surprising when one considers that children spend, on average, at least 15,000 hours in school settings, starting from the age of 4 or 5 when they enter school until they graduate (Pianta, Belsky, Houts, Morrison, & NICHD ECCRN, 2007). Decades of research have shown that caring and supportive classroom and school contexts are foundational to the promotion of students' academic success, as well as their social and emotional competence and well-being (Hamre & Pianta, 2010). Indeed, students can learn and thrive when they are in school and classroom contexts in which they feel safe, secure, connected, and cared for—contexts in which their social–emotional competence and academic growth is nurtured and cultivated (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

How do we create such contexts? The field of social and emotional learning (SEL) provides some answers to this question. Although a primary aim of schools has been to educate children and youth to master content areas, such as reading, writing, math, science, and social studies, there is a growing consensus among educators, policy makers, and the public at large for a more comprehensive vision of education—one that includes an explicit focus on promoting students' social and emotional competence alongside their academic achievement (Bushaw & Lopez, 2013). Bolstered by evidence indicating that empirically based curricula can promote students' social and emotional skills and well-being as well as deter problem behaviors (e.g., Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011), many schools, both nationally and internationally, have strengthened their efforts to include universal SEL programs that promote students' social and emotional competence. The focus has been on the implementation of *universal* interventions, rather than interventions that only target children with current problems, because universal approaches are likely to have a greater public health benefit (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017).

This chapter explores efforts to foster caring communities within school systems at both the classroom and school-wide level. We begin by providing the case for the explicit attention to promoting caring classroom and school contexts as a way to promote students' social and emotional competence and academic success, highlighting the importance of the role of contexts in shaping child development and resilience. We then move to a focus on SEL, first, by providing a definition of SEL, and second, a delineation of the various dimensions that comprise it. Following, we provide a description of several of the extant evidence-based programs for students and teachers in which the promotion of SEL and caring classroom and school environments is central. The chapter ends with conclusions on how an understanding of SEL has implications for our thinking about promoting caring classroom and school environments, along with some future directions for work in this area.

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## THE CASE FOR PROMOTING STUDENTS' SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE IN SCHOOLS

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The increased attention to the school-based promotion of children's social and emotional competence by educators, parents, policy makers, and other societal agencies has been driven, in part, by the increased concerns about the mental health of youth. Epidemiological reports estimate that one in five children and youth experience psychological disorders severe enough to warrant mental health services (U.S. Public Health Service, 2000). In this regard a focus on creating supportive school and classroom contexts that address both students' academic success and social and emotional competence is increasingly recognized as foundational to the promotion of positive mental health and school success (Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley, & Weissberg, 2017).

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### CHILD DEVELOPMENT: SITUATED WITHIN COMMUNITIES

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When considering the ways to cultivate children's positive growth and well-being, it is important to take a developmental systems perspective that "recognizes that human development is a bidirectional, individual↔context relational process" in which "there are multiple levels of organization within the individual (e.g., genes, motivation, cognitive abilities) that influence one's development course," and "different levels of organization within the social ecology (e.g., families, schools, and neighborhoods) that contribute to development" (Theokas & Lerner, 2006, p. 61). A child experiences life nested within these many interactive contexts, and within each context, a child can be nurtured by a variety of communities (e.g., school, family, church). In addition the interactions within these contexts are influenced by factors, such as a child's personal characteristics, structures within systems (such as the family, school, community), or the culture at large (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Research on resilience has shown how the interplay of contextual factors in a child's life plays a critical role in determining how, why, or to what extent life events influence development (Ungar, 2015). Resilience is a concept applied in prevention and intervention efforts because it provides a framework with which to identify factors that lead to success rather than to just those factors that reduce risk. Fostering a child's resilience, then, becomes a critical undertaking that must be actively nurtured in efforts to equip the child with the ability to face the inevitable challenges of life.

Although there is not an exact formula to increase a child's resilience, research has shown that certain contextual factors are highly related to the promotion of resilience (Luthar & Brown, 2007). Such factors are considered assets, or resources, and can promote positive outcomes when a child is exposed to adversity (promotive factors), or moderate the impact and provide protection, when a child is exposed to adversity (protective factors) (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2009). Assets known to promote resilience include, but are not limited to, positive relationships with caring adults, self-regulation skills, and effective teachers and school systems (Sapienza & Masten, 2011). Caring relationships are the foundation of most of these influential assets and lead to the establishment of caring communities within each context. Given that relationships are the heart of a caring classroom and school community, it is no surprise that researchers have found a link between the characteristics that define a caring classroom and the promotion of resilience in students (Hamre & Pianta, 2006).

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### DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF A CARING CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY

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Learning and development are largely social processes (Pianta, 1997). What a child learns, albeit intellectual, social, or emotional, is facilitated through a coordination of his or her knowledge combined with the others whom also share the social space (Resnick, 1994). Through this lens, it is easy to see school as a *community* of learners. A child is able to learn best when safely embedded within a community where human needs are met. Thus, in order for learning to take place, a caring environment must be established first (Noddings, 1992). It is argued that viewing a school as a community—a place where individuals, both children and adults, meet to learn and grow together—establishes a framework from which schools can more effectively meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of teachers and students (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997).

The definition of community, established by Battistich et al. (1997), serves as a framework from which to explore the essential *ingredients* needed to develop and maintain a caring community at either the school or classroom level. A community is defined as places where members: (1) care about and support one another;

(2) actively participate and are engaged in group activities; (3) feel they have a voice in making group decisions; (4) feel a sense of belonging and identify with the group; (5) share a sense of norms, values, and goals with the group. Simply put, schools are a relational context in which interactions among all individuals play a critical role in shaping child development.

## DEFINING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

SEL involves the processes through which individuals acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage their emotions, feel and show empathy for others, establish and achieve positive goals, develop and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), 2013]. As such, social-emotional competencies (SEC) are viewed as “mastery skills” underlying virtually all aspects of human functioning.

SEL builds from work in child development, classroom management, prevention, and emerging knowledge about the role of the brain in self-awareness, empathy, and social-cognitive growth (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015). SEL focuses on the skills that allow children to calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices. Moreover, SEL offers educators, families, and communities relevant strategies and practices to better prepare students for “the tests of life, not a life of tests” (Elias, 2001, p. 40). SEL is sometimes called “the missing piece,” because it represents a part of education that is inextricably linked to school success.

### Social and Emotional Learning: The Competencies

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL; [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)), a nonprofit organization in Chicago, IL, is one of the organizations at the forefront in national and international efforts to promote SEL. CASEL has identified a set of five core intra- and interpersonal and cognitive competencies that underlie effective and successful performance for social roles and life tasks. These competencies are interrelated and reflect the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of SEL (CASEL, 2013).

1. *Self-awareness*: The ability to identify and recognize one’s own emotions, thoughts, and influences on behavior, including recognizing one’s own strength and challenges, being aware of one’s own goals and values, possessing a well-grounded sense of self-efficacy and optimism, and having a growth mindset that one can learn through hard work. High levels of self-awareness require recognizing how thoughts, feelings, and actions are interconnected.
2. *Self-management*: The ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively, including stress management, delaying gratification, impulse control, motivating oneself, and persevering through challenges to achieve personal and educational goals. It also includes self-management within social interactions.
3. *Social awareness*: The ability to take the perspectives of others—including those who come from a different background and culture, to empathize with others, understand social and ethical norms, and to recognize resources and supports in family, school, and community.
4. *Relationship skills*: The ability to form and maintain positive and healthy relationships, communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, negotiate constructively during conflict, solve problems with others effectively, and to offer and seek help when needed.
5. *Responsible decision-making*: Knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make constructive choices regarding one’s own behavior and social interactions, taking into account safety concerns, ethical standards, social and behavioral norms, consequences, and the well-being of self and others.

SEL programs and approaches are founded on a variety of theoretical perspectives (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). All of these are predicated on the notion that the capacity to process, reason, and use emotion can enhance cognitive activities (such as thinking and decision-making), facilitate the development and maintenance of social relationships, and promote personal growth and well-being (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012). SEL also draws from theories that emphasize the primacy of *relationships* (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) and are based on the understanding that student learning is a social process that occurs in collaboration with teachers and in interactions with their peers. Thus best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful.

## Social and Emotional Learning: The Research Evidence

Perhaps the most compelling evidence for the importance of SEL programs in promoting students' social–emotional competence and academic achievement comes from a meta-analysis conducted by [Durlak et al. \(2011\)](#) of 213 school-based, universal SEL programs involving 270,034 students from kindergarten through high school. Students in SEL programs, relative to students who did not receive an SEL program, were found to demonstrate significant improvements in (1) SEL skills; (2) prosocial attitudes; (3) positive social behaviors; (4) conduct problems; (5) emotional distress; and (6) academic performance. Furthermore, SEL students outperformed non-SEL students on indices of academic achievement by 11-percentile points. These results provide strong empirical evidence for the “value added” of SEL programs in fostering students' social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behaviors and also counter the claim that taking time to promote students' SEL would be detrimental to academic achievement.

Most recently, [Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg \(2017\)](#) conducted a systematic review to address the relative paucity of evidence on the long-term effectiveness of SEL programming in enhancing positive student outcomes. This review is important because it addresses a critical question regarding the cost-benefit of investment in SEL programs, informing allocation of resources for SEL in school budgets. A total of 82 school-based, universal SEL programs involving 97,406 ethnically and sociodemographically diverse kindergarten to high school students in urban and rural settings that had been published by 2014 were reviewed. Results demonstrated that students who had received an SEL intervention continued to show increases in social–emotional skills, positive behaviors, and academic achievement and decreases in conduct problems, emotional distress, and drug use up to almost 4 years after program completion, in contrast to those students who did not receive an SEL intervention.

## Components of a Social and Emotional Learning Framework

Research demonstrates that well-implemented SEL programs promote positive development, reduce problem behaviors, and also improve students' academic performance, citizenship, and health-related behaviors ([Schonert-Reichl & Weissberg, 2014](#)). Such skills predict important life outcomes, including completing high school on time, obtaining a college degree, and securing stable employment ([Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015](#)). In their meta-analysis, [Durlak et al. \(2011\)](#) provided solid evidence that SEL programs promote more favorable student outcomes when program implementers follow sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (SAFE) procedures that (1) use a Sequenced step-by-step training approach; (2) emphasize Active forms of learning that require students to practice new skills; (3) Focus specific time and attention on skill development; (4) are Explicit in defining the social and emotional skills they are attempting to promote. [Durlak et al. \(2011\)](#) also found that classroom teachers and other school personnel effectively implemented SEL programs—a finding that suggests that SEL programs can be incorporated into routine school practices and do not require staff from outside the school to successfully deliver an SEL program.

Many SEL approaches include both an *environmental focus* and a *person-centered focus* ([Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004](#)). Hence, in addition to focusing on specific instruction in social and emotional skills, SEL is a process of creating a school and classroom community that is caring, supportive, and responsive to students' needs. Moreover, effective SEL interventions and skill development occur when teachers possess the requisite social and emotional skills to create an environment that is safe, caring, supportive, and well managed, and have the competencies and knowledge to effectively implement SEL programs. Hence, successful SEL implementation requires explicit attention to addressing three distinct and interrelated dimensions: (1) creation of a positive learning context; (2) explicit promotion of students' SEL; and (3) the SEL of teachers. As illustrated in [Fig. 19.1](#), these three dimensions are portrayed in a circle to demonstrate the interconnectedness of each dimension to the other and to highlight that each dimension is influenced by, and influences, the other dimensions. While the learning context and SEL of students have been discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, we now discuss the important role that educators play in our SEL framework.

## Social and Emotional Learning of Educators

Educators are the engine that drives SEL programs and practices in classrooms and schools. The SEL competencies of educators (albeit teachers, administrators, or school staff) play a critical role in influencing the learning context and the infusion of SEL into classrooms and schools ([Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013](#)). Classrooms with warm teacher–student relationships facilitate deep learning ([Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman, Cameron,](#)

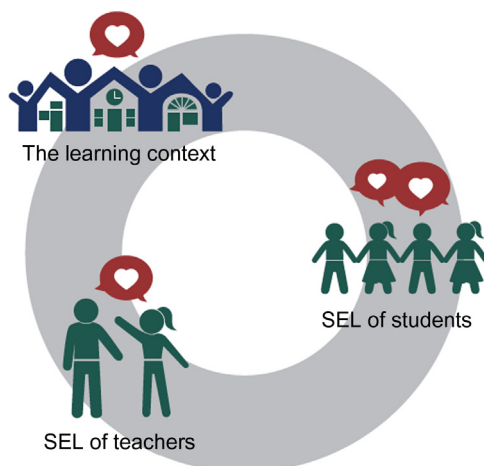


FIGURE 19.1 Three central components of SEL. *SEL*, Social and emotional learning.

& Peugh, 2012), and when children feel comfortable with their teachers and peers, they are more willing to grapple with challenging material and persist at difficult learning tasks. Conversely, when teachers poorly manage the social and emotional demands of teaching, students demonstrate lower levels of performance and on-task behavior (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003). Hence, it is essential that efforts are made to support the development of teachers' social and emotional competencies in order to optimize their classroom performance and their ability to promote SEL in their students (Jennings & Frank, 2015).

## PROMOTING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING: EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

### Ingredient 1: Create Caring, Safe, Collaborative, Participatory, and Inclusive Environments

Classrooms and schools operate as systems, and decades of research suggest that the unique culture and climate of classrooms and schools affect how and what students learn (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). School culture refers to a general set of norms, beliefs, and practices or "the way things are done around here" (Hemmelgarn, Glisson, & James, 2006, p. 75), whereas school climate "reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (National School Climate Council, 2007, p. 4). Culture and climate, in combination, influence the interactions and relationships among administrators, teachers, school staff, and students and their approaches to teaching and learning (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005). Therefore any approach to promoting SEL needs to take into account both school culture and climate and systematically and intentionally embed SEL into the fabric of a school.

SEL interventions and skill development should occur within supportive classroom and school environments, as well as help to create such a climate. In addition, successful SEL-related school and classroom activities foster active student voice in decision-making, problem-solving, and engagement in lifelong learning. Such programs provide repeated opportunities to practice new skills and behaviors within the program structure and to apply them in real-life situations. That is, providing opportunities to practice within classroom lessons is important, but actual opportunities to practice in real-life situations are likely to have even more impact (Durlak et al., 2011).

As noted by Nel Noddings, "Relations of care and trust provide the foundation for both academic and moral education" (Noddings, 2006, p. 20). Indeed, it is the establishment, strengthening, and intentional efforts of a caring network, or *community*, that serve as the very heart of a caring school culture. Regardless of whether an interaction takes place between students, students and adult within the school, faculty or staff members, or beyond the school with parents or guardians, the interchange is one that reflects respect and care. When such a community is established, members often feel welcomed. Table 19.1 provides a list of explicit strategies that educators can implement to help foster positive, student–teacher relationships, and caring classrooms.

TABLE 19.1 Strategies for Fostering Positive Student–Teacher Relationships and Caring Classrooms.

Teacher’s action(s)	Student/classroom benefits	Example(s) in practice
Greet students everyday as they enter the classroom with intentional efforts to have a brief positive interaction with each student before the day begins.	Students start each day feeling seen and cared for, which helps support their ability to learn and nurtures a caring climate in the classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greet students at the door, or move around the classroom to connect with each student before class begins.</li> <li>• Interactions can be as simple as commenting on a student’s new backpack or shoes, or asking them how their basketball game went the night before.</li> </ul>
Get to know your students and the lives they live when they are not in school.	Students feel cared for as you show them that they matter both within, and outside, of the classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This can be done through formal teacher–student interviews at the start of the year, or informally as part of daily “check-ins” throughout the year.</li> <li>• Ask students about the things that matter to them and what they do beyond the classroom setting.</li> <li>• Discuss with students their strengths, challenges, interests, and dreams/goals.</li> <li>• Ask students what you can do as their teacher to help them thrive in school.</li> </ul>
Actively listen to students to show you care.	Develops and strengthens trusting relationships with students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authentic listening is demonstrated by hearing your students and then checking back with them to make sure you understand.</li> </ul>
Involve students in making decisions in the classroom.	<p>By considering student feedback, teachers demonstrate that student opinions and experiences are valued.</p> <p>This helps to create a classroom culture in which students feel safe to ask questions and take chances, enhancing the development of their SEL skills as well as their academic success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give students a voice in the nature and organization of their physical environment. For example, ask for help in setting up the classroom (e.g., what to put on the classroom bulletin boards, how to arrange the seating, how to organize activity centers).</li> <li>• Hold regular class meetings to engage students in developing the rules for the classroom and in creating a positive classroom environment.</li> <li>• Create a “class constitution” with the entire class at the start of the school year that includes a discussion about what students’ needs are. Discuss how each member of the community (students and teacher) can contribute to the development of such an environment.</li> </ul>
Repair the classroom community when challenges arise through the use of <i>Restorative Justice</i> practices.	<p>Practicing restorative justice allows students to problem-solve real-life challenges such as communicating through misunderstandings and managing emotions.</p> <p>Students learn that when they make a mistake, it does not diminish or define them, rather it provides them with the opportunity to learn to do better next time (Yeager, Dahl, &amp; Dweck, 2017).</p> <p>Approaching disciplinary efforts with such a framework may further supports a child’s resilience by nurturing relationships within the community, upholding the respectful culture established, and bolstering self-concept.</p> <p>With a focus on the restoration of the relationships that make up the community, disciplinary or behavioral management efforts used within a restorative justice framework do not seem like discipline at all. Rather, when an “offense” is committed, the “offending” individual is given the opportunity to make things right in a manner that is appropriate to the offense committed (Teasley, 2014).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When developing a class constitution at the start of the year, brainstorm with students’ ways to peacefully resolve and deescalate potential conflicts. Having <i>established and practiced</i> these predetermined strategies beforehand provides students with the skills to peacefully navigate through challenges when they actually arise.</li> <li>• When an “offense” is committed, give the “offending” individual the opportunity to make things right in a manner that is appropriate to the offense committed. For example, rather than putting a student in timeout for hitting, brainstorm a solution to the problem with all of the students involved in the “offense.”</li> <li>• As a community, the students learn to problem-solve the situation, addressing the reasons behind the altercation and any misunderstandings that may have come of the situation.</li> </ul>

## Ingredient 2: Explicitly Teach Social and Emotional Learning Skills Through Evidence-Based Programming

In recent years a large corpus of SEL programs have been developed with considerable diversity in terms of the scope of SEL skills addressed, intervention design, content of the curriculum, target audience (e.g., elementary vs. middle school vs. high school), and research evidence supporting the program's effectiveness. Although some SEL programs include lessons that focus on the explicit instruction of students' SEL competencies, others integrate SEL content into core academic subject areas (such as language arts). Several SEL programs and approaches explicitly target teacher instructional practices and pedagogy to create and promote safe, caring, engaging, and participatory learning environments that foster student attachment to school, motivation to learn, and school success (Zins et al., 2004). Research has shown that the most beneficial programs are based on sound theory and research and provide sequential and developmentally appropriate instruction in SEL skills (Bond & Hauf, 2004). They are implemented in a coordinated manner, school-wide, from preschool through high school. Lessons are reinforced in the classroom, during out-of-school activities, and at home. In effective SEL programs, educators receive ongoing professional development in SEL, and families and schools work together to promote children's social, emotional, and academic success (Nation et al., 2003).

In Table 19.2, we highlight a selection of some of the most widely used and studied SEL programs identified as CASEL "SElect" programs (CASEL, 2013, 2015). We provide a description of each program and highlight research evaluating its effectiveness, categorized by Preschool/Elementary Programs or Middle School/High School Programs. We chose the following programs to highlight using the following criteria: (1) the program has an explicit curricular focus on the promotion of positive classroom environments; (2) the program is school based and has sequenced lessons intended for a general student population, that is the program is universal and is implemented to all children in the typical classroom and not targeted to a special group of children; (3) there are at least eight lessons in one of the program years; (4) the program is available commercially and requires teachers to receive some training before implementing the program in their classrooms; (5) the program has empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness via a rigorous pretest, posttest, control group experimental or quasi-experimental design. Programs that were *not included* in this section are those in which the focus on the development of skills and behaviors is not explicitly associated with creating a positive classroom environment, and programs that are targeted specifically at students who are already experiencing identified social and emotional problems (e.g., depression, anxiety, conduct problems) and are in need of more intensive approaches.

Commonalities across programs include the following: (1) all of the lessons in the programs include Durlak et al.'s (2011) SAFE criteria that has been found to promote more favorable student outcomes; (2) each program is theoretically derived and informed from research on children's social and emotional development; (3) each of the program's goals and activities emphasizes a child-centered approach with an explicit focus on providing students with opportunities for group discussion and individual reflection; (4) lesson plans and accompanying activities are calibrated to the students' level of development; and (5) in addition to the core program lessons, extension activities and materials are provided for teachers to integrate the content of lessons into academic subjects, such as math, science, language arts, and social studies.

Across the programs, there also exist several differences. For example, the *Caring School Community Program*, the *Responsive Classroom Approach*, and *RULER Approach* are programs with an explicit focus on actively involving students in creating a positive classroom community. Yet, the *Responsive Classroom Approach* has morning meetings, while *RULER* students work together to create a Classroom Charter in which they identify their collective goals as to how they want to treat each other, and how they want to feel at school. Several of the programs, including the *4Rs Program* (*Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution*), *The RULER Approach*, and *Facing History and Ourselves*, are programs that are explicitly integrated into the academic curriculum. The *4Rs Program* is specifically designed to be taught in language arts and includes a comprehensive literacy-based curriculum in conflict resolution and SEL, while *Facing History and Ourselves* can be embedded within the social studies, humanities, and language arts curricula. Although most SEL programs are taught by a classroom teacher, the *Roots of Empathy* (ROE) program is one exception in that the program is taught by a trained ROE instructor that visits the classroom three times a month. Also unique to the ROE program is that it includes monthly visits by an infant and his/her parent(s) with activities that serve as a springboard for discussions on emotion knowledge, perspective-taking, and infant development. Finally, *MindUp* is the only program that includes an integration of mindfulness activities in addition to SEL lessons. Specifically, in the *MindUp* program, children engage in mindfulness activities that are done three times everyday for 3 minutes and consist of focusing on one's breathing and attentive listening to a single resonant sound.

TABLE 19.2 SEL Programs for Schools.

Preschool to middle school SEL programs		
Program name and description	Key elements of program	Key research findings
<p><i>CSC Program</i> (formerly called the <i>Child Development Project</i>)</p> <p>Aims to promote core values, prosocial behavior, and a school-wide feeling of community for children in K-6th grade.</p> <p>Includes extensive classroom-wide and school-wide efforts to create a sense of common purpose and commitment to prosocial norms and values such as caring, justice, responsibility, and learning (Kohn, 1997).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Class meeting lessons to promote dialog among students</li> <li>2. Cross-age “buddies” program that pairs students across grades to build relationships and trust</li> <li>3. “Homeside” activities that promote family involvement and inform parents of school activities while providing them with opportunities to participate</li> <li>4. School-wide community building activities that involve school, home, and community</li> </ol>	<p>Compared to students who did not participate in the <i>CSC program</i>, students in the program demonstrated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More prosocial behaviors</li> <li>• Less aggressive behaviors</li> <li>• More positive school and motivation outcomes</li> </ul> <p>Increases in students’ sense of the school as a caring community was reflected in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A positive orientation toward school and learning</li> <li>• Mutual trust in, and respect, for teachers</li> <li>• Overall increases in prosocial behavior and social skills</li> </ul> <p>These positive effects remained stable in high-poverty schools with the highest sense of community, suggesting the effectiveness of this program for high-risk settings (Battistich, Schaps, Watson, &amp; Solomon, 1996; Battistich et al., 1997).</p>
<p><i>The 4Rs Program</i> (<i>Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution</i>)</p> <p>School-based intervention designed for children in kindergarten to fifth grade (<a href="http://www.morningsidecenter.org/">http://www.morningsidecenter.org/</a>).</p> <p>Provides a pedagogical link between the teaching of SEC and fundamental academic skills.</p> <p>Highlights universal themes of conflict, feelings, relationships, and community, the <i>4Rs</i> curriculum and provides opportunities for conflict resolution instruction as well.</p> <p>Introduces teachers to a set of SEL skills and concepts and then supports them in the use of these skills and concepts in their everyday interactions in the school with one another, with school administrators, and with the children in their classrooms.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Comprehensive literacy-based curriculum in conflict resolution and SEL (seven units; provided to teachers in a standardized, grade-specific teaching guide)</li> <li>2. 25 h of training followed by ongoing coaching of teachers to support them in teaching the <i>4Rs</i> curriculum with a minimum of 12 contacts in one school year</li> </ol>	<p>Teacher social–emotional functioning predicted differences in the quality of third-grade classrooms.</p> <p>Teachers’ perceptions of their own emotion abilities at the beginning of the year, significantly and positively predicted their ability to create high-quality social processes in their classroom by the end of the year.</p> <p>Compared to schools who did not participate in the <i>4Rs</i> program, participating schools demonstrated significant improvements in students’: hostile attributional bias, aggressive interpersonal negotiation strategies, depression.</p> <p>Teacher reports of students’ attention skills, aggression, and socially competent behavior also improved.</p> <p>The program also had effects on math and reading achievement for those children identified by teachers as having the highest behavioral risk.</p> <p>(see Brown, Jones, LaRusso, &amp; Aber, 2010; Jones, Brown, &amp; Aber, 2011)</p>
<p><i>The Responsive Classroom (RC) Approach</i></p> <p>Designed to create safe and supportive classroom environments conducive to improving the social, emotional, and academic skills of elementary school children.</p> <p>Emphasizes children’s development in family and school contexts, social interactions, social skills, and process-oriented learning.</p>	<p>Seven essential principles designed to guide teachers’ thinking and actions (NEFC, 2007):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emphasis on the academic and social curricula</li> <li>2. Emphasis on the content and process of learning</li> <li>3. Importance of social interaction in cognitive development</li> <li>4. Importance of social skills in academic and social competence</li> <li>5. Importance of understanding students as individuals</li> </ol>	<p>Research demonstrates that the <i>RC Approach</i> is associated with improvements in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom quality</li> <li>• Student achievement</li> <li>• Teacher efficacy</li> </ul> <p>Children in <i>RC</i> classrooms had more favorable perceptions of school and showed better academic and social behavior when their teacher used responsive classroom practices.</p>

(Continued)



TABLE 19.2 (Continued)

Preschool to middle school SEL programs		
Program name and description	Key elements of program	Key research findings
<p>Training in the principles and practices of the <i>RC Approach</i> occur via structured training procedures that involve comprehensive weeklong training sessions, ongoing coaching support, instructional books, and <i>RC Approach</i> newsletters.</p>	<p>6. Importance of working with students’ families 7. Importance of the climate among school teachers and administrators</p>	<p>Improvement in reading and math was associated with participation in the <i>RC</i> program.</p> <p>Higher implementation fidelity of <i>RC</i> practices demonstrated higher teacher–student interaction quality in emotional and organizational domains, but not in instructional interactions.</p> <p>(see <a href="#">Abry, Rimm-Kaufman, Larsen, &amp; Brewer, 2013</a>; <a href="#">Rimm-Kaufman, Fan, Chiu, &amp; You, 2007</a>)</p>
<p><i>Roots of Empathy</i></p> <p>A universal preventive intervention that facilitates the development of children’s social–emotional understanding in an effort to reduce aggression and promote prosocial behavior (<a href="#">Gordon, 2009</a>).</p> <p>Monthly visits by an infant and his/her parent(s) to a participating classroom. Children learn about the infant’s growth and development via interactions and observations with the infant.</p> <p>Allows children to understand and reflect on their own and others’ feelings.</p>	<p>Classroom practices to promote these principles include the use of <i>Morning Meetings</i>, <i>collaborative Rule Creation</i>, <i>Interactive Modeling</i>, <i>Positive Teacher Language</i> and <i>Logical Consequences</i> for misbehavior.</p> <p>Facilitated by a trained <i>ROE</i> instructor, each visit of the infant and his/her parent follows a lesson plan designed to discuss and learn about different dimensions of empathy. Lessons include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Meeting the baby</li> <li>2. Crying</li> <li>3. Caring and planning for the baby</li> <li>4. Emotions</li> <li>5. Sleep</li> <li>6. Safety</li> <li>7. Communication</li> <li>8. Who am I?</li> <li>9. Goodbye and good wishes</li> </ol>	<p>Children who have participated in <i>ROE</i>, compared to those who have not, demonstrated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advanced emotional and social understanding</li> <li>• Reduced aggressive behavior (specifically proactive aggression)</li> <li>• Increased prosocial behavior (e.g., helping, sharing, cooperating)</li> <li>• Significant increase in children’s assessments of classroom supportiveness and sense of belonging in the classroom</li> </ul> <p>The changes in children’s social and emotional knowledge were associated with reductions in aggressive behaviors and increases in prosocial behaviors.</p> <p>While <i>ROE</i> program children significantly decreased in aggression across the school year, comparison children demonstrated significant increases in aggression.</p> <p>(see <a href="#">Schonert-Reichl, Smith, Zaidman-Zait, &amp; Hertzman, 2012</a>)</p>
<p><i>MindUp</i></p> <p>A comprehensive classroom-based program for children from prekindergarten to eighth grade aimed at fostering children’s social and emotional competence, psychological well-being, and self-regulation while decreasing acting-out behaviors and aggression (see <a href="http://www.thehawnfoundation.org">www.thehawnfoundation.org</a>).</p> <p>Theoretically derived curriculum informed by the latest scientific research in the fields of cognitive neuroscience, mindfulness-based stress reduction, SEL, and positive psychology.</p>	<p>Daily breathing and listening exercises aimed toward enhancing children’s self-awareness, focused attention, self-regulation, and stress reduction.</p> <p>15 lessons grouped into four units:</p> <p>Unit I: Let’s get focused!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning how our brains work</li> <li>• Understanding mindful attention</li> <li>• Focusing our awareness: the core practices</li> </ul>	<p>Children who participated in the <i>MindUp</i> program, compared to children who did not, showed improvements in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher rated attention and social competence</li> <li>• Self-reported optimism, emotional control, empathy, perspective-taking, prosocial goals, and mindful attention</li> <li>• Peer acceptance</li> <li>• Self-reported school self-concept (i.e., perceived academic abilities and interest/enjoyment thereof)</li> <li>• 15% gain in teacher-reported math achievement</li> <li>• Decreases in aggressive/dysregulated behavior in the classroom</li> <li>• Decreased depressive symptoms</li> </ul>

(Continued)

TABLE 19.2 (Continued)

Preschool to middle school SEL programs		
Program name and description	Key elements of program	Key research findings
	Unit II: Paying attention to our senses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindful listening</li> <li>• Mindful seeing</li> <li>• Mindful smelling</li> <li>• Mindful tasting</li> <li>• Mindful moving I</li> <li>• Mindful moving II</li> </ul>	In addition, children who participated in <i>MindUp</i> were rated by peers as more prosocial (e.g., kind, helpful, trustworthy), and less aggressive.
	Unit III: It is all about attitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspective-taking</li> <li>• Choosing optimism</li> <li>• Savoring happy experiences</li> </ul>	On executive function (EF) tasks that required inhibition, working memory, and selective attention, <i>MindUp</i> participants had significantly shorter response times on average, while maintaining equal accuracy compared to children who did not receive <i>MindUp</i> .
	Unit IV: Taking Action Mindfully <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acting with gratitude</li> <li>• Performing acts of kindness</li> <li>• Taking mindful action in our community</li> </ul>	<i>MindUP</i> participants' diurnal cortisol patterns maintained a steep slope from pre- to posttest. Conversely, children who did not participate in <i>MindUp</i> demonstrated changes from a steeper diurnal pattern to a flatter, blunter pattern. This suggests that <i>MindUp</i> may help to regulate stress for students (see <a href="#">Schonert-Reichl &amp; Lawlor, 2010</a> ; <a href="#">Schonert-Reichl, Oberle, et al., 2015</a> ).
<p><i>The RULER Approach</i></p> <p>Aims to enhance the social and emotional skills of children and adolescents while creating an optimal learning environment that promotes academic, social, and personal effectiveness.</p> <p>Uses a systemic approach to education—one in which the learner, the learning process, and the learning environment are all incorporated into the curriculum (<a href="#">McCombs, 2004</a>).</p> <p>Includes curriculum designed for students of various ages.</p> <p>Applicable to subject areas in ELA (see <a href="#">Brackett et al., 2012</a>) and history because of a focus on literature, writing, and understanding the experiences of humans.</p>	<p>A multiyear, structured curriculum designed for elementary school and middle school children to promote social, emotional, and academic learning with units and lessons centered on feeling words and related concepts.</p> <p>Designed to help students obtain a thorough and deep understanding of the feeling words—words that characterize a range of human emotions such as excitement, shame, alienation, and commitment.</p>	<p>Compared to those that did not receive intervention, classrooms and schools that integrated the <i>RULER Approach</i> were found to have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher year-end grades</li> <li>• Higher ratings of social and emotional competence (e.g., leadership, social skills, and study skills)</li> <li>• Higher degrees of warmth and connectedness between teachers and students</li> <li>• More autonomy and leadership among students</li> <li>• Teachers who focused more on students' interests and motivations</li> </ul> <p>(see <a href="#">Brackett et al. 2012</a>; <a href="#">Rivers, Brackett, Reyes, Elbertson, &amp; Salovey, 2013</a>)</p>
Middle school to high school SEL programs		
Program name and description	Key elements of program	Key research findings
<p><i>Facing History and Ourselves</i></p> <p>(<a href="https://www.facinghistory.org">https://www.facinghistory.org</a>)</p> <p>Integrates the study of history, literature, and human behavior with ethical decision-making and aims to promote students' historical understanding, critical thinking, and social–emotional development.</p>	<p>Recommended amount of training for the program is 2 to 5 days. Implementation support is available for teachers.</p> <p>Can be implemented classroom- or school-wide and includes activities to involve the family and community in activities (e.g., community members come into the classroom to share their experiences).</p>	<p><i>Facing History and Ourselves</i> has been found effective in enhancing students' social–emotional skills and attitudes and in enhancing teachers' teaching practices (<a href="#">Barr et al., 2014</a>).</p>

(Continued)

TABLE 19.2 (Continued)

Middle school to high school SEL programs		
Program name and description	Key elements of program	Key research findings
<p>Students engage in reflecting on history, make connections to current events, and discuss the choices they confront and how they can make a difference in the world.</p> <p>Available for grades 6 through 12 and can be embedded within the social studies, humanities, and language arts curriculum.</p> <p><i>The Second Step: Student Success Through Prevention at Middle School</i> (<a href="http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step">http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step</a>)</p> <p>Aims to prepare students to navigate adolescence with effective communication, coping, and decision-making skills that help them make good choices and avoid peer pressure, substance use, and bullying.</p> <p>Designed for students in grades 6 through 8; however, adapted preschool and elementary school versions are available.</p> <p><i>Student Success Skills</i> (<a href="http://studentsuccessskills.com/programs">http://studentsuccessskills.com/programs</a>)</p> <p>Designed to help children develop cognitive and self-management skills that improve student performance.</p> <p>Implemented by the school counselor through classroom lessons. Additional group counseling support is provided to children who need further support.</p> <p>Includes school-wide components and involves activities that connect the family to program activities.</p>	<p>Consists of 48 lessons that involve activities and exercises.</p> <p>Training for second step implementation consists of four virtual modules that each last 30–60 min.</p> <p>Program consists of eight SEL-specific lessons adapted for various age-groups (upper elementary grades to high school).</p> <p>Training in program implementation takes 1 full day, and some implementation support is available (e.g., program coaches).</p>	<p>Effective in reducing violence, aggression, and sexual violence among socioeconomically disadvantaged students in sixth grade (Espelage, Low, Polanin, &amp; Brown, 2013).</p> <p>Experimental research with middle school students shows program is effective in enhancing executive functions, academic achievement, connectedness, and social–emotional skills (Lemberger, Selig, Bowers, &amp; Rogers, 2015).</p>

CSC, Caring School Community; EF, executive functions; ELA, English language arts; RC, Responsive Classroom; SEL, social and emotional learning.

### Ingredient 3: Promoting the Social and Emotional Competencies and Well-Being of Educators

Efforts to improve teachers' knowledge about SEL alone are not sufficient for successful SEL implementation. Indeed, teachers' own social and emotional competence (SEC) and well-being appear to play a crucial role in influencing the infusion of SEL into classrooms and schools (Jones et al., 2013). Reviewing the evidence linking teachers' own SEL competence and student outcomes, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) point to the importance of quality teacher–student relationships, effective student and classroom management skills, as well as implementation dosage and fidelity in obtaining the best outcomes for students. Accordingly, they recommend the development and implementation of interventions designed to specifically address teachers' SEL competencies, reduce teacher stress and burnout, and improve teacher well-being. Although limited, the past few years have seen the emergence of interventions specifically targeted at improving teachers' SEL and stress management.

### Social and Emotional Learning/Mindfulness Programs and Professional Development for Teachers

A need to focus on the well-being and promotion of educators' resilience is long overdue. According to a Gallup (2014) poll, 46% of K-12 teachers reported *high* daily stress, and less than one-third felt engaged in their jobs. High levels of stress and inadequate preparation for coping with the negative emotions that accompany

teaching are often cited by educators as reasons for leaving the profession (Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson, & Hymel, 2015). Burgeoning research suggests that one way educators can more readily meet the stressors associated with teaching is to strengthen their own SEC (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Research aimed at understanding educator SEC is still emerging, thus there are fewer evidence-based SEL programs for educators than are currently available for students. Nonetheless, the SEL programs available for educators have shown great promise in the promotion of teacher SEC and well-being. Table 19.3 provides descriptions of a few exemplary SEL-based programs that target the development of educator SEC. There are several other programs that also focus on promoting teachers' SEC that have not yet been evaluated but show some promise (see Schonert-Reichl et al., 2016 for a delineation and description of these programs).

TABLE 19.3 Social and Emotional Learning/Mindfulness Programs and Professional Development for Teachers.

Program name and description	Key elements of program	Key research findings
<p><i>CARE for Teachers</i></p> <p>Mindfulness-based SEL program focused on building the capacity of educators' SEC.</p> <p>Aims to develop and strengthen the SEC of the educator through increased awareness, reduced stress, greater presence, increased compassion, and a greater capacity for reflection and inspiration (Jennings et al., 2012).</p> <p>Cultivates educators' SEC by providing participants with a series of mindfulness-based exercises that can be easily adopted into an educator's daily routine. One of the few evidence-based SEL programs where the curriculum is created and delivered with sole focus on the educator, rather than the student.</p>	<p>Mindfulness-based exercises attend to the social and emotional needs of educators by teaching them how to (Jennings, Turksma, &amp; Brown, 2012):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a calm, focused mind</li> <li>• Understand and regulate emotions</li> <li>• Increase self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-compassion</li> <li>• Enhance relationships with students and colleagues</li> <li>• Improve classroom management and culture through mindful awareness</li> </ul> <p>Typically presented in a series of workshops spread out between 4 and 5 weeks. In between sessions, educators may also receive coaching from CARE facilitators, via phone or internet, to support them as they implement new skills into their teaching.</p> <p>An annual summer retreat is offered at the Garrison Institute located in upstate New York (<a href="http://www.garrisoninstitute.org">http://www.garrisoninstitute.org</a>).</p>	<p>In comparison to teachers who did not receive the intervention, teachers who received CARE training reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater improvement in adaptive emotion regulation and mindfulness</li> <li>• Greater reductions in psychological distress</li> <li>• Reduced feelings of time urgency/pressure</li> <li>• Significant improvements in well-being and efficacy</li> </ul> <p>Observations revealed that teachers who received CARE training were better able to maintain levels of emotional support for students across the school year, while those who did not receive CARE training declined in their level of emotional support.</p> <p>(see Jennings et al., 2017; Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, &amp; Greenberg, 2013)</p>
<p><i>SMART-in-Education</i></p> <p>A mindfulness-based professional development program designed for any adult who works to support education and can include participants such as teachers, counselors, and parents.</p> <p>Provides participants with a series of exercises that can be used to support well-being and help develop SEC. Supports participants in reconnecting to personal and professional meaning, finding balance, cultivating emotional intelligence, and improving mental and physical health (<a href="http://passageworks.org">http://passageworks.org</a>).</p>	<p><i>SMART-in-Education</i> is typically provided as a series of eight workshops, taught over the span of 11 weeks.</p> <p>The curriculum is focused on the development of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness</li> <li>• Self-kindness</li> <li>• Compassion</li> <li>• Forgiveness</li> </ul> <p>Curriculum uses emotion theory to support the development of these skills.</p>	<p>Compared to those who did not receive the intervention, those who received <i>SMART-in-Education</i> training reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significantly less job stress and feelings of burnout</li> <li>• Increased feelings of occupational self-compassion</li> <li>• Increased feelings of efficacy</li> <li>• Increased ability to forgive others</li> <li>• Having adopted more strategies to help them cope with the stressors of teaching</li> <li>• Increased ability to assess challenging students in a more positive light</li> </ul> <p>Self-compassion was found to mediate reductions in stress and burnout as well as symptoms of depression and anxiety.</p> <p>A large effect in reduction of depression and anxiety was found, both at postprogram and at a 3-month follow-up, for participants from the US group (see Roeser et al., 2013).</p>

CARE, Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education; SEC, social-emotional competencies; SMART, Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques in Education.

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## MOVING FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

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No society can long sustain itself unless its members have learned the sensitivities, motivations and skills involved in assisting and caring for other human beings. *Bronfenbrenner (2005, p. 14)*

What kind of world do we want for the citizens of tomorrow? Urie Bronfenbrenner reminds us that learning to care for others is essential for the survival of society, and clearly, schools play a fundamental role in this mission. The field of SEL holds much promise in creating a future generation of caring adults and students via SEL programs that promote caring classroom and school contexts. The past decade has witnessed significant advances in the research and practice of promoting students' social–emotional skills through strategic SEL programming and best practices that promote student engagement in classrooms and schools. Practical resources and guidelines for implementing SEL successfully have been developed—at the level of the classroom, school, and district. Research has demonstrated that close attention to implementation quality makes a difference. Moreover, it is also important to be cognizant of the notion that there are three essential ingredients of SEL that need to be explicitly and intentionally addressed: the learning context, the SEL of students, and the SEL of educators (see [Fig. 19.1](#)).

### Putting Social and Emotional Learning Into Action: The Importance of Implementation

To effectively establish an SEL program, it is essential that school leaders understand the best ways to implement such programs. Effective implementation not only has an impact on program outcomes, it is also associated with improved student outcomes ([Durlak & DuPre, 2008](#)). Furthermore, inconsistent or ineffective implementation of SEL programming has been found to promote undesirable outcomes, such as negative effects on staff morale and student engagement ([Elias, 2009](#)). These findings emphasize the critical importance of effective SEL implementation.

As noted earlier, SEL programs promote more positive student outcomes when program implementers follow procedures that are SAFE ([Durlak et al., 2011](#)). In addition, effective implementation processes include: (1) the collection and use of data to guide decision-making; (2) discussion with key stakeholders (including teachers, families, and school leaders) to identify visions and goals; (3) prioritized needs and goals based on the findings of collected data; (4) selection of an SEL program based upon the solidified needs and goals of the school ([Jones, Bailey, Brush, & Kahn, 2018](#)). A thorough examination of each of these steps is beyond the scope of this chapter. Fortunately, multiple resources are available to assist school leaders with the implementation process. A research brief written by [Jones et al. \(2018\)](#), titled *Preparing for Effective SEL Implementation*, provides a guide for school leaders to use when seeking to effectively implement SEL programming. Please also see [Durlak, Domitrovich, Weissberg, and Gullotta \(2015\)](#) for additional resources regarding effective SEL implementation.

Promising approaches in SEL are systematic and target both the school and district levels to promote student engagement. Indeed, school districts need to make the promotion of SEL, an important part of education that is equal to efforts to promote students' academic achievement, high school completion, and college and career readiness ([Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013](#)). Researchers and educators at CASEL have heeded this call, and in 2011, they initiated a groundbreaking project to systematically infuse SEL into the core of education. Titled as the "Collaborating Districts Initiative," CASEL is partnering with several large urban districts in the United States to encourage systemic changes that will influence students' social–emotional development and academic performance (see <https://casel.org/partner-districts/districts/>). Most recently, CASEL has developed an online School District Resource that provides resources and practical strategies for systemic implementation of SEL in schools and districts (see <https://drc.casel.org/>).

### Social and Emotional Learning in Action: The Story of the Breakfast Club

As can be surmised from this chapter, caring classroom and school contexts can be created when teachers implement evidence-based SEL programs and also attend to the development of their own social and emotional competence and well-being. Yet, promoting students' SEL may sometimes occur outside of a specific evidence-based SEL program; that is, students' SEL can be fostered organically when teachers provide students with opportunities to have a voice into the creation of a caring classroom and school context (as noted in [Table 19.1](#)). What does this look like in practice? The following vignette is illustrative of what can happen when a teacher engages students in cultivating a caring classroom and school context and allows them the space to put theory into practice.

In 2006 a group of teachers in Western Canada attended a session on social responsibility in which the second author (KAS-R) served as a facilitator. At the session, the teachers learned about the research on happiness (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005) and the ways in which it could be cultivated and promoted. One of the findings discussed was from research that illustrated that when individuals engage in altruism—random acts of kindness—they become healthier and happier. Following the session, one of the teachers who taught eighth graders in a school characterized as high risk, shared with her students the research on happiness. With their interest piqued, the students decided to conduct an experiment to determine if they could promote their own happiness by helping others. That school day the students went on to engage in “random acts of kindness” for their teachers; holding doors open, offering compliments, and offering to help teachers with various projects. At the end of the school day the students returned to their classroom with great excitement and reported to their teacher that performing random acts of kindness “was fun!”

The students wanted to continue their “experiment” and perform even more acts of kindness anonymously. They decided to name themselves *The Breakfast Club* and proceeded to do many more acts of kindness for the teachers and staff at their school, beginning first with writing an anonymous letter to all of the teachers telling them how much they were appreciated. The students’ next random act of kindness came with the help of the community. The students asked, “what do all of our teachers really like?—Starbucks coffee!” The students then went to their local Starbucks and asked if they would donate coffee to all of their teachers. The Starbucks’ employees said yes. The students then placed a letter on the principal’s desk indicating that coffee was in the staffroom for the teachers and signed it “The Breakfast Club.”

Over the course of the school year, the Breakfast Club’s enthusiasm and engagement for performing random acts of kindness for teachers, staff, and their peers blossomed. They continued to do random acts of kindness with the generous support of the community via donations (e.g., pizza, donuts, chocolates). Moreover, the local newspapers become aware of the activities and covered the story of the Breakfast Club in their papers. More donations from the community poured in, including several anonymous donations. All members of the school community—administrators, teachers, staff, and students—were engaged in discussions in which they speculated about who the members of the Breakfast Club might be.

After the school holidays the Breakfast Club decided to take their efforts further and have their classmates engage in random acts of kindness with them. They assigned each classroom in the school to another as their “anonymous givers” and gave each classroom a breakfast name (e.g., *Cheerios*, *Blueberry Muffins*). Shortly thereafter, anonymous acts of kindness were occurring all over the school.

A couple of months went by, and the students from the Breakfast Club decided to take their acts of kindness even further. They wanted to spread their giving to the community. They decided to give a challenge to members of their school community: “Raise 1,300 food items for the local food bank and we will reveal ourselves!” The school far exceeded that goal—students from every classroom in the school donated items for the food bank. During the final assembly the food was displayed, and the Breakfast Club students stood up one by one to an increasing applause from members of the entire school community. This joyous moment was captured on film and can be seen at: <https://heartmindonline.org/resources/random-acts-of-kindness-in-school-the-breakfast-club>.

The story of the Breakfast Club illustrates an important lesson about SEL. That is, SEL is not only concerned with the promotion of students’ social and emotional competence through the implementation of school and classroom-based programs. SEL can unfold when there is an explicit focus on creating the contexts and conditions where students are given the power, love, and support to follow their heart to make the world a kinder and more compassionate place.

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## CONCLUSION

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One of the biggest challenges that confronts the field of SEL is the translation of knowledge garnered from rigorous research on the effectiveness of programs into policy and widespread practice (Greenberg, 2010). This is necessary so that SEL approaches can be better integrated into schools and communities. Such efforts can help build the processes and structures needed to foster high-quality implementation and promote sustainability (Weissberg et al., 2015). In this chapter, we have attempted to bridge this divide by summarizing the research and identifying and delineating programs and practices that can assist educators with the practical tools necessary for creating caring classroom and school environments.

To create a world characterized by the values and practices that illustrate caring and kindness among all people, it is essential that educators, students, parents, community members, and policy makers work in concert to achieve long-term change. Clearly, there is no single solution, but many different approaches that can facilitate positive social and emotional development and deter problem behaviors in children and youth. In today's complex society, we need to take special care to encourage and facilitate our young people to reach their greatest potential and to flourish and thrive. Therefore, it is important that we are intentional about creating the educational contexts that promote social and emotional competence and positive human qualities, including empathy, compassion, and altruism, in our children and youth. Such efforts must be based on strong conceptual models and sound research.

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