SEL Implementation and Sustainability: What Does the Research Say?
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May 29, 2014
The Need for Evidence-Based Practice

As noted by Slavin (2008): “throughout the history of education, the adoption of instructional programs and practices has been driven more by ideology, faddism, politics, and marketing than by evidence” (p. 5).
What differences can we make to make a difference?
THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY

Over the past several years, a large amount of information has been collected on the causes of violence and prevention programs that can modify risk and protective factors that contribute to violence. The Blueprints Initiative has been in the forefront in identifying exemplary programs that have been evaluated in rigorous, controlled trials, and much attention has been focused nationally on selecting and implementing quality programs. However, identifying effective programs is only the first step in the efforts to prevent and control violence, as program fidelity must also be considered.

Widespread implementation of effective programs is unlikely to affect the incidence of violent crime unless there is careful attention given to the quality of implementation, the degree to which a program is delivered as intended. Fidelity is important because, we typically do not know which components of a program may be responsible for the reductions in violence. Therefore, the belief that some intervention is better than none may be erroneous. Programs must be implemented with fidelity to the original model of the lessons.

The importance of implementation fidelity is demonstrated in a meta-analysis study of 200 programs. This study found that the best interventions can reduce recidivism by about 40 percent. Thorough implementation, however, was found to be a significant factor in relation to recidivism effects. Intervention effects were larger when attention was given to the integrity of the program implementation. Additionally, programs of more than six months’ duration were, on aver-
Contexts Matter
Maximizing the Implementation Quality of Evidence-Based Preventive Interventions in Schools: A Conceptual Framework

Key words: implementation quality; prevention; schools; conceptual framework

Introduction

Moving evidence-based practices into real-world settings is both a high priority and a challenge for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. A large number of interventions delivered in schools have been shown to be effective in preventing problem behavior in children and adolescents (for reviews see Berryhill & Prinz, 2003; Burns & Symington, 2002; Catalano et al, 2002; Greenberg et al, 2001; Hahn et al, 2007), and an increasing number of federal policies encourage the use of evidence-based practices and programs in schools. Although schools offer an enormous opportunity for prevention of behavioral and mental health problems, unique contextual factors at play in schools influence the quality of implementation of preventive interventions (Elliott & Mihalic, 2004; Schoenwald & Hoagwood, 2001).

This paper aims to promote and improve research on the quality of implementation of preventive interventions in schools. We first establish a definition of implementation that includes characteristics of the intervention itself and characteristics of the interven-
Rather than being seen as exceptions to the rule that schools cannot change, the development of a small number of innovative practices and schools may instead reflect the rule that schools can only change through the monumental effort, unusual resourcefulness, and strong leadership of key individuals or groups (Hatch, 2000, p. 581).
The Role of Teachers’ Psychological Experiences and Perceptions of Curriculum Supports on the Implementation of a Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum

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Abstract. The present study examined how teachers’ psychological experiences of burnout and efficacy as well as perceptions of curriculum supports (e.g., coaching) were associated with their implementation dosage and quality of Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, a social-emotional curriculum. Results revealed that teachers’ psychological experiences and perceptions of curriculum supports
What Does the Research Say About SEL Implementation

• Some highlights from an SEL program (PATHS)
  – Administrative support was positively associated with higher implementation quality
  – Positive perceptions of training and coaching were positively associated with implementation quality.
• Teachers who reported the highest levels of burnout and the most negative perceptions of curriculum supports reported the lowest levels of implementation dosage and quality.
Implementation, Sustainability, and Scaling Up of Social-Emotional and Academic Innovations in Public Schools (Elias et al., 2003)
Barriers to Implementation

1. Turnover and innovative knowledge base.
2. Reinforcement systems favor short-term limited gains.
3. Programs are rarely delivered as planned.
4. The operating theory of learning and action is rarely explicated.
5. Management, resources, and organization requirements are consistently underestimated.
   — Readiness for change and planning
   — Strategy development
5 Relevant characteristics of adults involved in school innovations are overlooked.
6 Following the courage of one’s convictions is difficult.
7 Educators need proper preparation.
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<tr>
<th><strong>Table 1</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Factors Associated with Successful, Enduring Implementation of Evidence-Based Prevention/Social-Emotional Learning Programs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>* Presence of a program coordinator or committee to oversee implementation and resolution of day-to-day problems</td>
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<td>* Involvement of individuals with high shared morale, good communication, and a sense of ownership</td>
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<td>* Ongoing processes of formal and informal training, including the involvement of acknowledged experts</td>
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<td>* High inclusiveness of all school populations</td>
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<td>* High visibility in the school and the community</td>
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<td>* Components that explicitly foster mutual respect and support among students</td>
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<td>* Varied and engaging instructional approaches</td>
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<td>* Linkage to stated goals of schools or districts</td>
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<td>* Consistent support from school principals</td>
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<td>* Balance of support from both new and seasoned administrators</td>
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Recommendations

1. A pragmatic, theoretically informed, action research perspective is essential.
2. Current training and professional incentives must emphasize the implementation process.
3. A professional with appropriate preparation is needed to do the work required.
Research Findings

• Findings from 81 additional reports indicate there are at least 23 contextual factors that influence implementation.

• Management, resources, and organization requirements are consistently underestimated.
  – Readiness for change and planning
  – Strategy development

• Management, resources, and organization requirements are consistently underestimated.
  – Readiness for change and planning
  – Strategy development
The implementation process is affected by variables related to

- communities,
- providers and innovations, and
- aspects of the prevention delivery system (i.e., organizational functioning) and the prevention support system (i.e., training and technical assistance).

The collection of implementation data is an essential feature of program evaluations, and more information is needed on which and how various factors influence implementation in different community settings.
• Expecting perfect or near-perfect implementation is unrealistic. Positive results have often been obtained with levels around 60%; few studies have attained levels greater than 80%. No study has documented 100% implementation for all providers.
The Interaction Effects of Program Training, Dosage, and Implementation Quality on Targeted Student Outcomes for The RULER Approach to Social and Emotional Learning

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Abstract. This study examined how training, dosage, and implementation quality of a social and emotional learning program, The RULER Approach, were related to students’ social and emotional competencies. There were no main effects for any of the variables on student outcomes, but students had more positive outcomes when their teachers (a) attended more trainings and taught more lessons, and (b) were classified as either moderate- or high-quality program implementers. Student outcomes were more negative when their teachers were classified as low-quality implementers who also attended more trainings and taught more lessons. Post hoc analyses revealed that low-quality implementers felt less efficacious about their overall teaching than high-quality implementers. The discussion focuses on the importance of assessing the interaction of training and implementation variables when examining the effect of social and emotional learning programs.
• Examined whether the amount of training teachers received, the quality of delivery of the SEL program, and the amount of lessons students received (dosage) were associated with student outcomes of social and emotional competence during the initial implementation phase (i.e., the first year of adoption).

• Participants included 812 6th grade students and their teachers from 28 elementary schools in a large urban school district in the northeastern US that were part of a large randomized controlled trial (RCT).
• Clustered teachers into one of three groups:
  – *low quality implementers* (i.e., teachers initially very resistant to the program and delivered it poorly but became open to the program by the end of the school year),
  – *moderate-quality implementers* (i.e., teachers who were moderate in their attitudes toward the program and in their delivery of the program from beginning to end), and
  – *high-quality implementers* (i.e., teachers who were consistently open to and delivered the program very well from beginning to end).
Results

• More positive outcomes for students when their teachers attended more trainings and implemented more lessons, and were classified as either “moderate” or “high” implementers.

• Teachers categorized as “low implementers” were lower in their sense of teaching efficacy (i.e., beliefs about their capabilities to modify their teaching practices to influence students’ engagement and learning even among difficult and unmotivated students) than teachers categorized as “high implementers.”
Take home messages

• High quality implementation is not enough, teacher buy-in and administrator buy-in is also essential!
• Need to have implementation supports all along the way (e.g., coaching, boosters)
• May need to modify MindUP implementation and support depending on teacher background and expertise.
Identifying Core Elements of a Program

• **Staff/practitioner selection:** Beyond academic qualifications or experience factors, certain practitioner characteristics are difficult to teach in training sessions so must be a part of the selection criteria. Staff selection also represents the intersection with a variety of larger system variables. General workforce development issues, the overall economy, organizational financing, the demands of the evidence-based programs in terms of time and skill, and so on impacts the availability of staff for human service programs.
Identifying Core Elements of a Program

• **Preservice and inservice training:** Trainings are efficient ways to provide knowledge of background information, theory, philosophy, and values; introduce the components and rationales of key practices; and provide opportunities to practice new skills and receive feedback in a safe training environment.

• **Ongoing consultation and coaching:** Most skills needed can be introduced in training but really are learned on the job with the help of a consultant/coach.
Implementation of evidence-based practices and programs requires behavior change at the practitioner, supervisory, and administrative support levels. Training and coaching are the principle ways in which behavior change is brought about for selected staff in the beginning stages of implementation and throughout the process of evidence-based practices and programs.
• **Staff and program evaluation:** Staff evaluation is designed to assess the use and outcomes of the skills that are reflected in the selection criteria, are taught in training, and reinforced and expanded in consultation and coaching processes. Assessments of practitioner performance and measures of fidelity also provide useful feedback to managers and implementers regarding the progress of implementation efforts and the usefulness of training and coaching. Program evaluation assesses key aspects of the overall performance of the organization to help assure continuing implementation of the core intervention components over time.

• **Facilitative administrative support:** This provides leadership and makes use of a range of data inputs to inform decision making, support the overall processes, and keep staff organized and focused on the desired outcomes.

• **Systems interventions:** These are strategies that work with external systems to ensure the availability of the financial, organizational, and human resources required to support the work of the practitioners.
The Burnout Cascade

1. Emotional Exhaustion
2. De-personalization
3. Lack of Accomplishment

50% leave within first 5 years of teaching (NEA, 2006)
Evidence supports the need for specialized professional development that promotes teachers’ social and emotional competence (SEC) and well-being to improve teachers’ emotional resilience and prevent emotional stress, thus reducing burnout and attrition and improving teachers’ capacity to provide well organized and instructionally and emotionally supportive classrooms, especially in high risk settings (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).
Thank You!

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