

## Chapter #20

# IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS IN JAPANESE SCHOOLS: SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF ANCHOR POINTS IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

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### ABSTRACT

The present study examined which factors school teachers perceive as anchor points (bases or elements for constructing and developing a system) to implement and sustain social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. The most suitable subject area and aims of SEL were also surveyed. The participants were 111 school teachers in Japan where schools are strongly controlled under national curriculum standards. A factor analysis of the responses to a questionnaire of anchor points revealed the following four factors: (1) Procedures for Conducting a Program (e.g., trials at one class or one grade level), (2) Necessary Contents and Items for Implementation (e.g., teaching plans, teaching material), (3) Partnership with Families and Local Community (e.g., having partnership with local community), and (4) Leadership in Conducting a Program (e.g., leadership by the chief teacher in practical research). Among these four, factors 2 and 4 were more highly perceived as anchor points for incorporating SEL programs. As a proper curriculum area for SEL programs, Special Activities (e.g., class meetings, class activities, student council, and school events) were given the highest evaluation scores among the major curriculum areas. The programs' main aim was to improve the communication competency and interpersonal relationship ability of Japanese children.

*Keywords:* social-emotional learning program, school teachers, anchor point, implementation, sustainability.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Implementation of SEL programs

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is explained as the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2012, p.4).

Because relationships and emotional processes with peers affect not only students' learning, but also their attitudes and behaviors in school, numerous SEL programs for children have been developed.

The positive effects of SEL programs on children's behavior and academic achievement have been previously reported in review articles (e.g., Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Both the positive impacts immediately following intervention using SEL programs, and their long-term effects, have been found in a meta-analysis (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). However, in spite of the

evidence-based analyses of the effects of SEL programs, implementing them efficiently and sustaining them in regular school settings has proved to be a difficult issue (Askill-Williams, Dix, Lawson, & Slee, 2013). From the ecological perspective, both SEL programs and school environments need to be considered, because SEL lessons will not produce satisfactory effects without the creation of meaningful real-life opportunities to use the skills obtained (Weissberg, Caplan, & Harwood, 1991). This study looked at the issue from the perspective of teachers as well, by examining how they currently work in the Japanese school system, and determining what facilitators are required to enable their implementation in ordinary Japanese schools.

Roughly speaking, there are two types of SEL programming in terms of program structure. The first is “firmly structured SEL programming” in which the program structure is solid and robust. The sessions in a program are fixed in number and order as well as in contents. The second type is “segment-based SEL programming”. In this form of programming only the contents of program sessions are provided, and each school must constitute its own SEL curriculum with those program segments. The number of sessions and their order differ from one school to another, and the framework depends on each school’s policy and purpose. Most evidence-based SEL programs are categorized as including “firmly structured SEL programming”. If they are implemented according to procedure we can expect positive effects, because their program structures are solid and there is little space for adjusting them for on-demand requests. In these circumstances implementers require fidelity for successful implementation (Domitrovich et al., 2011). On the other hand, “segment-based SEL programming” prevails in Japan, because of the characteristics of the Japanese school system.

## **1.2. Japanese school system and SEL programs**

National curriculum standards have been firmly established in Japan. They are found in the Education Ministry’s Curriculum Guideline (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), 2008), and their aim is to provide fundamental standards for kindergarten to high school education all over Japan. They include educational objectives, goals, curriculum structures, number of educational weeks, and course subjects, and have been revised approximately every 10 years since the 1950s. The greatest advantage of the curriculum guidelines is that children can get standardized education anywhere in Japan (DeCoker & Bjork, 2013), but one of the demerits is that schools have little freedom to take in new curriculums or learning areas into the present curricula structure.

In fact, SEL is not included in the national curriculum standards, it is only suggested in the Student Guidance Outline (MEXT, 2010). Some learning methods in SEL, such as social skills training, and some categories of SEL, such as peer support activities, are suggested as useful “techniques” in school counseling. SEL is not regarded as an area for students’ learning. Therefore, Japan may be one of the countries in a preliminary stage in terms of SEL. In fact, SEL programs for “firmly structured programming,” comprised of structured sequential sessions of definite numbers are not prevalent at all in Japanese schools. Most SEL programs are offered in the form of segment-based SEL programming in Japan, and a few motivated schools create their own SEL curricula with those program segments.

Furthermore, those curricula cannot be regarded as independent learning areas, and have to be emerged into the present curriculum structure so that they meet the criteria in the MEXT Curriculum Guidelines. Possible areas for the SEL curriculum are Special Activities (e. g., classroom meetings, class activities, student council, and school events), Moral

Education, Integrated Study Class (learning through project method), and extra curriculum time (morning meetings and end-of-the-day meetings). In the “emerging” process, each school is required to meet the Curriculum Guidelines, because the whole curriculum structure, the contents of all school subjects, and even the total number of classes for each school subject in a whole school year are specified precisely.

Besides selecting the area for the SEL curriculum, the aim of SEL programing is also to cover crucial issues such as the variety of independent valuables that include social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance through review articles (Durlak et al., 2011). This means SEL programing allows for a wide range of outcomes, and schools and teachers have to set their clear aims when conducting SEL programs.

One example of “segment-based SEL programming” in a Japanese school is reported in Kagawa & Koizumi (2015). The selected program was the Social and Emotional Learning of Eight Abilities at School program (SEL-8S: Koizumi, 2011) that provided 54 sessions (teaching plans and materials) for elementary schools (1st through 6th grades), and 36 sessions for junior high schools (7th through 9th grades), according to students’ development levels. One public elementary school constituted its own SEL curriculum within those sessions and emerged it into the Special Activities in Education Curriculum Guidelines from MEXT. They aimed to promote children’s interpersonal abilities and academic performance with this learning program. The first year implementation of the curriculum resulted in a significant increase in children’s social and emotional competencies and basic academic performance (Japanese language Kanji and arithmetic) in most grades, compared with the results from an elementary school control group.

### **1.3. The anchor point planting approach**

In evaluating the Japanese school system the author focused on Anchor Point Planting Approach for SEL program implementation. An anchor point is originally defined from the ecological and developmental perspective as an element of the person-in-environment system that facilitates transaction between the person and the environment (Koizumi, 2000). From a system-construction viewpoint an anchor point means a base or an element for constructing and developing a system. If a proper anchor point is introduced and placed in a given system, it is expected to facilitate the construction of the system based on internal resources and those around it. The Anchor Point Planting Approach is a method to find and settle effective anchor points in a system to promote the construction of the system in the desired direction (Koizumi, 2000).

In SEL program implementation in a school-wide setting, for example, 10 anchor points are proposed: the introduction procedure (a top-down style or a bottom-up style), school principal’s leadership, the SEL coordinator (teacher), selecting a proper SEL program (segments/ sessions), a trial in one class or one grade level, SEL curriculum construction, the committee of teachers in charge of SEL, training workshops, classroom and school environment (e.g., posters, slogans), and coordination with parents (Koizumi, 2016). If these anchor points are introduced and planted properly, SEL programming is expected to be successfully incorporated into standard educational practice.

In particular, “segment-based SEL programming” requires each school to customize program sessions or contents into its own SEL curriculum through its own efforts. From the ecological view point both SEL programs and school environments need to be considered (Weissberg et al., 1991), the school teacher’s role is more influential in this programming than in “firmly structured SEL programming.” However, the perception by teachers of anchor points for the implementation of SEL programs has not yet been examined.

#### **1.4. Objectives**

The aim of this study was to examine Japanese school teachers' perception of anchor points for implementing and sustaining SEL programs in Japanese schools, their evaluation of curriculum areas for these programs, and their understanding of the program's aims. It was hoped that the results obtained will contribute to the success of SEL program implementation in Japanese schools.

### **2. METHODS**

#### **2.1. Participants and procedure**

Participants were recruited at some seminars on teaching license renewal during a summer vacation period. A total of 111 (38 males and 73 females) of the 143 attendees responded to the study questionnaire voluntarily in several of their recess periods. This group was made up of 64 elementary school teachers, 33 junior high school teachers, 10 high school teachers, and 4 special school teachers. For elementary school to junior high school teachers (N=97; 30 males and 67 females), the average years of teaching experience was 14.9: Thirty seven of these teachers had less than 10 years teaching experience, 31 had 11 to 20 years, and 29 had more than 21 years. No principals or vice principals were included. All the participants knew or had observed more than one SEL program being conducted in schools, however their actual experience of implementing an SEL program had not been surveyed.

At the beginning of the first recess period in each seminar it was explained that participation was voluntary and they were not required to write down their names. It was also noted that responses had nothing to do with the evaluation of their seminar credits.

#### **2.2. Material**

The questionnaire was composed of three parts: Perception of Anchor Points, Curriculum Areas for SEL Programs, and the Aims of SEL Programs. Perception of Anchor Points was measured with 19 candidates as anchor points. These anchor points were based on Koizumi's (2016) explanation of the Anchor Point Planting Approach for SEL program implementation. The question was as follows: how much do you think these items are needed to implement social and emotional learning programs in a school-wide setting? Participants rated each item on an 11-point scale (ranging from 0 = does not need at all to 10 = need very much).

The Curriculum Areas for SEL Programs part was evaluated in five areas: Special Activities (class meetings, class activities, student council, and school events), Moral Education, Integrated Study Class (learning by a kind of project method), a Specifically Settled Subject, and Extra Curriculum Time (morning meetings and end-of-the-day meetings). The question was as follows: which curriculum areas do you think are appropriate for social and emotional learning in the school curriculum? Participants rated each item on an 11-point scale (ranging from 0 = not proper at all to 10 = very proper).

The Aims of SEL Programs part was composed of 5 items: Improving Academic Achievement, Human Rights Education, Career Education, Improving Communication Competence, and Interpersonal Abilities. The question was as follows: what do you think are the appropriate aims for SEL? Participants rated each item on an 11-point scale (ranging from 0 = not proper at all to 10 = very proper).

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. Factor analysis of the perception of anchor points

The responses to the Perception of Anchor Points questions were analyzed via a factor analysis (maximum likelihood estimation, followed by promax rotation). A four-factor resolution was adopted based on Cattell's scree test (eigenvalues: 4.39, 1.87, 1.34, 1.24, 0.80, 0.64 in this order). The results of the confirmatory factor analysis (Table 1) showed satisfactory adoptive indexes ( $\chi^2=36.04$ ,  $df=32$ , CFI=.986, RMSEA= 0.044, AIC=130.83). The four factors were named: (1) Procedures for Conducting a Program (e.g., trials at one class or one grade level); (2) Necessary Contents and Items for Implementation (e.g., teaching plans, teaching material); (3) Partnerships with Families and Local Community (e.g., having a partnership with a local community); and (4) Leadership in Conducting a SEL Program (e.g., leadership of a teacher in charge of practical research in the school), respectively.

Cronbach's alpha tests of the four subscales produced the values of .74, .73, .78 and .77, respectively. The four subscale scores were calculated by averaging the responses to each item.

Table 1.  
Results of a factor analysis.

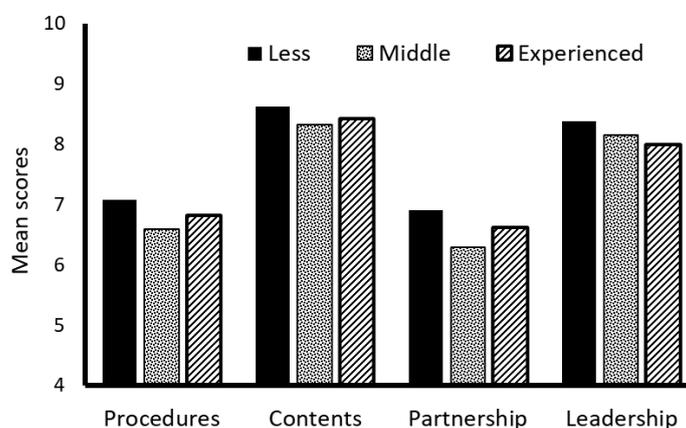
Factor and item	F1	F2	F3	F4	Communarity
F1. Procedures for Conducting a Program					
Trials at one class or one grade level	<b>.813</b>	-.169	-.034	.022	.530
Section in charge of SEL in a school	<b>.775</b>	.059	.037	-.196	.611
Being selected as a pioneer model school	<b>.566</b>	.058	-.019	-.060	.327
Middle-aged leaders playing a role model for implementation	<b>.501</b>	.166	-.031	.196	.475
F2. Necessary Contents and Items for Implementation					
Teaching plans and teaching material	-.069	<b>.769</b>	-.046	-.028	.504
Selecting a proper and teacher-friendly SEL program	-.049	<b>.686</b>	.087	.004	.490
Scheduled training workshops for teachers	.215	<b>.593</b>	-.051	.054	.536
F3. Partnership with Parents and Local Community					
Partnership with local community	.110	-.217	<b>.923</b>	.080	.850
Partnership with parents	-.158	.213	<b>.868</b>	-.092	.777
Model schools in the near areas	.233	.166	<b>.332</b>	.105	.404
F4. Leadership in Conducting a Program					
Leadership of the chief teacher in practical research section	-.009	.032	-.108	<b>.933</b>	.858
Leadership of the chief teacher in curriculum management	-.111	.012	-.015	<b>.655</b>	.396
Leadership of the chief teacher in each grade	.010	-.048	.179	<b>.636</b>	.460
Others					
Decision making and lead of education boards					
Leadership of the principal					
Leadership of the vice principal					
One or two teachers who can start SEL in the school					
Teachers with experience of instructing SEL programs in other schools					
Constructing and emerging SEL programs into the present curriculum					
Factor contribution	3.062	2.767	2.573	2.306	
Correlations between factors		.538	.470	.327	
			.396	.378	
				.199	

### 3.2. ANOVAs of perception and estimation

A three (Experience: teaching experience period) x four (Factor) factorial analysis of variance was computed from the Perception of Anchor Points data to examine what kind of factors school teachers perceive as effective anchor points, and how these are different among groups with different experience periods. Figure 1 shows the mean subscale scores by Experience group and Factor. The Factor main effect was significant ( $F(3, 312) = 46.83, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .311$ ). A multiple comparison with Bonferroni correction ( $p < .05$ ) showed that the scores of Necessary Contents and Items for Implementation and those of Leadership in Conducting a Program were higher than those of the other two factors. The other main effect and its interactions were not significant.

A two (School) x five (Area) factorial analysis of variance was computed using the Curriculum Areas for SEL Programs data. This was done to examine which areas school teachers estimate as appropriate area(s) in implementing a SEL program, and how this is different between elementary school teachers and junior high school teachers. High school teachers and special education school teachers were not included because the number of participants in these groups was not large enough for this analysis. Figure 2 shows the mean subscale scores by School and Area. The Area main effect was significant ( $F(4, 364) = 16.21, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .151$ ), and the School x Area interaction was marginally significant ( $F(4, 364) = 2.04, p < .10, \eta_p^2 = .022$ ). Analyses of the simple main effects and the multiple comparison with Bonferroni correction ( $p < .05$ ) showed that Special Activities scores had a tendency to be higher than the other four areas among elementary school teachers, but that these scores were only marginally higher than specifically settled subjects and extra curriculum time (morning meetings and end-of-the-day meetings) for junior high school teachers.

Figure 1.  
Perceived Anchor Points.



Procedures: Procedures for Conducting a Program  
 Contents: Necessary Contents and Items for Implementation  
 Partnership: Partnership with Families and Local Community  
 Leadership: Leadership in Conducting a Program  
 Less: Teaching experience less than 10 years  
 Middle: Teaching experience from 11 to 20 years  
 Experienced : Teaching experience more than 20 years

A two (School) x five (Aim) factorial analysis of variance was computed for the Aims of SEL Programs. This was to examine which aims school teachers perceive as appropriate in implementing a SEL program, and how this is different between elementary school teachers and junior high school teachers. Again high school and special education school teachers were not included. The main effect for Aim was significant ( $F(4, 364) = 79.31, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .452$ ). Figure 3 shows the mean scores by Aim. Multiple comparison with Bonferroni correction ( $p < .05$ ) showed that the scores were different from each other except for those between Human Rights Education and Career Education, and between Improving Communication Competence and Interpersonal Relationship Abilities. The other main effect and interactions were not significant.

Figure 2.  
Curriculum Areas for SEL.

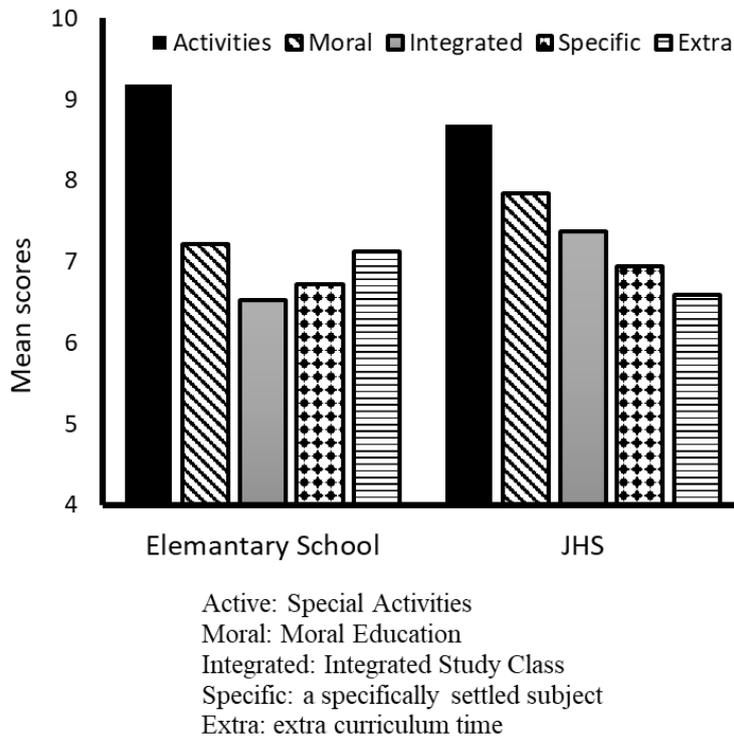
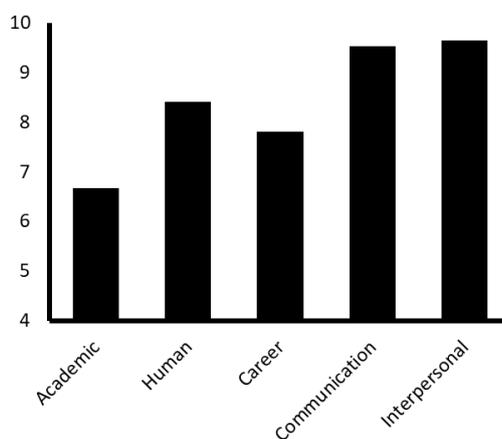


Figure 3.  
Aims of SEL.



Academic: Improving academic achievement  
Human: Human rights education  
Career: Career education  
Communication: Improving communication competence  
Interpersonal: Interpersonal abilities.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results of the factor analysis indicated that school teachers' perception of the anchor points for SEL program implementation can be roughly categorized into four groups: (1) management (Procedures for Conducting a Program); (2) practicing (Necessary Contents and Items for Implementation); (3) family & local community (Partnership with Families and Local Community); and (4) leadership (Leadership in Conducting a SEL Program). Items concerning school management such as leadership from a board of education, school principal leadership, and curriculum construction were not extracted in any factor. These three items are however included in the 10 proposed anchor points for SEL program implementation in Japanese schools (Koizumi, 2016): introduction procedures (a top-down style or a bottom-up style), school principal leadership, and SEL curriculum construction. That our data shows a different pattern is probably because administrative persons were not included in the participants, and that teachers pay more attention to everyday educational practice in classes and schools.

For successful SEL program implementation some key practices were recommended in previous studies: e.g., SAFE ("sequenced" activities to develop skills, "active" forms of learning, including one or more "focused" components, and "explicit" targeting skills) (Durlak et al., 2011). In the case of "segment-based SEL programming", other facets become additional key issues, such as teaching plans and teaching material (in the Necessary Contents and Items for Implementation factor). These are supplied usually by program inventors or consultative organizations in the case of "structured sequential SEL programming". Schools and teachers need more time to customize teaching plans and prepare teaching materials by themselves in "segment-based SEL programming". Leadership of a chief teacher in curriculum management (Leadership in Conducting a SEL

Program factor) is also important in “segment-based SEL programming”, because the question of how to tailor SEL program segments to the real state of affairs of the school (Weare, 2010), and to merge the SEL program into the current curriculum requires this type of effort.

Among the four factors, (2) practicing and (4) leadership were evaluated more highly than the other two factors ((1) management, (3) family & local community) as anchor points in the questionnaire. This result may reflect the fact that most participants were classroom teachers and their perceived anchor points are based on their everyday teaching activities. School administrators have to recognize the importance of these four anchor points in implementing and sustaining SEL programs.

The most suitable curriculum area for SEL appeared to be Special Activities, and the aim of SEL was seen to be the improving students’ communication competence and interpersonal relationship abilities. This perception is consistent with the MEXT Curriculum Guideline in which Special Activities must involve class meetings, class activities, student council, and school events. These activities and events will not go smoothly without communication skills and the ability to have effective relationships with peers and sometimes students in different grades. However, the guideline does not include SEL-related aims or contents.

Concerning the evaluation of curriculum areas for SEL programs and the aims of the programs, no differences were found between elementary school teachers and junior high school teachers, or among the teacher’s groups that had different teaching experiences. Thus, irrespective of the kinds of school or degree of teaching experience, school teachers may have similar perceptions and estimates about SEL program implementation in the present preliminary stage of this program in Japan.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In the successful implementation and sustainability of SEL programs, the factors of Necessary Contents and Items for Implementation (e.g., teaching plans, teaching material) and Leadership in Conducting a SEL Program (e.g., leadership of a teacher in charge of practical research in the school) play an important role as anchor points from the perspective of teachers in Japanese schools. School teachers estimate that SEL is more properly conducted in the Special Activities area in relation to the present Japanese national curriculum standards, and its main aims are improving communication competence and interpersonal relationship abilities. Administrative persons can promote the implementation and sustainability of SEL programs in schools by focusing on and “planting” effectively the types of anchor points revealed in this study. Just suggesting or proposing to introduce SEL programs is not enough to enhance student adaptation to schools without paying attention to teachers’ viewpoints.

## **6. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

“Segment-based SEL programming” is suitable in the school curricula structure that is strongly controlled by governments, such as in Japan. In this type of programming, schools have a wider range of freedom in conducting SEL programs, and this means that we need not only evidence-based SEL programs themselves but also effective delivery methods. Future research with a larger number of participants should examine each anchor point factor in more detail using multiple regression analyses whose independent variables should

be factor, school, aim, teachers' sex and experience period. This would give more elaborated results for actual implementation at each school. Without this kind of effort we cannot provide policy makers with sufficient empirical evidence to ensure that SEL programing will be included in the national curriculum standards in the future.

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