HIGH QUALITY TEACHING IN RURAL SCHOOLS

WITH SEL (SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING)

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Introduction:

What is SEL?

SEL (Social Emotional Learning) is an innovative and creative approach to learning aiming to develop social skills, independence and stability, as well as the desire to progress in all participants in the education system. Teachers working in small suburban schools and rural areas are familiar with the nature of the demographic social and economic issues facing them day in day out. The statistics show that 88 percent of children living in rural areas finish primary school. We are often confronted with students' lack of interest in learning and the absence of support on the part of their families because their parents do not emphasize or promote the importance of education. The question now arises as to what can be done to stimulate popularization of education and support the improvement of the quality of teaching in these areas.

Towards implementing SEL with the help of digital technology

The use of web-based tools, interactive boards and mobile phones enhances the level of student interest in classes since these teaching aids are closely related to their everyday needs. This is how students are no longer simply passive participants. Instead, they become creators of the educational content and the teaching process as well. The emphasis is placed on achieving gender equality in the rural setting thereby ensuring a higher level of participation of girls in STE(A)M disciplines that used to be regarded as largely male dominated! Innovative digital activities and the application of SEL make inclusion of children belonging to vulnerable social groups easier. Mastery of specialized programming skills is not a requirement for using digital tools in teaching. All that is needed is the willingness to do it and a little bit of research. The web is a wellspring of information that can be very useful if used in the right way. There are numerous web sites with content already adapted to students' needs that can be modified further to be implemented in your classroom. For those who desire to use their imagination and create their own educational resources, there is a wide range of options

available: from Google Classroom and YouTube channels to Wordwall, Learning Apps, Kahoot, Nearpod, Pro Prof, Quizlet, Genially, Liveworksheet, Canva and many others. All these web-based tools offer numerous templates in which we can insert our own data or simply use the existing ones made by other teachers. For those who show additional interest in making a contribution, maintaining a teaching-oriented blog on different platforms is an excellent choice, both for the purposes of distance learning and use in the traditional classroom.

The pandemic has taught us that a classroom is more than a walled space filled with desks and chairs as it includes students and teachers wherever they happen to be. 21st century technology enables us to establish interaction with students anywhere. Even during quarantine, not a single student had to be isolated from the group thanks to networking in Google Classroom, Facebook Classroom or on the blog…

"Believing we can improve schooling with more tests is like believing you can make yourself grow taller by measuring your height.", Robert Schaeffer.

Why don't we use devices like computers and phones in teaching to make learning interesting to students in the 21st century?

With that in mind, I decided to make a leap forward and instead of constantly criticizing students for spending too much time in front of mobile phone screens, I introduced phones into the teaching process. So, the Instagram profile zm.thequeen followed Google Classroom, Facebook Classroom and the blog. Students used to take tests writing on paper. Today, they take daily quizzes I post as part of Instagram Stories and they enjoy learning,

You must be wondering how all this can be achieved with minimal technical and financial resources? "First and foremost, you need to think out of the box, and not be afraid of disappointment. You need to be strong enough to help others even if you are struggling with your own paperwork problems" (Majkić, 2022).

The students in one of my classes expressed their desire to make a New Year's greeting card wishing all teachers and students happy holidays. By implementing STE(A)M skills in teaching, we have empowered students to use web tools and make different kinds of presentations, games and the like. This is how the activity *Tree of Wishes 2022*[1] was developed with the participation of all the students in the class, even those who

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[1] Available at: https://view.genial.ly/61c0459d74907f0e36a57bd0/interactive-content-christmas-card-iv2

were in isolation at that time. This is the advantage of making use of ICT in the classroom to establish communication and foster the spirit of togetherness even when we cannot gather together in person.

What are the five components of social-emotional learning?

CASEL lists **five core social emotional learning competencies[2]**:

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

If we are to help students develop these skills, it is necessary to implement STE(A)M in the classroom, linking new knowledge to the existing pieces of information and the best way to do that is via an interdisciplinary approach to teaching.

"Students need our help not simply to become successful, but to accept failures as a step forward on their way to success. Our job is not only to teach them algebra, history, geography or languages, but also to encourage them to continually make progress, no matter how slow, and to be role models to our students as far as the quest for lifelong learning is concerned." (ibid. p.)
"There is no need for grand gestures, it is enough to accept that everyone's growth looks different, and to let them grow!" (ibid. p.)

The students taking part in Social Emotional Learning programmes available at school learn how to identify their individual strengths and weaknesses when dealing with stress. Knowing one's own strengths and weaknesses can help students develop social and emotional skills necessary to be successful at the university and later on in in their professional careers.

"Research proves that social-emotional learning has positive, lasting effects for K-12 students, including improved academic achievement, reduced conduct problems, lower emotional distress, and higher rates of graduation."[3]

—Tia Kim, Ph.D., Vice President of Education, Research & Impact
Committee for Children

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[2] Available at: https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/guide-to-core-sel-competencies

[3] Available at: https://info.flipgrid.com/blog/tips/social-emotional-learning-in-classrooms.html

Conclusion

"SEL provides many benefits for students, but for me personally, the most important thing is being part of a group, feeling that you belong to a team, and that together we can make it." (ibid. p.)

It is simple and small things that make people happy and improve their self-confidence, which is very important in terms of inclusion of all students into the teaching process, especially those belonging to vulnerable groups.

Teaching is the only profession helping educate professionals in all other fields. Therefore, let us assist future great minds to become just that.

References

Majkić, Z. (2022). "SEL and Why it matters to students". K12 Digest Balkan Countries Special (106-111)