



FORUM

New Research Shows that Social and Emotional Learning Improves Academic Achievement

BY LAURA MIRSKY

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is publishing a four-year study confirming that school-based social and emotional learning programs that help students build positive relationships, develop empathy, and resolve conflicts respectfully and cooperatively also have a positive effect on academic performance.

[The goals and philosophy of restorative practices are, of course, consistent with those of programs promoting social and emotional learning. These findings should therefore buoy the confidence of those working in schools to enhance social and emotional learning by means of restorative practices.]

The study showed that students who participate in school-based programs that focus on social and emotional learning, compared to students who do not, improve significantly in terms of social and emotional skills; attitudes about themselves, others and school; social and classroom behavior; emotional distress such as stress, anxiety and depression; achievement test scores (11 percentage points higher); and school grades.

The findings are from a meta-analysis of 207 studies of social and emotional learning programs that examined a wide-ranging group of more than 288,000 students from urban, suburban, and rural elementary and secondary schools in the United States.

Meta-analysis inclusion criteria consisted of: program focus on social and emotional improvement; student groups involving children and youth age five to 18 in "ordinary" school populations; and a control group. About half of these

studies examined students randomly assigned either to a program group or a control group.

Positive social, emotional and behavioral outcomes did not occur apart from academic performance, the study showed, but rather enhanced it. In addition, studies that collected follow-up data in the above-listed categories showed that such positive benefits persisted over time.

The research was presented in a keynote speech by one of its authors, CASEL president and University of Illinois, Chicago, psychology and education professor Roger P. Weissberg, at CASEL's December 10, 2007, forum, in New York City. One of the forum's moderators was CASEL cofounder and leader Daniel Goleman (best-selling author of the books *Emotional Intelligence* and *Social Intelligence*).

Weissberg said that CASEL had always maintained that taking time in the classroom for such programs would not hurt learning. Now, he said, evidence had been found to suggest that the programs actually helped academic performance, reported Debra Viadero in *Education Week*, Vol. 27, Issue 16.

Weissberg also noted that the effect of these programs on academics was nearly twice as strong as that of smaller class size. He added that the programs were more effective when they were provided to students by teachers or other school staff, rather than by program developers or researchers.

The research findings are especially important in connection with the United States No Child Left Behind Act, which

requires standardized test-based student accountability. The act also advocates the use of educational programs and practices that have been proven effective by scientific research. The study's authors hope that its findings will help promote the use of social and emotional learning programs in US schools.

International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) president Ted Wachtel commented, "I have long held that when kids come to our schools [Community Service Foundation/Buxmont Academy (CSF Buxmont) day treatment schools—demonstration programs for the IIRP Graduate School] and are provided with a restorative milieu to deal with their emotional problems, they are able to take huge leaps in academics. We're excited to see research confirming what we've observed all these years."

Said director of CSF Buxmont schools Rick Pforter, "From experience, I've seen that when kids' behavior is better, when their self-esteem is better, they do better in academics. And it works the other way, too: When kids do better in academics, their self-esteem improves. The two things reinforce each other."

The full report, *The Effects of Social and Emotional Learning on the Behavior and Academic Performance of School Children*, by Weissberg, Loyola University of Chicago psychologist Joseph A. Durlak, and researchers Allison Dymnicki, Kriston Schellinger and Rebecca Taylor, will be available in early 2008.

To see a preliminary report on the CASEL meta-analysis, please go to: www.casel.org/downloads/metaanalysissummary.pdf.