

Responsive Classroom Lessons for an Elementary Classroom

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Honors Thesis Project

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Literature Review

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is critical for children. SEL can increase self-awareness, academic achievement, and positive behaviors in and out of the classroom and “provides a foundation for safe and positive learning and enhances students' ability to succeed in school, careers, and life” (Weissburg, 2016). Because of the increasing importance of SEL in education, I decided to focus my honor’s thesis project on integrating SEL into elementary school classrooms. I aimed to provide future educators with a resource on how to integrate social and emotional learning into the required curriculum, by utilizing the fundamentals of responsive classrooms and designing usable lesson plans.

Educators focus on SEL within the classroom to help students experience the targeted benefits of the SEL curriculum within their coursework. Many educators speculate that there will be a need to support and enhance social and emotional learning especially during post-pandemic times. According to Responsive Classroom, SEL “promotes cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control” (Responsive Classroom, n.d.). These skills and characteristics are important for the student to learn at a young age and build on them as they continue through school. The core focus is for the students to increase self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, responsibility, and relationship skills.

Educators encourage students through self-exploration to experience the Social and Emotional curriculum. The organization, Responsive classroom, advocates for a teaching approach that allows for a “student-focused, social-emotional-centered way of learning and discipline” (Responsive Classroom, n.d.). The idea of self-discovery increases student choice and emotional awareness when it comes to their schoolwork. Students can understand the importance

of the key skills of social and emotional concepts through communication with their peers and the different lesson plans and resources provided by the teacher. Students are more likely to gain the necessary social skills and characteristics needed for development with a learner-centered approach.

When educators plan curricula, they often borrow ideas from colleagues. The Internet is another source of information for teaching ideas. The Scholastic article, *Welcoming the Internet Into Your Classroom* supports that the Internet can be one of the most powerful and rewarding instructional tools. The Internet provides a wealth of resources and information that make teaching exciting and new. Some of the nuggets you can find on the Internet include lesson plans. After collecting, it is beneficial to curate ideas electronically. Gonzalez (2017) describes the importance of curation to create meaning out of a collection. I decided to use the internet as a tool and curate SEL information and lesson ideas for elementary school educators.

Methods

For my project, I created a curation website promoting social and emotional integration within the classroom with various lesson plans written for elementary-aged students. To create the final product, I reviewed research, developed lesson plans, and conducted a peer-review survey of the effectiveness of the finished product, to prepare a usable resource. I researched information about the responsive classroom, the Massachusetts Education standards, and the CASEL standards for the website and create the lesson plans. Once I published the website, which is available at: <https://sites.google.com/view/honorsprojectselresources/home>, I conducted the peer-review study.

Methodology

The study is a peer-review survey of the effectiveness of the finished product. The information gained will assist in revising the usable resource. The study collected opinions on the lesson plan value, connection to the focused content area, as well as if the website can be used as an educational resource for educators.

The importance of “having teachers exchange collegial feedback gives teachers time to reflect on their own teaching while learning from one another in a nonthreatening manner” (ASCD, 2021). Teachers can learn valuable information from each other and by gathering my peer’s feedback I am able to adapt my final product and gain valuable information, because “when teachers observe and learn from one another, better teaching practices, more student learning, and more positive evaluations result” (ASCD, 2021). In order to proceed with the survey, I asked permission from the Department Chair, Dr. Glen, and Dr. Renaud the professor for ELED 360, Teaching in a Standards-Based, Inclusive Elementary Classroom, to recruit students in a pre-practicum course.

Once the permission was granted, I provided the necessary materials to Dr. Renaud, to distribute recruitment letters to potential participants, the students enrolled in ELED 360 Teaching in a Standards-Based, Inclusive Elementary Classroom. The students in the class have previously participated in observation hours and have coursework in Elementary Education. In the course, they are learning how to plan, teach and assess in a standards-based, inclusive classroom. They are exploring classroom-based “inclusive” models and teaching strategies and professional teaching standards. The students received the materials in class from Dr. Renaud and signed the consent forms. After completing the consent form, the participants who agreed to

participate will have access to the website available at:

<https://sites.google.com/view/honorsprojectselresources/home> and the survey so that they can complete the task within a two week period. The task includes: reviewing a website with reasons to promote social and emotional learning and how to integrate SEL into other classroom lessons, then they are rating the effectiveness of the website using an anonymous Qualtrics survey.

Findings

There were 32 survey responses that provided positive feedback and helpful suggestions. Figure 1 shows that a majority of the results strongly agreed with the 11 questions presented in the survey. Over 90% of the participants agreed that the website is user-friendly and easy to navigate, as well as the content is related to social and emotional learning appropriately. About 87% of people believe that the information is clear, comprehensible, and informative. Areas where I could improve the website based on the data collected, would be adjusting the overall visual appeal and searchability within the tabs, which both received a 65.63% for the strongly agree category, and accessibility on various devices received the lowest percentage overall. None of the participants voted somewhat disagree or strongly disagree on any of the questions, which resulted in positive ranks and reviews. I feel as though I received accurate results from the survey, as I only received minimal neither agree nor disagree results for all the questions provided.

Besides numerical feedback, I also received written feedback from the survey. Figure 2 is a chart with three categories listing the feedback left by my peers; positive comments, specific suggestions, and positive feedback with suggestions. The positive comments were superficial in nature. The second and third columns were my main focus for improvements, despite the

positive feedback being affirming that the positive and specific column in the chart offers positive feedback and comments on the overall structure and content of the website. Many describe the website as informative, organized, and easy to navigate. My peers also commented on the targeted area of SEL and I received one comment about the adaptability of the lessons within the classroom and the division of the different grade levels. This feedback provides me with information on the effectiveness and usability of the website and an outside perspective on how the website is being received by others. The second column offers suggestions on what needs improvement. I personally have not taken a class that has provided me with a formal lesson plan writing procedure. One comment stated the “format was kind of strange” for my lesson plans, which I chose to write as basic as possible, due to my lack of experience, in hopes to later re-write formally. Another comment suggested that I should label the “actual lesson plans with the intended grade to avoid confusion”. I did do this but will see how I can revise for clarification. My last comment received was a suggestion to “add some links on the homepage”, which I think is a great idea on how to improve the usability of the website.

Using the specific suggestions provided in columns two and three from Figure 2, I am able to create an improvement plan for the website. I would like to rewrite the lesson plans formally and follow the guidelines provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary Education, upon further education in my elementary education courses. I would move the resources and links tab to be a section on the homepage or just add another section to the bottom of the homepage for the resources and links used to provide viewers with multiple places to access them. The comment about defining the lesson plans better by grade level, suggests that I should rethink the way the lesson plans are presented on the content tabs for each focus area of SEL. With these suggestions, I will improve the overall usage of the website.

Conclusion

Creating a website about Social and Emotional Learning was a wonderful experience. From this I learned the process of writing basic lesson plans, developing a website, and conducting a peer-review study. I developed critical thinking skills and perseverance. When I reached a stumbling block, I was able to work through the issues with patience and focus to complete the task. I had to create 15 different lesson plans for 5 subject areas for 3 different grade levels. It was difficult at times to come up with ideas for the lesson plans or how to apply the specified content area. With the help of my mentor and impending deadlines, I was able to focus and create a website that I am proud of.

Social and Emotional Learning is an important focus among educators in Elementary Classrooms. The skills that students gain from focusing on SEL within their curriculum is important to their success and development. This became the focus of my honors thesis project to promote the integration of SEL in the classroom. I decided to create a usable, accessible resource for educators to be able to adapt and use to fit the needs of their students. I created the website with 15 lesson plans for grade levels 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, for the 5 target areas of SEL. Once published, I sent out a survey for peer feedback on my lesson plans and website that provided me with information on how to improve and positive feedback. From this, I gained general knowledge on lesson plan writing and an in-depth understanding of the importance of Social and Emotional focus within the classroom.

Figure 1

#	Question	Strongly Agree		Somewhat agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Somewhat disagree		Strongly disagree		Total
1	The website is user-friendly and I found it easy to navigate in an intuitive manner. I could navigate the tabs with ease.	93.75%	30	3.13%	1	3.13%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	32
2	The information is clear and comprehensible.	87.50%	28	9.38%	3	3.13%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	32
3	The information on the website is Information that is related to social and emotional learning.	90.63%	29	6.25%	2	3.13%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	32
4	I could access the website from either a laptop, tablet, and/or phone. Design of the mobile tool fully takes into consideration the constraints of a smaller-sized screen.	59.38%	19	21.88%	7	18.75%	6	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	32
5	The lesson plan is adaptable to meet the learner's needs.	68.75%	22	28.13%	9	3.13%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	32
6	I found the information useful.	78.13%	25	18.75%	6	3.13%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	32
7	The information was informative.	87.50%	28	9.38%	3	3.13%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	32
8	The website was visually appealing.	65.63%	21	31.25%	10	3.13%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	32
9	I could search for information on the website easily.	65.63%	21	31.25%	10	3.13%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	32
10	I could download and adapt the lesson plans with no challenges.	81.25%	26	9.38%	3	9.38%	3	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	32
11	The lesson plans were labeled grade-level appropriate.	75.00%	24	21.88%	7	3.13%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	32

Figure 2

Positive Comments - superficial level	Feedback with specific suggestions	Positive and specific
Really great lesson plans!	The lessons format was kind of strange , but other than that GREAT JOB	The website was very informative and easily accessible
Amazing work!	This is an excellent website with a lot of excellent information. I would recommend labeling the actual lesson plans with the intended grade to avoid confusion when teachers use these lesson plans as resources.	I found this website to be very helpful and informative , especially all of the lesson plans! I think it is important to explicitly teach SEL everyday, so thank you for including those!
It looks amazing.	Maybe add some links on the home page for people to easily click on as well as the drop down menu	I loved how organized your google site was organized! I am currently working on a google site for one of my classes, so I hope my site looks as good as yours! Great job!
		This is great! Such a good idea for an honors thesis and I am so glad to have been able to view it. Very easy to navigate and the lessons can be adapted to fit the needs of all learners (example: choose between book or video for multiple means of engagement). I love that you did different lessons for different grades! Great job & good luck!
		I think you did a great job overall! Your images were great and the navigation was very easy . I looked at it on a laptop, so I do not know how it would navigate on a tablet or phone. Its composition looks like it would work well for that too, though! Great job!

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