

# A Review of the Provision of Social and Emotional Learning in Australia, the United States, Poland, and Portugal

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The aim of this research is to gather preliminary information from a range of countries to develop an international perspective on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Currently, there is no cohesive international statement on the minimum requirements to provide SEL in schools. By bringing together a range of international perspectives it is intended that clarity will be provided from which new approaches and initiatives can be developed and researched. International researchers familiar with SEL programs in their country were asked to answer five questions about the context and processes used to teach SEL in specific countries to begin an understanding and synthesis of best practice. These questions relate to: (1) sociocultural contexts of school systems, (2) the range of SEL programs presented in each country and what is common about these programs, (3) the effectiveness of prominent SEL programs, (4) the facilitators and barriers that exist to effectively present SEL programs within the country, and (5) recommendations for the future of SEL programs. A synthesis is followed by a discussion of the future of SEL and how the SEL Interest Group may make a contribution to the current state of the literature, curriculum, pedagogy, and research that informs SEL in schools.

■ **Keywords:** social emotional learning, international perspectives, social development, school programs, social emotional development

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) emerged into a field influencing psychological practice and education and attracting research in the 1980 and 1990s. The aim of SEL programs was ‘to generate and coordinate flexible, adaptive responses to demands and to generate and capitalize on opportunities in the environment’ (Waters & Sroufe, 1983, p. 80). SEL was really an amalgam of many different strands of thinking about emotions and relationships, and how they were developed. Two major strands influencing the advent and advancement of SEL were emotional intelligence and emotional literacy. Emotional literacy was defined as ‘the ability to understand

your emotions, ability to listen to others and empathize with their emotions, and the ability to express emotions productively’ (Steiner & Perry, 1997, p. 11). This definition was taken up by educators and business and was used extensively as a foundation for thinking about relating with emotion. At the same time, movements within school education were focusing on a stronger emphasis

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on relationships and emotions. For example, McGown's work on integrating emotional development and the curriculum for talented and gifted children in the decade to 1980 (Drago, 2004) generated a great deal of interest and new methods for prompting emotional and social development. At approximately the same time, Goleman's (1998) landmark book on emotional intelligence and emotional quotient were published, articulating the importance of social and emotional attributes to adult work and relationships. Interest in developing such attributes in childhood through school education grew, and the definition of SEL emerged as a process of developing core competencies in recognising and managing emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, appreciating the perspectives of others, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling interpersonal situations constructively (Elias et al., 1997).

In 1994, in response to the growing interest in SEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was established in the United States to generate high quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning programs and promote them as an essential part of preschool through high school education in the United States. The stated goals of SEL programs were to develop five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioural competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2005). Research subsequently focused on emotional skills and the cognitive processes used to understand and process emotions by focusing on the pedagogical and training processes that prompt learners' skills development, understanding, and competence (Brackett et al., 2009; Goleman, 2006). Meta-analyses have shown the benefits of SEL programs implemented in schools by improving students skill development (e.g., programs focusing on emotions recognition, stress-management, empathy, problem solving, decision making), attitudes and academic performance, and positive social behaviours, while reducing conduct problems and emotional distress (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Given these impressive findings, it was considered important to establish whether SEL programs had been adopted in countries and cultures other than the United States, and current status of program delivery.

The problem that prompted the paper was the absence of a cohesive definition or description of the necessary processes to foster adequate learning regarding social and emotional development across cultures and national boundaries. This problem is compounded by teaching and intervention strategies that are administered with a limited research foundation, largely focused on Western cultures. SEL is a component of wellbeing that can be conceived of positively, with emotional wellbeing defined as including: 'resilience, attentiveness, confidence, and

social skills, and positive affect and self-concept including happiness, selfworth, sense of belonging, and enjoyment of school' (Hamilton & Redmund, 2010, p. 21) and negatively when associated with antisocial behaviours, risky behaviours, and underachievement. From an educational perspective, SEL has recently been defined as learning self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision making that is informed by the context of the educational setting and curriculum (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015). As a foundation document, the aim was to establish a clearer understandings of the ways that SEL is conceived, presented, taught, scaffolded, and resourced from various educational systems in a number of countries. To that end, five questions were developed to guide the authors, related to: (1) sociocultural contexts to school systems, (2) the range of SEL program presented within the country and what is common about these programs, (3) the effectiveness of prominent SEL programs, (4) the facilitators and barriers that exist to effectively present SEL programs within a country, and (5) recommendations on the future of SEL programs.

These questions were proposed to the members of the Social Emotional Learning Interest Group of the International School Psychology Association. Researchers with knowledge of SEL programs from four countries agreed to join and became the authors of this paper. Each of the authors work in universities teaching into psychology or school psychology programs in their respective countries, and teach or research into aspects of SEL and therefore have considerable insight into practices associated with the development of SEL programs. Following is a summary of the responses within various country specific contexts, beginning with Australia.

## SEL Programming in Australia

### Australia: What Social, Political, and Economic Factors Influence the Delivery of SEL?

The sociocultural contexts of school systems within Australia is very complex. The delivery of SEL programs is influenced by five main factors. First, geographic diversity means that large sections of the interior and north-west of the country are not as easily served educationally as more populated coastal areas (Forlin, 2006). More resources and educational opportunities are associated with the capital cities and regional centres in Australia, which in many ways retain an independence and autonomy over such things as the delivery of SEL programs. Second, and reflecting this diversity, is the stratified provision of educational services that is nationally funded but administered and governed by eight separate states and territories, each with a different focus on varying degrees of common curriculum offerings. Third, each state and territory has responsibility for public and private

providers of education (Gidley, 2011). Fourth, Australia is a multicultural country that has been a migrant nation for over 200 years (Forlin, 2006), with a proportionally small number of First Nation peoples. This has resulted in a rich multicultural heritage that informs the educational curriculum, thus making SEL a powerful driver in generating acceptance, tolerance, and respect for others (Durlak et al., 2011). Finally, although Australia is a very rich nation, it is not without poverty, which has an impact on the learning and the formation of many students' education and SEL (Considine & Zappalà, 2002) from as early as preschool. The common experience for most children is kindergarten, beginning at approximately 5 years of age. This is followed by 6 years of primary school and another 4–6 years of secondary school. There are consistent subjects and themes within the curriculum of the states and much diversity; however, there is a growing number of national policies, practices and programs emerging.

#### **Australian SEL Programs: What Programs Are Commonly Delivered and What Are the Characteristics of the Content of Such Programs?**

Policy and direction for the Australian National Curriculum of education is provided by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). ACARA has produced guidelines for the shape of the Australian health and physical education curriculum that provide an overview of the curriculum areas wherein SEL fits. In this policy document, the philosophy guiding SEL within the curriculum states that:

*The inclusion of the holistic strengths-based approach with an inclusive preventative health focus was strongly supported in submissions from government departments, professional associations, education sectors and non-government organisations. Responses from several professional associations and individuals supported the strong emphasis on cognitive, social and emotional aspects of health and well-being. (ACARA, 2012, pp. 14–15)*

It is the school's responsibility, however, to define where SEL fits within the curriculum. The policies and guidelines reflect the diversity, hence there is an absence of a single, cohesive, nationwide approach to SEL.

Despite the absence of specific guidelines, there is a wealth of Australian SEL resources available to schools. For example, KidsMatters is a comprehensive online resource for schools, early childhood educators, families, and community workers that was designed through collaboration with mental health services (Australian Government Department of Health, 2015). This site provides activities and over 100 programs with information regarding applicability and resources required. Similarly, MindMatters is a mental health initiative based in secondary schools that is applicable to adolescents

and young adults (Australian Government Department of Health/Beyond Blue, 2015). This site supports key components of SEL and provides a complete framework of mental health built on four key components: (1) positive school community, (2) student skills and resilience, (3) parents and families, and (4) support for students experiencing mental health difficulties. The site provides school staff with blended professional learning activities, resources, face-to-face events, webinars program guides, leadership packs, and ample resources. While this is a world-class resource it does not explicitly outline which topics are focused specifically on SEL; that said, all of the material is focused on schools developing their mental health plan and strategies. These two national initiatives are largely funded by the federal government in conjunction with other organisations. Furthermore, at the Victorian State Government (2015) site and Queensland Government site there is a collection of links and further resources (Queensland Government, Department of Education and Training, 2015). The sites noted above advocate, promote, and provide resources for SEL-related interventions and training, with SEL being an often unstated component of the programs. For example, in 'Understanding Friends and Peers' (Australian Government Department of Health/Beyond Blue, 2015), Module 4.5 is a topic central to SEL, whereas a number of other programs have a specific focus that is very limited in their link to SEL.

#### **Australia: The Effectiveness of Prominent SEL Programs That Are Presented and Indicators of Effectiveness**

The effectiveness of the programs has been explored through often poorly defined indicators of effectiveness. In most cases, the impact of SEL programs is yet to undergo stringent investigation in the Australian context. Ashdown and Bernard's (2012) research into SEL skills from one Australian program, 'You Can Do It!', showed improvements in social and emotional competence and wellbeing, and decreases in externalising, internalising, and hyperactivity. Similarly, Australian research into the impact of the FRIENDS for Life program has shown considerable success (Iizuka, Barrett, Gillies, Cook, & Marinovic, 2015). This pre-and post-test design investigated the effectiveness of interventions focused on teachers' and students' emotional states and resulted in decreased anxiety and improved teacher resilience. Another study conducted by Askell-Williams, Dix, Lawson, and Slee, (2013) consisted of a large-scale investigation of the theoretical, conceptual, and statistical development of an index to evaluate the effectiveness of the KidsMatters program. The results indicated that there was a significant increase in the effectiveness of KidsMatters-based interventions. Finally, exemplary work that is relevant to SEL, such as Rapee's (1998) work investigating shyness and social phobia has also contributed to

understanding the impact of SEL (Centre for Emotional Health, 2015).

#### Australia: Facilitators and Barriers to the Delivery of SEL Programs

One barrier to implementing SEL programs in Australia is the range of available programs that vary with regard to their utility and relevant research. Further, no benchmarks exist to conceptually, statistically, and methodologically set out the criteria for implementation of the program. While there is an inbuilt rating system of the 'evidence of effectiveness' (Australian Government Department of Health, 2015), in the absence of a precise evidence base, it is difficult to establish what works. Building an evidence-based, age-appropriate social learning program would be very advantageous to those working in schools and to those working with adults who experience social and emotional stresses. Another barrier is the crowded and demanding nature of the Australian curriculum. Given these demands, only the most effective and efficient programs should be implemented. Developing such a curriculum is essential. Ensuring that the program is universal, assessed appropriately, and evaluated and improved would be advantageous within the Australian setting.

#### Recommendations for the Future of SEL Programs in Australia

On the basis of the information above, following are recommendations for the future of SEL programs. A clear and relevant definition of SEL is required. From this definition, social and emotional benchmarks can be developed that are reflected, explored, and developed in a curriculum that is sequenced, active, focused, and explicitly contained to SEL constructs (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Diagnostic tools that measure age-appropriate information that can inform students' suitability to various levels of the curriculum intervention (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012), administered by a psychologist (or suitably trained person) in line with Response to Intervention would be useful (Bohanon & Wu, 2011). The development of appropriate curriculum material and assessment tools, as well as a procedure for evaluating and improving the implementation of SEL programs is required. Finally, comparable material needs to be developed for students of minority and non-mainstream cultures that is then placed into a national database of SEL responses to the curriculum and intervention. In summary, developing a high quality, sequenced, age-appropriate SEL program with a strong evidence base that focuses on the universal features of emotional and social behaviour would promote SEL in Australia. Similarly, adequate training for such a program and sufficient time in the curriculum to complete such a task would also be required.

#### Australia: Conclusions

Future research into the gold standards required of good SEL programs needs to be defined and encouragement given to teachers, trainers, psychologists, researchers, and psychology consultants to actively meet these standards wherever possible. Encouragement should also be given to researchers to conduct quality investigations into the impact of SEL programs.

### Social-Emotional Learning Programming in the United States

#### The United States: What Social, Political and Economic Factors Influence the Delivery of SEL?

Efforts and programs to foster students' social and emotional learning (SEL) are widespread in the United States and gaining momentum. This is in part due to American researchers' pioneering work on SEL since the late 1960s (e.g., James Comer, Roger P. Weissberg, Timothy Shriver and Maurice Elias) and SEL's early promotion by programs like the Comer School Development Program, the W.T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, and CASEL. The term *social and emotional learning* appears to have been first introduced at a conference hosted by the Fetzer Institute in 1994 as a framework to unify various school-based efforts to promote positive relationships and students' psychological wellbeing (Elbertson, Brackett, & Weissberg, 2009).

Dissemination of research findings on the relationship between students' social-emotional development and academic achievement, school engagement, behaviour, stress levels, peer relationships, and student-teacher interactions has raised American educators' and parents' awareness of and support for efforts to address students' social and emotional needs at school (Durlak et al., 2011; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2012). Moreover, research indicates that social competence in kindergarten is a significant predictor of a host of critical future outcomes, including education, employment, criminal justice, substance abuse, and mental health (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). There has also been growing recognition of the many negative consequences that result from neglecting children's social and emotional development. For instance, the findings that young people at risk for behaviour problems typically lack the core social and emotional competencies necessary for success in school (Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998), family relationships (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996), and the workplace (Frey, Hirschstein, & Guzzo, 2000; Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

These developments have been bolstered by a burgeoning commitment to preventing bullying, victimisation, and violence in U.S. schools. The majority of U.S. states have implemented anti-bully policies (Limber & Small, 2003; Piscatelli & Lee, 2011), although research roundly suggests such initiatives are ineffective

(American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008) and that effective bullying and violence prevention involves fostering students' social-emotional learning and mental health in the context of more comprehensive efforts to cultivate positive school climate (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010; Cohen, Espelage, Twemlow, Berkowitz, & Comer, 2015; Jimerson, Nickerson, Mayer, & Furlong, 2012; Jimerson, Swearer, & Espelage, 2010; Smith & Low, 2013).

#### The United States SEL Programs: What Programs Are Commonly Delivered and What Are the Characteristics of the Content of Such Programs?

Currently, there are several empirically supported SEL programs most commonly delivered in the United States.

**Second Step.** Second Step (Committee for Children, 1997, 2002) is a universal, classroom-based program created with the dual goals of reducing the development of social, emotional, and behavioural problems and promoting students' self-regulation and social-emotional competence. The core competencies are empathy, social problem solving, and emotion management. Developmentally appropriate curricula are available for each grade level, from early childhood to 8th grade (age 13–14). Lessons employ music, videos, and stories to teach social-emotional skills. For additional information see: <http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step>.

**Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program.** Steps to Respect (Committee for Children, 2001) is a bullying prevention program implemented in American schools. It is designed to complement the Second Step program and has a greater focus on social-emotional learning. Steps to Respect is a comprehensive, school-wide curricula that supports administrators, staff, teachers, parents, and students. The program provides three different kits geared toward three elementary school levels: Grades 3–4 (ages 8–10), Grades 4–5 (ages 9–11), and Grades 5–6 (ages 10–12). Instruction consists of lessons focused on reducing bullying and destructive bystander behaviours, increasing prosocial beliefs related to bullying, and increasing social-emotional skills. The program also includes surveys and a data-collection procedure to support progress monitoring of program effectiveness. For additional information see <http://www.cfchildren.org/steps-to-respect> (Committee for Children, 2001).

**Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS).** PATHS (Kusché & Greenberg, 1994) is an empirically supported program that aims to increase academic achievement and school engagement, reduce classroom disruptions, improve classroom conduct, promote positive school climate, prevent bullying, facilitate conflict resolution, develop students' character, and foster stu-

dents' social and emotional development. To accomplish this, the PATHS program covers five domains of social and emotional learning: self-control, emotional understanding, positive self-esteem, relationships, and interpersonal problem-solving skills. Aspects of all five domains are integrated into each unit, although some of the units specifically target one or more of the domains. New units build on learning from preceding units, and lessons are sequenced according to increasing developmental difficulty. Developmentally appropriate curricula are available from preschool and kindergarten to Grades 5/6. For additional information see <http://www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/paths/paths.html>.

**Responsive Classroom.** The Responsive Classroom approach is an empirically supported classroom-based program that seeks to address the critical intersection between students' social and emotional competencies, academic learning, and effective classroom management (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2012). It provides teachers with a set of strategies designed to create caring, community-oriented classroom environments with fewer behaviour problems, which are also efficient, productive, and academically engaging. This is accomplished through regular, structured class meetings, an established approach to setting norms and consequences for behaviour, procedures that offer academic choice to students, techniques to focus students' attention on the process of learning and problem solving, and methods for introducing new academic material to students. Responsive Classroom authors, many of whom are former teachers, have written a series of practical implementation guides popular among teachers in the U.S. (e.g., Brady, Forton, & Porter, 2003; Denton & Kriete, 2015; Kriete & Davis, 2014; Charney, 2002). For additional information see <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/>.

**School Climate.** Initiatives to improve and enhance school climate are also an important aspect of the social and emotional learning landscape in the United States. The National School Climate Council (2007) has defined school climate in the following way: 'the quality and character of school life is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures' (p. 5). School climate improvement is rooted in ecological systems theory and aims to prevent anti-social and victimising behaviour while simultaneously promoting prosocial, safe, and supportive interactions among all individuals in the school environment. Naturally, such a comprehensive approach involves school-wide interventions, classroom instruction in social and emotional learning and mental health promotion, and relevant professional development for educators and school leaders. For additional information see: <http://www.schoolclimate.org/index.php>.

### The United States: The Effectiveness of Prominent SEL Programs That Are Presented and Indicators of Effectiveness

**Second Step Research.** Edwards, Hunt, Meyers, Grogg, and Jarrett (2005) found that students who received the Second Step program demonstrated significant gains in their understanding of empathy, anger management, impulse control, and bully-proofing, and small gains in prosocial behavior. Research by Frey, Nolen, Edstrom, and Hirschstein (2005) documented that when compared to a control group, children participating in the program were more socially competent and less aggressive. Espelage, Low, Polanin, and Brown (2013) report that 6th-graders participating in the program for 1 year were roughly 40% less likely to report involvement in physical aggression vis-à-vis sixth-graders in schools that did not implement the program. See Fitzgerald and Von Schoiack Edstrom (2012) for more information on the program's research base.

**Steps to Respect Research.** A large and rigorous U.S. study found that a year-long implementation of the Steps to Respect program significantly reduced bullying behaviour and had a positive impact on school climate (Brown, Low, Smith, & Haggerty, 2011). Teachers implementing the program reported students were 33% less likely to engage in physical bullying. Elementary school students participating in the program for 3 months showed a 72% decrease in malicious gossip (Low, Frey, & Brockman, 2010). See Hirschstein and Frey (2006) for more information on the program's research base.

**PATHS Research.** More than three decades of research indicates PATHS' implementation is significantly associated with improvements in children's social and emotional skills. This research suggests the PATHS program has been able to: reduce teachers' reports of students exhibiting aggressive behaviour by 32%; increase teachers' reports of students exhibiting self-control by 36%; increase students' vocabulary for emotions by 68%; and increase students' scores on cognitive skills tests by 20%. In addition, students participating in the program showed an 11% gain in academic achievement (Dariotis, Bumbarger, Duncan, & Greenberg, 2008; Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000; Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001; Kutsche & Greenberg, 2012).

**Responsive Classroom Research.** The program's ability to effectively foster both teacher improvement and student gains in academic achievement and socio-emotional development has been demonstrated by numerous studies associated with both the Social and Academic Learning Study (SALS) and the Responsive Classroom Efficacy Study (RCES). The SALS was a 3-year, quasi-experimental study (2001–2004), and the RCES was a 3-year randomised controlled study (2008–2011) funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Edu-

cation Sciences (IES). Most recently, Rimm-Kaufman and colleagues conducted a 3-year randomised controlled study, the Responsive Classroom Efficacy Study (RCES; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014). The RCES involved 24 elementary schools and followed 350 teachers and over 2,900 students from the spring of the students' 2nd-grade year to the spring of their 5th-grade year. Results of the RCES indicated that teachers' employment of program practices was associated with improvement in student achievement, teacher-student interactions, and higher quality instruction in math.

**School Climate Research.** Research indicates that the many facets of positive school climate are associated with a host of important student outcomes, including school motivation and engagement, attitudes toward learning, prosocial attitudes and behaviours, fewer risk-taking and violent behaviours, and fewer discipline referrals and school suspensions (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003; Klem & Connell, 2004; Nelson, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2002; Resnick et al., 1997; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 1998; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Welsh, 2000). In a recent narrative review of experimental and ethnographic research, Cohen et al. (2015) maintain that, based on the empirical evidence, targeted bully prevention programs and curricular-based efforts are, at best, marginally helpful when implemented as stand-alone programs. Instead, they recommend targeted efforts within more comprehensive approaches to create positive school climates that nurture and promote prosocial and ethical norms and behaviours.

### The United States: Facilitators and Barriers to the Delivery of SEL Programs.

At present, many well-meaning schools in the United States employ a variety of ineffective approaches to facilitating students' social and emotional development (Jimerson et al., 2012; Jimerson et al., 2010). For instance, schools frequently hold brief assemblies to advocate for prosocial school norms and build students' enthusiasm for socially and emotionally competent behaviour. While assemblies can be used to get students excited, they are not enough to truly promote students' social and emotional development and do not lead to lasting change. There has also been a trend among American schools to implement 'zero tolerance' policies to address bullying and victimising behaviours. However, because of their punitive nature, such policies may result in under-reporting of bullying, and there is limited evidence to suggest that they actually have an impact on negative and antisocial behaviours.

So, what does work? Program selection should be based on a needs assessment of the different factors that will affect program implementation at the school (e.g., administrative support and feasibility; acceptance by teachers

and administrators; cultural considerations). SEL programs should be intensive, proactive, sustainable, embedded in broader efforts to create positive school climate, and address multiple levels of the school context (Jimerson et al., 2012; Jimerson et al., 2010). Best practice suggests implementing SEL within a multi-tiered system of supports framework (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2016). SEL programs need to be culturally sensitive and implemented in a culturally competent fashion. In addition, careful and continued monitoring of the programs is necessary to ensure it is being implemented with fidelity. Finally, programs should be evidence-based. CASEL has published a guide to effective social and emotional learning programs that identifies and rates SEL programs based on their quality and evidence base. It is available for free on their website (<http://www.casel.org/guide/>).

### Recommendations for the Future of SEL Programs in the United States

Going forward, effective implementation of SEL programming will depend on the degree to which schools select programs that are evidence-based, culturally sensitive, engaging, and relevant. Effective SEL programming needs to be tailored to fit the local social ecology (individual, family, peer, school, and community). To enhance SEL program efficacy, it is recommended that schools employ data-based decision making and progress monitoring, and implement SEL programming within broader positive school climate reform efforts (Jimerson et al., 2012; Jimerson et al., 2010). Schools may also consider utilising a comprehensive survey to understand the complexity of the social dynamic in the local school context and enhance the cultural relevance of their particular SEL program (see e.g., Garibaldi, Ruddy, Kendziora, & Osher, 2015). Ultimately, though, implementing an evidence-based SEL program is only part of it; success will be highly dependent upon the people delivering the program and the degree to which they are able to build safe and positive relationships with the students.

### The United States: Conclusions

Fostering healthy and caring social relationships really does take a village. Ideally, all caregivers in a child's life will make a commitment to being caring, positive role models. In the school setting, this means making a commitment to ongoing staff training on how to support students' social and emotional development, create a positive school climate, and integrate social and emotional learning throughout the curriculum. While social and emotional learning programs have the potential to lead to more positive outcomes for students, ultimately it is the people and the relationships that youth experience at school that will have the greatest impact on their development.

## Social-Emotional Learning Programming in Poland

### Poland: What Social, Political and Economic Factors Influence the Delivery of SEL?

The deficit of social capital is indicated as one of the most important barriers in the long-term prognoses of development of the country, according to the Polish Government (Boni, 2009; Kleiber et al., 2011), where dramatically low levels of social and emotional competences have been reported. Results of the recent research revealed a very low level of social trust (Brzezińska & Czub, 2013; European Social Survey, 2008), an increasing proportion of neurotic disorders and suicides among children and youth, and a growing number of crime actions with violence in youngsters aged from 17 to 24 years (Szafraniec, 2011). It seems that one of the main problems of young Poles is difficulty with emotional self-regulation, that is, the ability to lower emotional tension in stressful situations, overcome conflicts, search for solutions, and maintain positive attitudes about oneself and the outside reality (Czub & Matejczuk, 2015).

Polish experts claim that the education of children and youth could be a tool for improvement of social and emotional competences. The foundations of the Polish educational system resulted from democratic changes of the social-political system, which started in 1989. In the first stage of these changes, new democratic authorities allowed non-government organisations to establish and conduct new schools and to design new courses and programs of teaching. They also removed communist ideology from the content of teaching. In 1998, the idea of recommending aims of education by government returned in a new form and a national curriculum for mandatory school subjects was established. The curriculum describes the general goals of all levels of education, the content of teaching, and the required competencies of pupils. This is the mandatory base on which publishers and/or individual teachers design detailed programs of teaching (Śliwerski, 1999).

Domestic barriers to the improvement of social capital focus mainly on the quality of knowledge transmission and miss how the quality of social relationships among teachers, pupils, parents and the local community can be established as a result of schooling (Brzezińska & Czub, 2013). Another issue is the placement of social-emotional competencies in the curriculum while attending to the phenomenon of post-traumatic diminution of emotionality in Polish society. This is a result of common traumatic experiences caused by the course of history (e.g., annexation of the state by neighbouring countries in the years 1795–1918, World Wars I and II, and the authoritarian communist regime in the years 1945–1989). The impact of these events was so extensive that Poland was transformed from an open, multicultural and multinational country in the 19th century into a country plagued

with uncertainty about the future and violence (of a military or ideological character). This is why Poles started to emigrate. Democratic changes started in 1989 and the accession of Poland to European Union in 2004 began the process of gradual renewal of an independent country and society.

### Poland SEL Programs: What Programs Are Commonly Delivered and What Are the Characteristics of the Content of Such Programs?

There is only one social-emotional competence described explicitly in the national curriculum as a goal of preschool and school education — cooperation. It means that SEL is really absent among main courses of teaching in Poland. All Polish schools are obliged to design and execute their own program of development but should follow the national curriculum and values important for the school community. In fact, SEL is practised on a small scale and by NGOs and the private sector only. They offer original or adapted programs of SEL and sell it to educational institutions.

One such program is Zippy's Friends, distributed in Poland under license from Partnership for Children in the United Kingdom. The program is a part of international promotion of mental health in children aged from 5 to 8 years. It helps to develop the ability to deal with troubles in everyday life and to increase the quality of relationships among children and between them and adults. The core of the program is 24 meetings separated into six thematic blocks: feelings, communication, making and breaking relationships, conflict resolution, dealing with change and loss, and the 'we cope' theme.

Another activity for developing social-emotional abilities available from the Polish educational services is Aggression Replacement Training (under license of G&G Consultants in the United States). It focuses on three areas of mental functioning: social skills, anger control, and moral reasoning. It is worth noting that a local initiative for improving SEL has been undertaken by the Institute of Psychology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and School Inspectorate of Wielkopolska in 2013 (Wielkopolska is one of 16 Polish districts). The 'Action-Tutor' event consisted of three lectures prepared for all principals of kindergartens and schools (of primary, middle, and high levels) from the voivodeship of Wielkopolska. The main theme of the lectures was the role of teachers' tutoring competences and capabilities for supporting their development. A large part of the lectures concerned the placement and role of social-emotional skills in preschool and school education. During the program, 50 meetings were carried out and almost 3,000 school principals and about 1,000 kindergarten principals took part. Participants were also asked twice to: (1) prepare a description of good tutoring practice in their kindergarten or school, and (2) complete a questionnaire

on their ability to manage different aspects of kindergarten or school activities.

### Poland: The Effectiveness of Prominent SEL Programs That Are Presented and Indicators of Effectiveness

The efficacy of the Zippy's Friends and Aggression Replacement Training has been completed in other countries (e.g., Denmark, Lithuania, Norway). There is no large-scale and systematic research on effectiveness of SEL programs in Poland.

### Poland: Facilitators and Barriers to the Fidelity of SEL Programs

The promise of developing and disseminating of SEL programs in Poland is increasing with a growing consciousness of the importance of social-emotional competence for both everyday life and the labour market. The value of such programs is not yet understood by authorities and Polish society in general. This is the main barrier for the popularisation of SEL programs in Poland. There is growing pressure from parents on schools to provide SEL programs. Parents want schools to stimulate stronger development of academic skills, and at the same time they do not want to increase emotional pressure on children as a result of academic demands.

A second barrier for implementing SEL programs is the crisis of education in Poland. People are questioning the organisation of the education system (mainly around compulsory school education and having the entry age to primary school lowered in 2015), its merits-related assumptions (range of content and skills being taught from the perspective of 21st-century challenges), and the mission of society as well as the status of the teaching profession. The lack of an integrated and wholistic vision of education and the technical changes implemented by authorities without asking about key competencies developed in pupils is problematic.

### Recommendations for the Future of SEL Programs in Poland

There is no doubt that increasing social-emotional competencies in Poland's students will be difficult. Environmental factors and patterns of activity introduced by global pop culture are not optimal conditions for social-emotional development. Planned and controlled interventions are necessary for improvement in SEL. The easiest way of doing so is to introduce SEL into mainstream education in Poland. To reach this goal it is necessary to design a general vision of the key competencies of SEL relevant to those attending preschool and school education. SEL should be defined and added to national curriculum. Another need is to introduce the idea of SEL into programs of basic and further training for teachers in order to broaden their understanding of SEL and its

relevance for personal life. Undertaking scientific research on development and evaluation of SEL is also necessary.

## Social-Emotional Learning Programming in Portugal

### Portugal: What Social, Political and Economic Factors Influence the Delivery of SEL?

In Portugal, mandatory schooling has increased recently (effective in 2012/13), from the 9th to 12th grade. Currently, the Portuguese school system is organised into four study cycles (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e da Ciência [DGEEC], 2015): elementary school (1st–4th grade); low middle school (5th–6th grade); high middle school (7th–9th grade); secondary school (10th–12th grade). Elementary schools are smaller units, while middle and secondary school configuration is quite diverse.

Since 2011, there has been an increased focus on achievement as a result of political decisions, and a gradual increase in testing has become more pronounced over recent years. Presently, the years that constitute the end of study cycles in Portugal (4th, 6th, 9th, and 12th grade) exams and their preparation. A further challenging feature of the Portuguese schools are the high levels of disciplinary incidents, retention and school dropout (DGEEC, 2015).

Social and economic crises, as well as political decisions, have led to budget cuts, an increase in class sizes, and the amalgamation of several school districts. The number of teachers in Portugal has decreased by 24% from 2001 to 2014; however, Portugal is still considered to be the European Union country with the highest teacher per student ratio (DGEEC, 2015). For many years, the school calendar is marked by industrial conflict, with several strikes per year (teachers and auxiliary staff).

### Portugal SEL Programs: What Programs Are Commonly Delivered and What Are the Characteristics of the Content of Such Programs?

In Portugal there has been a steady growth in interest in SEL, as can be concluded from the growing number of programs and doctoral theses in this area. Unlike other European countries, in Portugal there are no publications detailing the application of the most popular international programs (e.g., PATHS; Second Step). A review of SEL programs being applied in Portugal (Faria, 2011) only identified one program (for 4th-grade students) in Portugal (Raimundo, Marques-Pinto, & Lima, 2013). A similar situation, but identifying a different SEL program (Positive Attitude), was reported in Coelho and Figueira (2011).

Several practitioners and university doctorate students claim to be developing or applying SEL programs. These efforts may be categorised into three groups: (1) SEL activities not integrated into a program or without a

manual that are usually applied in a single school or single school grouping; (2) social skills training that has been reorganised (or simply renamed sometimes) as SEL programs; (3) SEL programs without evaluation.

The few programs that have provided some form of evaluation may be grouped into two categories: ongoing or one-off. One-off programs are usually developed as a part of university studies (mainly PhDs); their evaluation tends to be reported by efficacy studies, and at least one of them has led to publications (Slowly, We Go Steady; Raimundo et al., 2013). Ongoing programs such as Grow Up Playing (Moreira, Crusellas, Sá, Gomes, & Matias, 2010) and Positive Attitude (Coelho & Figueira, 2011) tend to be run by associations that are funded by public institutions, either state or municipal.

### Portugal: The Effectiveness of Prominent SEL Programs That Are Presented and Indicators of Effectiveness

A consequence of the fragmentation of SEL program delivery in Portugal has led to a relative reduced number of publications concerning the effectiveness of such programs. Usually, only ongoing programs, after being applied over a number of years, are in a position to report their effectiveness, which excludes most of the present Portuguese efforts in SEL.

Three published studies have claimed to analyse the effectiveness of SEL programs in Portugal. All three employed large samples and concluded that the programs had been effective. One addressed an elementary school (1st–4th grade) SEL program (Grow Up Playing; Moreira et al., 2010), reporting program gains in social skills (according to self-reports), self-control and self-esteem (according to teacher reports); and the other a high middle school (7th–9th grade) SEL program (Positive Attitude; Coelho, Marchante, & Sousa, 2015; Coelho, Sousa, & Figueira, 2014). According to self-reports, significant intervention benefits in self-control, social awareness, social and emotional self-concept, and self-esteem were found, with students who presented with initially lower levels of social and emotional competencies, academic and social self-concept benefitting more from the intervention. Teacher reports showed program benefits in self-control, social awareness, and relationship skills.

### Portugal: Facilitators and Barriers to the Delivery of SEL Programs

The two main facilitators that can be identified are the increased awareness from teachers towards social and emotional learning and the existence of an adequate timeslot in elementary school curriculum. However, for 16 years, this timeslot existed also in the Portuguese middle schools in the form of a discipline named Civic Formation, which was removed in 2012 as a part of the increased focus on achievement (some schools opted for keeping this timeslot). The two main barriers are the

general lack of funding for SEL programs and the lack of support or incentives for practitioners who are implementing SEL activities to properly evaluate their effectiveness, which means that (mostly at elementary schools) some SEL activities are developed, but no programs have been thoroughly researched and reported so far.

### Recommendations for the Future of SEL Programs in Portugal

Three areas may easily be identified as challenges for the future of SEL in Portugal. First, there is a need for practitioners and universities to work closer together for two main purposes: (1) in order to allow that some promising set of activities developed in schools by practitioners may be properly organised into programs and appropriately evaluated; (2) to permit programs developed from university research, if shown to be effective, to be applied and disseminated effectively. There is a need for the several programs or sets of activities currently being applied in kindergarten to be consolidated into appropriately evaluated programs. There are also no SEL programs for secondary schools (10th–12th grade) presently being developed, which is contrary to the recommendation of CASEL (2015).

### Conclusion

The reports from the countries of interest indicate that there is a strong interest in SEL and its programmatic presentation in each level of education to adolescence. Despite this interest, there is great diversity in the linking programs to the curriculum and what is presented at different year levels; the organisation, structure, presentation, assessment and evaluation of programs; and that some programs are commercially developed and others are sponsored by governments and school systems. While there is relative consistency about the definition of factors contributing to SEL there is greater variability in defining the content and focus of the programs and the specificity of the material. For example, should bullying programs be linked to SEL programs or stand alone? At what age should SEL programs be presented and in what method of delivery? The method of delivery is also very diverse and yet to be sufficiently researched. Another question on which there is insufficient data is who is best trained to implement such programs and what training is necessary. Developing insights based on best practice and fully evaluated programs would advance both the understanding of SEL programs and the most effective ways and times to intervene.

Future research should focus on evaluations of effectiveness and assumptions underlying programs as well as comparisons of the effectiveness of programs across countries and cultures, and how the suitability of material may be defined culturally. There is little comparative research on the process and utility of programs in generat-

ing wellbeing of students. There is also a need to establish whether the best delivery platform is a stand-alone subject or integrated into another subject or course.

There are limitations to this article. First, it is a very general comparison. Although the questions were focused, each commentator was, by design or accident, limited in their response. Second, what became apparent was the very large diversity of the educational background and systems within which programs were presented, which affected the structure of the curriculum offerings.

Respecting these limitations, the article provides a central point from which discussion may flow regarding the endeavour to improve the provision of SEL to students in a range of countries. It is possible that fruitful research will emerge from collaboration of educators and researchers from different countries working with systems and schools to develop, compare, evaluate, and revise programs for effective implementation of SEL in schools.

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