

The Practice and Challenges of Integrating Social and Emotional Learning Into Junior High School Arts Curricula: Teachers' Perspectives and the Construction of Teaching Indicators

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Summary

Social and emotional skills can have a positive influence on student behavior, academic outcomes, and career development along with relationships with teachers and peers. These skills can prepare individuals for university, workplaces, and taking on a positive role in society. Discourse on this topic has been developing rapidly, with the five core competencies of social and emotional learning (SEL) developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) now widely used. These core competencies are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. SEL is not merely a passing trend; rather, it is a right to which all students should have access. As such, SEL is currently being implemented by schools worldwide. Despite the increasing number of schools adopting SEL, there remains a gap between relevant research on the topic and practical applications, leading some to question SEL's applicability and effectiveness. For example, most studies on the topic have focused on evaluating teachers' understanding of the concept and student outcomes; in comparison, research on the developmental benchmarks of SEL remains limited. This study therefore aims to explore these developmental benchmarks, with the ultimate goal of improving the feasibility and effectiveness of SEL implementation in schools. To this end, it considers the implementation of SEL in Taiwan as a case study.

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In Taiwan, the earliest program promoting SEL was the Emotional Quotient Observation Record, a pilot launched by the Taipei City Government's Department of Education in the 2018 academic year. Only 1–2 schools were included for each subject, including art. Therefore, integrating SEL into art instruction is indicated as a sustainable direction. The intrinsic emotional and communicative functions provided by the arts have great educational value and thus an integral aspect of a holistic education. The power of art to convey or transform emotions can help make learning more interesting and meaningful, allowing individuals to share their life experiences in a dynamic way, reducing their feelings of isolation, and fostering positive social cohesion. Thus, SEL can easily be incorporated and assimilated into existing teaching methods in art. However, in school-based arts education, teachers often overlook this aspect and miss opportunities to connect the arts with SEL. The objectives of this study, therefore, are as follows: first, to investigate the views of junior high school art teachers and the difficulties they face regarding the integration of SEL into their teaching. Second, it aims to construct teaching indicators for the integration of SEL into the subject of art in junior high schools. Finally, it proposes recommendations for implementing SEL into junior high school art instruction.

The research method of this study involved two separate stages. The five core SEL competencies proposed by CASEL were used as a framework for this process. In stage one, we explored existing literature from Taiwanese and international scholars to clarify the definitions, connotations, and constructs of social and emotional capabilities. We also used the literature to determine the teaching strategies to be used to integrate SEL into junior high art instruction. This process enabled the development of a sub-conceptual SEL framework. Subsequently, we interviewed eight junior high school art teachers. These interviews focused on the teachers' practical teaching experiences and daily interactions with students.

These methods allowed us to develop a first draft of teaching indicators for integrating SEL into junior high school art education. In total, thirteen indicators were constructed, based on the 12-Year Basic Education Arts Platform in Taiwan, the New Jersey Arts Standards in the United States, and the results of the interviews. In stage two, we conducted a questionnaire survey using the Delphi methodology and updated our draft of teaching indicators after each iteration of the questionnaire was completed.

We found that although junior high school art teachers recognized the importance of SEL, they faced challenges in implementation. For example, they felt it important to respect their students' wishes for privacy and self-disclosure and found it challenging to appropriately evaluate the long-term effects of SEL or plan for it in their course schedules. As a result, the study could develop

diverse indicators that centered on students while extending their focus to the wider community. In addition, the indicators could account for practical application by teachers and the situations students often face. Furthermore, the proposed indicators are in line with the developmental history and cultural context of SEL indicators, enhancing their applicability and dissemination.

Based on these indicators, this study argues that when teachers design curricula, they should focus on the social and emotional capabilities and constructs that they consider are vital for students and then tailor the curriculum accordingly within time constraints. Furthermore, teachers should first be frank and open to gain their students' trust, and respect how open their students are willing to be. When assessing students, teachers should prioritize formative assessments during the learning process and provide feedback that students can transform into concrete actions. Finally, a safe learning environment should be constructed for students and teachers. The proposals put forth in this study can serve as a reference for improving teacher training, co-planning and developing curricula, choosing the contents of teacher training course materials, and evaluating lesson plans in schools and teacher training organizations. Future research could include other stages of education and different fields and academic subjects and consider different types of students. Experimental studies may also be conducted to verify the applicability of the teaching indicators developed in this study and evaluate their effectiveness in enhancing students' social and emotional capabilities.