IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

CH // 06

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ABSTRACT

While social and emotional learning (SEL) can have many benefits for psychosocial development and well-being, the extent to which the benefits of SEL are realised depends to a large extent on how well it is implemented. This chapter takes up the question of what is necessary for effective implementation of SEL initiatives and why it is important to attend to implementation factors when undertaking SEL in schools and other settings. Included in the discussion is a consideration of policy settings and curriculum frameworks that provide important context and support for SEL implementation in schools. Critical research-based factors for effective implementation of SEL programmes are identified and discussed. The chapter also provides a detailed examination of the benefits and components of systemic approaches to implementation using a whole school approach.

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE BENEFITS OF SEL ARE REALISED DEPENDS TO A LARGE EXTENT ON HOW WELL IT IS IMPLEMENTED

KEY MESSAGES

6.1 Effective implementation of SEL should provide developmentally appropriate support for children's ongoing social and emotional development. This requires careful planning and sequencing of active, focused and explicit teaching and learning activities.

6.2 A holistic approach to policy design and implementation requires integration and collaboration across sectors including education, health, community and social services to ensure policy coherence when implementing social and emotional learning programs.

6.2 Systemic implementation is critically important for generalising learning beyond the classroom and into the daily life of the school. This is undertaken through a school-wide approach that integrates SEL practices into school culture and operations.
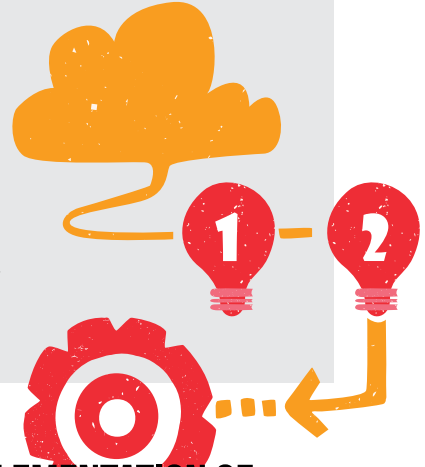
INTRODUCTION

Recent international interest in the field of SEL has seen the development of a range of programmes and delivery approaches. Embedded in these various approaches are assumptions about what to teach, how to teach, who should teach, how children learn and more. Decisions relating to these kinds of questions have direct implications for the ways that SEL initiatives are designed and implemented. Such decisions extend to the reach or breadth of an initiative, for example: whether the initiative's singular focus is on formal classroom teaching, or whether it involves the whole school community, parents and others. Decisions taken regarding the design of the initiative should inform its implementation and evaluation.

EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF SEL REQUIRES CAREFUL PLANNING AND SEQUENCING OF ACTIVE, FOCUSED AND EXPLICIT TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The following consideration of issues and benefits associated with SEL implementation begins with a comparative overview of four key aspects of its conceptualisation and delivery: policy frameworks, national and subnational curricula, specific SEL programmes and whole school approaches. Table 6.1 presents a summary comparison, drawing on criteria adapted from Humphrey (2018).

Table 6.1: Four Aspects of SEL Implementation

	Policy for SEL	**National Curricula**	**Identified Programmes**	**Whole School Approaches**
Form	Overarching educational objectives	Curriculum standards	Explicit staged lessons	Multi-level, curriculum, school-wide ethos & practices
Function	Sets priorities and goals for education	Informs schools and teachers regarding guidelines & outcomes for SEL Sets assessment standards	Provides structure, content and resources to enable effective delivery of SEL	Supports systemic implementation of SEL practices to enable generalisation across school & home settings
Breadth (Complexity)	Establishes frameworks for inter-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration	Guides integrated and sequential learning across schooling levels	Emphasises sequenced in-depth teaching of explicit skills	Multi-component approach involving schools, families, community
Flexibility	Reviews progress and adjusts settings based on evidence	Educators develop and adapt content for their settings	Fidelity to programme guidelines supports effectiveness	Tailors implementation for identified school needs
Focus	Education system as a whole, policy makers, education directorates, all education stakeholders	Education system, schools, teachers, evaluators	Student learning Teacher professional development	Brings all school staff, parents, community together to support student learning & development Targets intensity of intervention according to need

Although much of the evidence for SEL has come from the implementation and evaluation of discrete programmes, recent developments in the field call for a systemic approach to implementation in which features of all four aspects outlined in Table 6.1 are deployed in combination (Elias et al., 2018; Meyers et al., 2019). Indeed, a comprehensive and systemic approach to SEL implementation that integrates elements of all aspects has been conceptualised and trialled in several jurisdictions internationally (Banerjee et al., 2014; Björklund et al., 2014; Graetz et al., 2008). Hence, while each of these aspects identified in Table 6.1 will be considered in turn, it is important to recognise that they are interrelated.

POLICY SETTINGS

Educational policy establishes and articulates goals and priorities for education systems at national, state and/or regional levels. Policies that identify the importance of children's social and emotional development for learning and life success can help to direct educational efforts and establish a basis for investing resources. It is imperative, however, that policies go beyond broad intentions to explicitly address SEL in educational objectives and practice (Cefai et al., 2018; Elias et al., 2018).

In many countries, educational policies advance children's holistic development as a key goal of education and actively acknowledge the role of education in children's social and emotional development. A recent cross-country review of SEL in OECD countries identified that, while most had policies relating to SEL, there was considerable variability in the ways that this focus is articulated and addressed (OECD, 2015). Where identified in national policy statements, SEL is commonly linked to national education priorities.

IN MANY COUNTRIES, EDUCATIONAL POLICIES ADVANCE CHILDREN'S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT AS A KEY GOAL OF EDUCATION

One argument for comprehensive implementation of SEL highlights the potential to increase economic and social outcomes through enhancing labour market readiness. However, a primary focus on economic productivity risks failing to adequately prioritise holistic social and emotional development through educational objectives that promote well-being and social inclusion, as well as academic success (Cefai et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2017). While advocating the explicit teaching of SEL skills, recent policy-oriented reviews for the European Union (Cefai et al., 2018) and the United States (National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development, 2018) call for a realignment of education policies and practices based on the recognition that social and emotional dimensions of experience underpin all learning and are essential to establishing effective relationships with learners who may experience a variety of life stressors.

Promoting children's mental health and well-being has been a significant driver of SEL policy in a number of countries. For example, in Australia, school-wide SEL has been implemented successfully as a central component of school-based initiatives for mental health (Littlefield et al., 2017). A focus on promoting mental health has also informed the development of educational policy and programming for SEL in a number of EU countries (Barry, 2015; Cefai et al., 2018; Fitzpatrick et al., 2013). In Korea, SEL has become an important method for addressing heightened mental health and behavioural issues amongst adolescent students (Lee & Bong, 2017), and in British Columbia, a comprehensive strategy to embed SEL in schools has been

developed to address Canada's national priority on child and youth mental health (Hymel et al., 2017).

While evidence for the benefits of SEL is substantial, it is important to recognise that SEL is not 'one-size-fits-all'. Cultural conceptions of well-being and human flourishing may give rise to very different goals for social and emotional development, both between countries and among different communities in the same country (Hecht & Shin, 2015; Rappleye et al., 2019). Implementation and effectiveness may be compromised when SEL programmes developed for one particular setting are transferred to another without accounting for such differences. Ensuring cultural fit and rigour of implementation are therefore important objectives for policymakers, educators and researchers.

Many countries promote cultural values and citizenship education as a means of addressing children's social and moral development through cultivating prosocial values such as integrity, respect, kindness, cooperation and compassion (Torrente et al., 2015). Aligning SEL with values education helps to ensure that young people develop both the attitudes and skills needed for responsible and ethical citizenship (Elias et al., 2018). Linking civics and SEL affords opportunities to explore personal, social and cultural identities as part of social and emotional development, and supports local contextualisation of SEL. Some examples of efforts to build cultural dimensions into SEL include Bhutan's focus on education for Gross National Happiness (Drupka & Brien, 2013; Krogh & Giri, 2013), infusing the philosophy of Ubuntu in schools in South Africa (Maphalala, 2017) and the incorporation of traditional knowledge concepts into SEL teaching in New Zealand and the Pacific Islands (Hecht & Shin, 2015; Lagi & Armstrong, 2017; Macfarlane et al., 2017).

Notwithstanding the evident synergy with values and civics education, it is vital not to reduce the emotional and relational dimensions of SEL to a focus on social or cultural values (Cefai et al., 2018). Rather, ethical values should inform the development of critical social and emotional skills. Singapore's Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes integrates social and cultural values as core foundations for SEL skill development. SEL underpins the development of 21st century competencies for: civic literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural skills; critical and inventive thinking; and communication, collaboration and information skills (Liem et al., 2017; Singapore Ministry of Education, 2018).
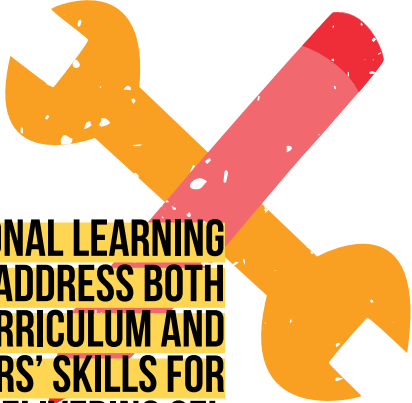
Policy settings outline a direction and impetus for embedding SEL into educational initiatives, but policy alone is not enough to ensure outcomes. Robust, well-articulated policies are essential for leading "efforts to support the whole learner from the periphery to the mainstream … and from the realm of ideas to implementation" (Bridgeland et al., 2018). A holistic approach to policy and implementation requires integration and collaboration across sectors including, education, health, community and social services. It addresses the social determinants of health and well-

being, and involves multiple stakeholders, including students, teachers and parents in shaping policy and practice (Cefai et al., 2018).

NATIONAL CURRICULA: SETTING STANDARDS FOR SEL

Curriculum frameworks set the parameters for what is to be learned as students progress through their education. National curricula help to translate policy into practice by defining the broad skills and competencies that children need to develop to become effective and productive members of society. In most jurisdictions, this is pursued through discrete curriculum areas such as health and physical education, civics and citizenship education, or education in ethics and religion. In some instances, SEL skills have been embedded in dedicated subject areas.

A curriculum focus encourages teachers to implement SEL teaching strategies rather than seeing them as unrelated to their academic work. However, providing broad curriculum guidelines is insufficient to ensure that most teachers can confidently and competently teach social and emotional skills (Brackett et al., 2012; Collie et al., 2015). As discussed in Chapter 5, sufficient depth and frequency of teacher professional learning is necessary to support implementation effectiveness (Askell-Williams & Lawson, 2013; Iizuka et al., 2014). Professional learning should address both the curriculum and teachers' skills for delivering SEL.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SHOULD ADDRESS BOTH THE CURRICULUM AND TEACHERS' SKILLS FOR DELIVERING SEL

Explicit identification and embedding of social and emotional competencies (SEC) in the curriculum at a national or subnational level helps to prioritise educational efforts and accountability for outcomes (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Curriculum guidelines for SEL elaborate learning goals relevant to key competencies for different educational stages. Effective learning goals are sequenced progressively using a recursive approach that enables skills to develop over time. Indicators define the outcomes expected at each stage of learning and development.

A number of jurisdictions internationally, including Ireland, Malta, British Columbia and Mexico, have developed comprehensive curricula for SEL (Cefai et al., 2018; Hymel et al., 2017). In the US, several states have followed the lead of Illinois and joined a Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) initiative to develop formal standards for implementing SEL (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). A recent European review recommended "strengthening social and emotional education as a core curricular area across the EU" (Cefai et al., 2018).

Although the development of shared curriculum standards promises benefits for the quality of SEL implementation, overly prescriptive specification of curriculum outcomes can lead to deficit views and negative stereotyping of children whose development does not follow predetermined norms (Cefai et al., 2018; Ecclestone & Hayes, 2019). Uneven developmental trajectories, cultural and contextual differences, as well as individual temperaments, mean that rates of social and emotional development, forms of emotional expression, behavioural norms and capacities for self-regulation are highly variable (Acar et al., 2018; Huynh et al., 2018; Malti et al., 2016). Curriculum guidelines should provide scope for adaptation to the needs of students, and enable tracking and evaluation of implementation impacts.

By articulating the links between SEL and other curriculum components, system-wide curricula may help to integrate efforts across several related initiatives (Elias et al., 2015). The Australian curriculum has been formulated to incorporate personal and social capability, ethical understanding and inter-cultural understanding across all curriculum areas (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (2019). Singapore's 21st Century curriculum provides a similar emphasis on interrelated competencies. The incorporation of SEL skills within UNESCO's Education 2030 curriculum underlines the importance of aligning social and emotional capabilities with education for peace and sustainable development, so as

EDUCATION

THE INCORPORATION OF SEL SKILLS WITHIN UNESCO'S EDUCATION 2030 CURRICULUM UNDERLINES THE IMPORTANCE OF ALIGNING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CAPABILITIES WITH EDUCATION FOR PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

to help prepare young people to meet major environmental, economic and social challenges (Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, 2017; OECD, 2018; UNESCO, 2017).

SPECIFIC SEL PROGRAMMES

Over the last 25 years, CASEL has spearheaded a programme of systematic development and evaluation of a multitude of classroom-based SEL programmes led by experts in child development and learning. A meta-analysis of foundational work in the field confirmed the value of a set of core practice guidelines for identifying high-quality programmes with implementation processes that were most likely to be effective (Durlak et al., 2011). These practices, known by the acronym 'SAFE', are presented in the following table.

Table 6.2: SAFE Practices Associated with High-quality Implementation and Positive SEL Outcomes

S A F E

Sequenced – applies a planned set of activities to develop skills sequentially in a step-by-step approach

Active – uses active forms of learning such as role play to help youth learn new skills

Focused – devotes sufficient time exclusively to the development of social and emotional skills

Explicit – targets specific social and emotional skills

Step-by-step sequencing of SEL enables children to practise basic skills and progressively build more complex skills. The use of active, experiential methods is essential for developing new capacities, allowing children themselves to try out the practices being presented to them, to explore how they work and directly experience their benefits. A focused approach to teaching that explicitly targets social and emotional skills ensures that the particular skills being taught are clearly identified and practised, that the steps involved are well understood and that children have the opportunity to consolidate their learning of both the skills and the contexts for their use.

Concurrent with research confirming the importance of SAFE practices, an independent meta-analysis of studies on school-based mental health promotion identified similar indicators of implementation quality (Weare & Nind, 2011). High-quality implementation was associated with: a) a sound theoretical base with explicit definition and communication of goals and rationale, and staff training that was clearly linked to intervention components; b) a "direct, intense and explicit focus on the desired outcome"; c) explicit guidelines, reinforced through training and clear specification of individual responsibilities; and iv) they provided complete and accurate implementation to achieve specified programme goals (Weare & Nind, 2011).

QUESTION OF CULTURAL TRANSFERABILITY

Varying degrees of success have been reported for SEL programmes that have been adopted cross-culturally (Humphrey, 2018; Wigelsworth et al., 2016). While a number of factors, including the need for adequate preparation and implementation support, may, in part, account for these findings, careful consideration should be given to the question of cultural transferability. Many prominent SEL programmes have been developed for English-speaking populations, but implementation in different cultural contexts requires more than simple translation. Consideration must always be given to assessing the relevance and cultural fit of any programme that is

intended for implementation with different populations. Contextual factors to be taken into account have to do with cultural values and norms for regulating and expressing emotions, as well as rules of social behaviour (Dobia & Roffey, 2017; Hecht & Shin, 2015; Huynh et al., 2018).

The emphasis on sequenced, active, focused and explicit practices tends to favour approaches that are manualised and highly structured. Developmentally, this approach is most effective with younger children, for whom the evidence for SEL programme effectiveness is stronger. For adolescents, direct skill-based instruction has been found to be less effective (Lendrum et al., 2013). More developmentally appropriate and engaging pedagogies support autonomy and mutual respect in adolescents. This can be facilitated, for example, by involving young people in determining and exploring issues that are of concern to them and supporting them to think through the ways that different values and social norms are enacted in classrooms and in their relationships (Yeager, 2017).

The development of effective SEL skills requires that SEL practices are embedded throughout everyday learning and relationships. While a consistent and developmentally sequenced approach is important, highly prescribed programmes may not reflect student experiences and, therefore, may not generalise well to everyday settings in the classroom and beyond. Similarly, highly scripted and sequenced SEL programmes may not provide sufficient opportunity to build on the contextualised knowledge and expertise of teachers and their capacity to be creative and responsive to their students' needs.

One suggested alternative is to offer teachers a continuum of evidence-informed strategies and practices that are developmentally sequenced, flexible and responsive to student needs. A strategy-based approach to SEL seeks to provide teachers with customisable tools that can be contextualised and embedded throughout their teaching (Bailey et al., 2019). This model entails a shift in focus from curriculum to pedagogy.

> Extending the emphasis on flexibility and responsiveness to include student voice and collective learning, Roffey (2017) highlights the importance of the principles of agency, safety, positivity, inclusion, respect and equity for teaching and learning SEL. This pedagogical approach has particular relevance for breaking down stereotypes and cultivating collaboration, compassion and a sense of shared humanity.

WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACHES

Whole school approaches broaden the focus of school-based interventions beyond the explicit curriculum to include the people and contexts that support children's learning and development. Much of the international work into developing whole school practice models has been informed

by the World Health Organization's Health Promoting Schools (HPS) initiative (WHO, 1996). HPS integrates a tiered approach to mental health promotion, prevention and intervention with a social-ecological orientation that lays emphasis on the cooperative engagement of people and contexts in support of children's learning and development.

A whole school approach recognises that the contexts in which children learn and interact are vitally influential for their social and emotional development. Accordingly, multiple components and strategies are employed in order to build nurturing and responsive relationships, systems, policies and practices. The HPS framework promotes a strategic focus on three core overlapping domains: curriculum, teaching and learning; school ethos and environment; and family and community partnerships. This approach has guided many whole school and whole system SEL initiatives throughout Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific (Cefai et al., 2018; Goldberg et al., 2018; Samdal et al., 2013; Sheinman & Hadar, 2017; Weare & Nind, 2011). Figure 6.1 presents the core domains of the whole school model, along with key examples of recommended strategies for each domain.

Figure 6.1: Whole School Approach for SEL – Core Domains and Strategies

Consistent with a social-ecological approach, Figure 6.1 places young people at the centre. The surrounding middle sphere includes actions and implementation strategies that schools can undertake as part of their everyday practice. The outer sphere shows the kinds of enabling inputs from the education and community sectors that are needed to strengthen school-based implementation in each of the core domains. Implementation is led by a school-based team that provides crucial planning and monitoring functions, and instigates collaborative school-wide systems and practices.

CLIMATE/ETHOS

School climate refers to the overall relational quality of a school, which is reflected in the ways that norms, goals and values are embedded and expressed. Studies of school climate have identified five key dimensions: safety; relationships; teaching and learning; school environment; and processes for school improvement (Thapa et al., 2013). Building a positive school climate involves engaging all members of the school community in a meaningful process of establishing and enacting a shared vision based on ethical and democratic values (Cohen, 2014).

A caring and inclusive school climate is underpinned by policies and practices that uphold principles of fairness and equity, as well as proactive strategies for including students and families with diverse needs and cultural backgrounds. Rather than taking a punitive orientation, discipline policies and practices promote the development of SEL skills such as perspective taking, responsible decision making and conflict resolution. Opportunities for meaningful participation and leadership enhance students' connectedness, as well as their skill development. Respectful and collaborative relationships are cultivated among staff members and between staff and students. Support is available to students and staff for academic, professional and personal development (Weare, 2015).

CURRICULUM TEACHING AND LEARNING

In addition to the curriculum and programme considerations discussed in previous sections, a whole school focus on curriculum teaching and learning adds particular emphasis to school-wide integration of SEL. Applying a whole school perspective enables and enhances the implementation of a staged, developmentally appropriate SEL curriculum and encourages the extension

STUDENT VOICE AND AGENCY IN THE PLANNING AND DELIVERY OF SEL IS ALSO STRONGLY ADVOCATED AS PART OF A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

of teaching and learning beyond the classroom into everyday interactions in all school settings. A whole school approach also facilitates the provision of targeted SEL interventions for students with identified needs.

By emphasising the whole school community and promoting staff collaboration and ownership, the HPS approach encourages schools to make the link between classroom teaching and school-wide policies and practices. Benefits of school-wide programming for SEL include continuity and consistency in teaching and practical application, greater integration of social and emotional competencies with academic skill development, better school relationships and systemic, school-wide promotion of prosocial norms and school culture (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Student voice and agency in the planning and delivery of SEL is also strongly advocated as part of a whole school approach (Barry et al., 2017; Cefai et al., 2018). Teaching and learning effectiveness is enhanced through professional learning and expert consultation.

The HPS framework advocates a tiered model of intervention that distinguishes strategies for providing a classroom-based SEL curriculum for all students, targeted small group interventions for students requiring more intensive or more tailored SEL, and early intervention strategies that provide individualised support for students with complex needs (Cefai et al., 2018; WHO, 1996). When well implemented, universal classroom-based SEL has been shown to have long-term benefits for many students, including those experiencing emotional or behavioural difficulties (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017). Additionally, well-designed targeted programmes have specific benefits for young people experiencing particular mental health or social challenges (Iizuka et al., 2014; Werner-Seidler et al., 2017; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007).

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Locating family and community partnerships at the core of a whole school approach acknowledges that the responsibility for children's social and emotional development is shared with parents and caregivers, and supported by the wider community.

Children's prosocial learning is enhanced when educators work closely with families to support children's social and emotional learning (Slee et al., 2012). Effective engagement of parents and caregivers benefits student learning and supports parents in their parenting role. Activities that promote shared

CHILDREN'S PROSOCIAL LEARNING IS ENHANCED WHEN EDUCATORS WORK CLOSELY WITH FAMILIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

responsibility for promoting children's social and emotional development, and link parents and caregivers to sources of support at school or in the community succeed on the basis of open communication, respect and trust (Garbacz et al., 2015).

The development of active partnerships with parents and caregivers requires a willingness on the part of school staff to learn about parents' needs and views as a basis for cultivating meaningful collaboration (Bartolo & Cefai, 2017). Fostering supportive engagement with parents of children who exhibit emotional and behavioural difficulties, and decreasing the risk of stigma is critical for the success of targeted interventions (Aasheim et al., 2018; Herman & Reinke, 2017).

At the targeted level, some parenting programmes may provide support for the development of parental social and emotional competence (Miller et al., 2018). Parenting programmes that take an emotion coaching focus appear particularly well suited to the goals of SEL. Emotion-focused programmes help parents to build children's emotional awareness and acknowledge the validity of emotions and improve relationships, enhancing parents' SEC at the same time (Lee & Kim, 2019; Wilson et al., 2012).

Active community partnerships provide schools with additional support from community-based agencies and specialist practitioners. Community partners may be involved in providing a variety of co-curricular activities for children, offering information and support to parents, contributing expertise to the implementation of programmes, or providing specialist assessment and referral for children and families who require targeted interventions. In a recent meta-analysis of whole school interventions, school-community partnerships were found to lead to better outcomes for children (Goldberg et al., 2018). Enabling schools to link with support in the community is seen as central to the social-ecological framework of the HPS approach.

> "Research indicates that interventions yield most successful outcomes when they are integrated into daily practice and school culture, seek to engage all staff, reinforce skills outside of the classroom such as hallways and playgrounds, support parental engagement, and coordinate work with outside agencies. Together, these characteristics point to the importance of adopting a whole school approach to enhancing children and young people's social and emotional skill development" (Goldberg et al., 2018).

Whole school implementation involves a multi-component approach that is developed in stages, and requires guidance and support. While more complex than programme-based approaches, it seeks to embed support for social and emotional well-being through enhancing relationships, extending opportunities to develop and practise SEL competencies, and ensuring greater consistency and continuity between school and home settings. Multiple components require a coordinated and whole school focus. Effective shared leadership is essential (Samdal et al., 2013).

REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

Despite clear overall evidence of the efficacy of SEL, there is still considerable variability in its effectiveness when programmes that may have been successful at the pilot stage are transferred to 'real world' settings (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Wigelsworth et al., 2016). These discrepancies are frequently associated with implementation factors (Humphrey, 2018).

Without adequate planning for implementation, the benefits of an otherwise promising programme or initiative may not be achieved. Better outcomes have consistently been related to the quality of implementation (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Meyers et al., 2012). This requires attention to the provision of effective support and monitoring of implementation processes over a sufficient duration throughout preparation, professional development, initiation and ongoing maintenance of the initiative (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Fixsen et al., 2013).

WITHOUT ADEQUATE PLANNING FOR IMPLEMENTATION, THE BENEFITS OF AN OTHERWISE PROMISING PROGRAMME OR INITIATIVE MAY NOT BE ACHIEVED

With a focus on the translation of research evidence into practice, the field of implementation science has identified the importance of fidelity, adequate dosage, quality, participant responsiveness and programme differentiation as key elements associated with effective implementation. Also highlighted is the need to monitor progress, as well as issues of programme reach and adaptation when evaluating programme implementation (Durlak, 2016; Durlak & DuPre, 2008).
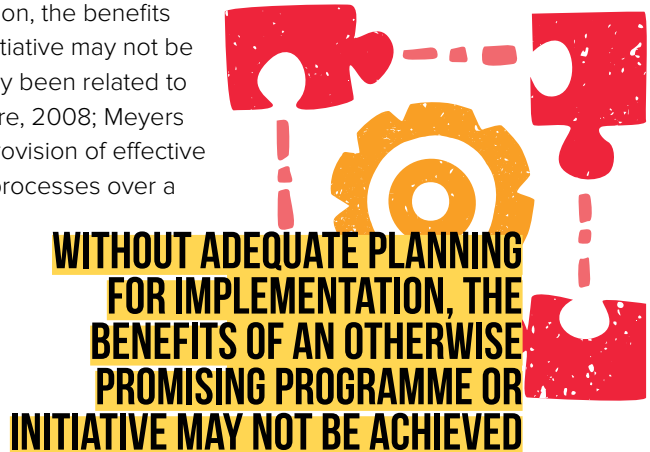
Table 6.3: Key Factors for Implementation Effectiveness

Fidelity (Adherence)	To what extent has the intended delivery model been adhered to?
Dosage (Exposure)	How often and for how long is the programme being delivered?
Quality	How well are the programme components delivered?
Responsiveness	How fully do participants actively engage with the programme or initiative?
Programme Differentiation	Does the programme provide clearly distinguished aims and methods?
Monitoring	Is there an effective system for monitoring quality and progress?
Reach	How well does the programme reach its target participant group/s?
Adaptation	What adaptations, if any, are required to fit the context?

*[Source: Durlak, 2016; Humphrey, 2018]*

SEL programmes delivered with adherence to programme guidelines have been found to be more likely to show the desired impacts for student academic and behavioural outcomes. In order to promote fidelity, many programmes, especially those originating in North America, provide highly structured and detailed lesson plans and implementation guides, as well as professional learning and support.

At the same time, effective implementation requires adaptation to suit the specific context in which an SEL initiative is being undertaken (Meyers et al., 2012). If school leaders and staff are not convinced of the benefits of SEL or are not committed to the implementation process, effectiveness will be compromised. Taking time to adapt the initiative to their needs and context is key to securing initial buy-in and ongoing involvement in the process of implementation (Flaspohler et al., 2012).

Adaptation may be necessary to ensure a given programme is responsive to cultural differences in the development of social and emotional competence (Brown et al., 2018; Dobia & Roffey, 2017; Huynh et al., 2018). Cultural adaptation may also be an important determinant of effectiveness when SEL programmes are transferred from one country to another. For example, educators and researchers in the UK and Europe have noted a preference for a 'bottom up' flexible approach to implementation that provides scope for teachers to determine content and teaching methods.

EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION REQUIRES ADAPTATION TO SUIT THE SPECIFIC CONTEXT IN WHICH A SEL INITIATIVE IS BEING UNDERTAKEN

Adaptability was an intentional design feature of the UK's Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiative. However, the secondary-level SEAL evaluation suggested that excessive flexibility and limited resources contributed to diluted implementation, which resulted in poor outcomes. The research findings also identified problems with dosage, responsiveness and programme differentiation. These issues were attributed to the perception of an 'anything goes' approach to implementation (Humphrey et al., 2013). Further reasons why educators may prefer adaptation over programme adherence include school context, demands, lack of resources and the conviction that schools know their students' needs better than programme developers (Skrzypiec & Slee, 2017).

Since both adaptation and fidelity contribute to effective implementation, it is essential to strike a productive balance between these two dimensions. To this end, programme developers should clearly designate core components and underlying principles that must be preserved in order to maintain the integrity of the initiative and, at the same time, identify components that can be modified for contextual fit (Fixsen et al., 2005; Meyers et al., 2012).
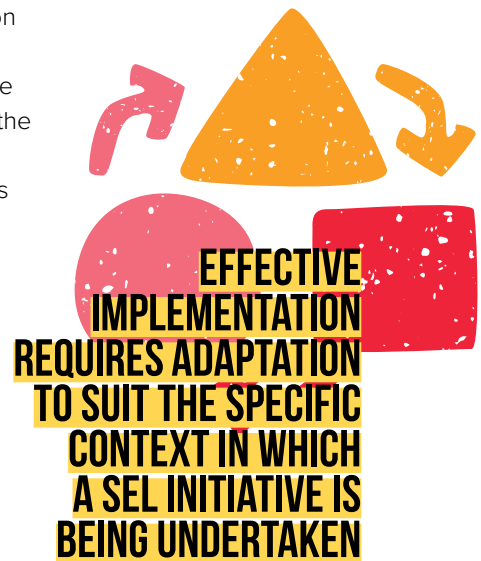
A focus on strategic and pedagogic approaches aims to enable teachers to infuse SEL into their teaching with a greater sense of autonomy, knowledge and competence. This emphasis on flexibility reduces the need for strict fidelity when implementing predetermined programmes and highlights the importance of quality of implementation and processes of quality assurance to support effectiveness (Barry et al., 2017).

Quality of implementation refers to how well a programme or practice is taught. Implementation quality in SEL relates to teachers' SEC, including effective engagement, sensitivity and responsiveness, as well as preparedness, and skill in lesson delivery and in integrating SEL concepts and skills into daily interactions and activities (Lendrum et al., 2016). An emphasis on quality assurance for implementing flexible SEL practices requires investment of resources in professional development and support, with a focus on building understanding of the purpose, principles and pedagogies of SEL, as well as enabling teachers' SEC (see Chapter 5).

Researchers in the field of implementation science have identified a number of ways that SEL implementation is weakened (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). These include:

Insufficient dosage, duration, and effectiveness – This occurs when lessons are shortened, provided at less than the recommended frequency or offered sporadically. Lack of continuity limits effectiveness.

Fragmentation and marginalisation – This occurs when SEL is not seen as core curriculum and is consequently given a low priority. Inconsistency of teaching undermines learning outcomes.

Sole focus on classrooms – Restricting the focus on SEL to classroom lessons only limits valuable opportunities to generalise and apply learning to other contexts, and reduces skills development.

Limited staff training – Teaching SEL skills requires specialised understanding and effective support. Without appropriate training, staff competence and confidence for teaching SEL will be limited.

WHOLE SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION

While many established SEL programmes offer some form of implementation support, systemic and sustained implementation is enabled by policy settings, standards and support structures that can direct resources and expert guidance to schools. Effective whole school implementation follows a carefully planned and sequenced process. This should begin with a phase of preparation and developing readiness, leading to the establishment of structures

for effective implementation, including forming a team and devising an implementation plan. Specific professional learning is critical prior to commencing implementation. Active implementation includes attention to fidelity, dosage, quality and engagement. To ensure effectiveness and sustainability, monitoring and evaluation should be undertaken for both process and outcomes (Fixsen et al., 2013; Meyers et al., 2012).

Evaluation of the KidsMatter initiative in Australia led researchers to propose a framework for quality assurance in implementing whole school social-emotional well-being programmes. The emphasis is on supporting the engagement of all stakeholders in an ongoing process of planning, action and reflection (Askell-Williams et al., 2013). CASEL's online *Guide for School-Wide Social and Emotional Learning* provides extensive tools and resources to support systematic implementation of evidence-based SEL programmes. Its *School Theory of Action* elaborates six sequential steps intended to systematically build the capacity of schools for SEL implementation (Meyers et al., 2015, 2019).

EFFECTIVE WHOLE SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION FOLLOWS A CAREFULLY PLANNED AND SEQUENCED PROCESS

Implementation frameworks need to be adapted to cultural and educational contexts in different countries. Key considerations identified from the literature are presented below.

PREPARATION

Preparation involves engagement of stakeholders and undertaking thorough planning to ensure that the school is ready for, and has the resources needed, to take on the SEL initiative. This requires investigation of the needs of the school and the resources available to support implementation (Flaspohler et al., 2012). At this stage, an implementation team should be formed with the responsibility to lead the initiative and engage staff, students and parents.

In order to build interest and procure buy-in across the school community, it is important to learn and share what SEL is to discuss how and why SEL might be of benefit, as well as to hear and address any concerns. Taking time at the outset to establish interest and commitment will help to develop a sense of shared mission and will support consistency and quality of implementation.

Selection of the SEL programme or approach to be taken should be based on a thorough investigation of the specific aims and objectives of the programme, and what is entailed in implementation in light of the needs, context and capacity of the school and its community as well as the resources available to support it. Any needs for programme adaptation should also be carefully considered.

Planning for implementation involves developing action plans to prioritise and address key areas that require attention. It should consider processes for engagement of staff and community members, professional learning needs, curriculum integration and timetabling of lessons, as well as policy and practice implications and processes for monitoring and feedback. This work is ongoing and requires significant coordination. The time, effort, skill and support required must therefore be recognised and included in resource planning at school and education system levels.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Teachers' 'will and skill' have been identified as critical factors in determining quality of SEL implementation and positive outcomes for students (Lendrum et al., 2013). As previously indicated, the quality of implementation depends largely on the quality of teaching. Since few teachers receive specific training in SEL principles or pedagogies in their pre-service learning, it is essential to provide high-quality professional learning prior to implementing SEL, as well as ongoing guidance and support during implementation (Schonert-Reichel et al., 2015).

QUALITY OF IMPLEMENTATION DEPENDS LARGELY ON QUALITY OF TEACHING
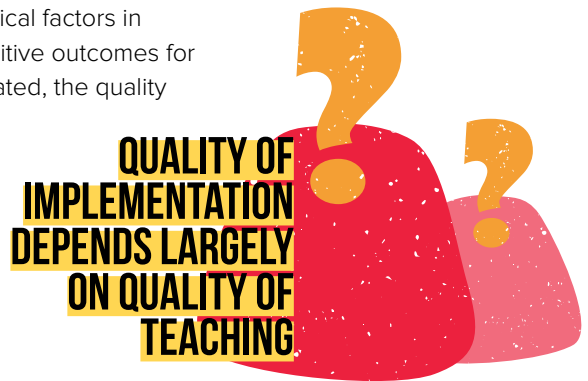
In addition to personal SEC, characteristics needed for effective SEL teaching include having an authoritative teaching style, good teaching skills, an extroverted interpersonal style and strong group leadership skills. Implementation quality will be enhanced when teachers are motivated to teach SEL, have a positive opinion of the programme and have the self-efficacy to deliver it well (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Effective professional learning should therefore aim to promote these skills and dispositions.

The process of whole school implementation is complex and requires additional skills for leadership, peer mentoring and collaborative engagement with parents, caregivers and community stakeholders. Professional learning and guidance to support implementation, including appropriate adaptation and monitoring of SEL programmes, is therefore also essential to build organisational capacity for successful whole school SEL implementation (Goldberg et al., 2018).

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

Implementation of a whole school approach must be adapted to local circumstances, with contextualising programme aims and methods for the particular school community as an ongoing focus. This requires systematic definition and prioritisation of goals and targets, and reflexive and regular progress monitoring, adjustment and review.

Adoption of developmentally sequenced evidence-based programmes helps to guide and enable classroom teaching and learning and supports programme fidelity. In addition, SEL practices are extended to non-classroom settings and effectively diffused through the broader curriculum, as well as informing school policies and practices (Iizuka et al., 2014).
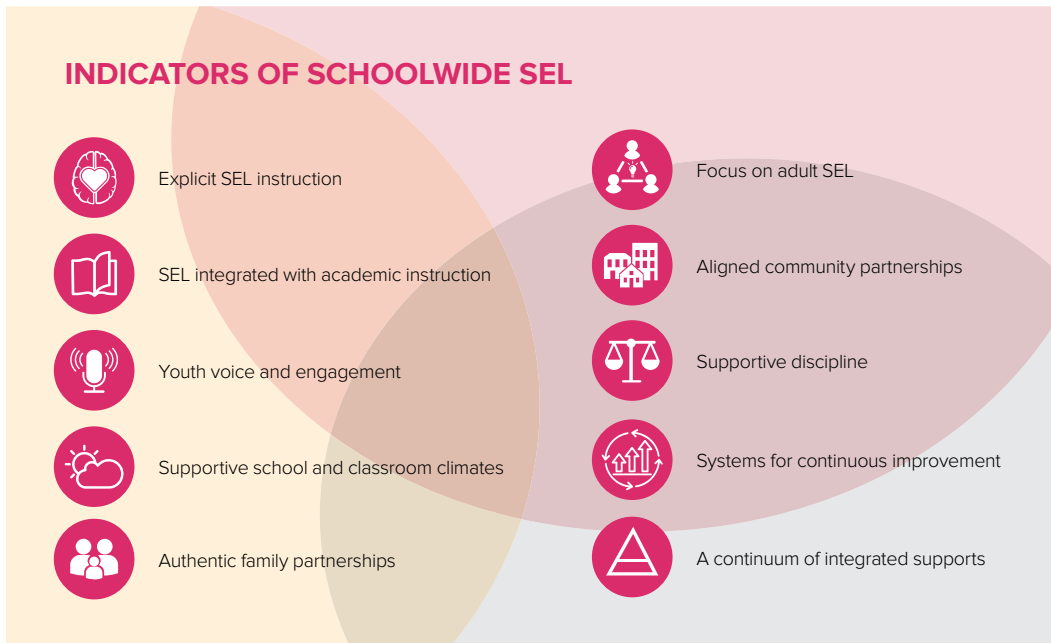
The commitment of school leadership in support of a team-based approach is critical to enabling effective implementation (Askell-Williams, 2017). Ongoing guidance provided by specialist support staff is also crucial (Meyers et al., 2019; Slee et al., 2009). The provision of both universal and targeted interventions is recommended to ensure that more intensive support options are available for students who may benefit from them (Werner-Seidler et al., 2017). Planning and delivery of targeted interventions should be undertaken in consultation with specialist staff and community experts careful monitoring of implementation processes and effects should be incorporated (Evans et al., 2015).

THE COMMITMENT OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN SUPPORT OF A TEAM-BASED APPROACH IS CRITICAL TO ENABLING EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

The cultivation of genuine partnerships with parents and caregivers involves collaborating in accessible and meaningful ways on the basis of sharing responsibility for children's development. Working with parents and caregivers in this way is often challenging for schools, but has significant benefits for children's development and academic achievement (Bartolo & Cefai, 2017; Garbacz et al., 2015).

CASEL's *Guide for School-Wide Social and Emotional Learning* provides a useful overview summarising ten indicators for schoolwide SEL implementation.

Figure 6.2: Indicators of School-wide SEL as outlined by CASEL

INDICATORS OF SCHOOLWIDE SEL

- Explicit SEL instruction
- SEL integrated with academic instruction
- Youth voice and engagement
- Supportive school and classroom climates
- Authentic family partnerships
- Focus on adult SEL
- Aligned community partnerships
- Supportive discipline
- Systems for continuous improvement
- A continuum of integrated supports

[Source: CASEL, ©2019. All rights reserved. https://schoolguide.casel.org/what-is-sel/indicators-of-schoolwide-sel/]

SUSTAINABILITY

Whole school SEL seeks to promote and enable a school culture oriented towards an ethic of care and development of the whole child. Schools' capacity for meeting this agenda is central to achieving the 21st century goals of education for peace and sustainable development. A major challenge for implementing and sustaining whole school SEL is to embed it thoroughly so that quality relationships and social, emotional and citizenship development become focal to the ways that schools operate.

Unfortunately, even successful programmes lose impetus through insufficient attention to maintenance and renewal. Major challenges to sustainability of educational initiatives include competing priorities, overcrowded curricula, innovation fatigue and staff turnover. Educational structures, particularly those of high schools, and a narrow focus on academic achievement and competitive ranking, are further challenges to embedding and sustaining SEL initiatives (Collie et al., 2015).

A number of the factors that underpin effective implementation of SEL are also important for ongoing sustainability. These include effective leadership, ongoing consultation and professional learning, whole school implementation, deep involvement of teaching teams who model the required competencies, school-level curriculum integration and financial resourcing (Elias, 2010). A systematic review in the US identified four kinds of characteristics that predicted programme sustainability: organisational support and readiness; programme fit; implementer characteristics including knowledge, skill and motivation; and sustainability planning (Cooper et al., 2015).

Those involved in implementation of SEL initiatives have identified the need to plan for sustainability through providing ongoing professional learning and consultation. This is particularly important for addressing issues associated with staff turnover, which in some instances can leave newer staff assuming leadership for implementing an initiative without having received the requisite professional learning (Askell-Williams, 2017).

MAJOR CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABILITY OF EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES INCLUDE COMPETING PRIORITIES, OVERCROWDED CURRICULA, INNOVATION FATIGUE AND STAFF TURNOVER

Planning for sustainability is not primarily a responsibility of schools alone; it also involves policy makers and funding bodies. A significant body of research has identified that there "there is no 'one-size-fits-all' when it comes to school-based prevention" (Humphrey et al., 2013) and, therefore, it is not simply a matter of 'plugging in' a ready-made programme and expecting to achieve outcomes. The clear benefits of SEL are only achieved when it is well implemented (Durlak, 2016).

Effective implementation is systemic, employs a school-wide focus and is backed up with clear policy, curriculum standards and appropriate resourcing. Most importantly for policy makers, quality implementation of SEL requires ongoing professional learning and implementation support. Both are essential for maintaining effectiveness and delivering desired outcomes. This requires sustained prioritisation and investment.

KEY CHALLENGES

6.1   International implementation of specific programmes has shown variable outcomes. Relevance and cultural fit of pre-existing programmes is necessary. Further research to distinguish implementation factors in diverse cultural settings is required.

6.2   Universal implementation of formal programmes in secondary schools has had limited success. Greater emphasis on student voice and agency has been suggested as more appropriate for SEL implementation in secondary schools.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1   Enable systemic and sustained implementation through the development of consistent policy settings, curriculum standards and effective implementation support, including expert guidance for schools.

6.2   Prepare for SEL implementation by ensuring that SEL practices, programmes and implementation methods are effectively and inclusively contextualised to meet the social and cultural needs of particular school communities.

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