

Programs that teach emotional intelligence in schools have lasting impact

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Social and emotional learning programs for youth not only immediately

improve mental health, social skills, and learning outcomes but also continue to benefit children years later, according to new research from UBC, University of Illinois at Chicago and Loyola University.

"Social-emotional learning programs teach the skills that children need to succeed and thrive in life," said Eva Oberle, an assistant professor at UBC's Human Early Learning Partnership in the school of population and [public health](#). "We know these programs have an immediate positive effect so this study wanted to assess whether the skills stuck with students over time, making social-emotional learning programs a worthwhile investment of time and financial resources in schools."

Social-emotional learning teaches children to recognize and understand their emotions, feel empathy, make decisions and build and maintain relationships. Previous research has shown that incorporating these programs into the classroom improves learning outcomes and reduces anxiety and behavioural problems among students. Some schools have incorporated social-emotional learning programs - like MindUP and Roots of Empathy - into classrooms while other school systems, including the new B.C. curriculum, embrace it more systemically.

The new study analyzed results from 82 different programs involving more than 97,000 students from kindergarten to middle school in the U.S., Europe and the U.K. where the effects were assessed at least six months after the programs completed. The researchers found that social-emotional learning continued to have positive effects in the classroom but was also connected to longer-term positive outcomes.

Students who participated in programs graduated from college at a rate 11 per cent higher than peers who did not. Their high school graduation rate was six per cent higher. Drug use and behaviour problems were six per cent lower for [program](#) participants, arrest rates 19 per cent lower, and diagnoses of [mental health disorders](#) 13.5 per cent lower.

Oberle and her colleagues also found that all children benefitted from the programs regardless of race, socioeconomic background or school location.

"Teaching social-emotional learning in schools is a way to support individual children in their pathways to success, and it's also a way to promote better public health outcomes later in life," said Oberle.

"However, these skills need to be reinforced over time and we would like to see schools embed social-emotional learning systematically into the curriculum, rather than doing programs as a 'one-off.' "

Oberle and her colleagues say schools are an ideal place to implement these interventions because they will reach almost all [children](#), including those who are disadvantaged.

"Especially during middle-[school](#) years and early adolescence, young people shift away from their families and toward influences in peer groups and teachers," Oberle said. "Children spend 923 hours in the classroom every year; what happens in schools is very influential on child development."

More information: Rebecca D. Taylor et al, Promoting Positive Youth Development Through School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects, *Child Development* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/cdev.12864](https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12864)

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