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# Exploring the Perceived Benefits and Limitations of a School-Based Social–Emotional Learning Program: A Concept Map Evaluation

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Schools today are faced with the challenge of equipping students with the skills they need to succeed in life outside the classroom while also teaching the academic material required. More often, teachers are called on to establish environments in which students learn social and emotional skills alongside academics. With increased recognition that punitive models of school discipline have a negative impact on school culture and on students' individual growth, schools are tasked with designing positive alternatives to improving school engagement and culture. Social Harmony teaches K–8 school communities the skills necessary to promote social–emotional learning and address conflict through restorative methods, a model that is gaining traction. After three years of implementation in a small private school, authors conducted a study that involved 32 students, faculty, and parents in a community-based, concept mapping procedure to articulate perceived impact. Participants reported an observable impact on faculty productivity, student well-being, peer relationships, and school climate. Lessons learned include the need for strong, consistent, and sustainable leadership and stronger parental inclusion, which may best be guaranteed by school social work professionals. The article concludes with a discussion of implications of the findings and recommendations.

KEY WORDS: *concept mapping; leadership; school climate; social–emotional learning*

Now more than ever, conversation in schools is not just about students' academic growth but their personal growth as well. Schools across the country are introducing programs that focus on character development, social–emotional learning (SEL), building relationships, and enhancing school climate and culture. Researchers recognize that schools that focus on this type of growth in students both increase students' potential for success in life and show positive impact on the school culture, both of which lead to academic growth and success (Durlak, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Gullotta, 2015). Interventions that promote SEL may decrease bullying behaviors, increase personal growth, reduce behavioral issues in schools, and increase academic performance (Payton et al., 2008). SEL is student-centered and considers each child's growth personally and relationally as integral to his or her academic development. Simultaneously, schools that place continued emphasis on resolving discipline issues or conflicts through restorative methods within the school community as a component of this SEL skill building

provide an opportunity for continued growth for students and schools.

## **SEL**

SEL cultivates school-age children's personal social and emotional competencies in five domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships skills, and responsible decision making (Durlak et al., 2015). Successful SEL programs focus on these five competencies (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015), emphasize fidelity (Payton et al., 2008; Rime-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015; Weissberg et al., 2015), and provide infrastructure support within the school (Greenberg et al., 2003) and districtwide (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Research consistently indicates that evidence-based SEL programs can instill strong values, foster relationships, and provide comprehensive support for students by leveraging the social resources of the school, family, and community (Greenberg, 2010; Greenberg et al., 2003). Student-centered outcomes include enhanced positive attitude about self and

others, connection to school, positive social behavior, academic performance, and attenuated stress and conduct problems (Payton et al., 2008). Given the high-stakes testing environment within education today, it is essential that SEL can positively affect the bottom line—improving student social and emotional skills can boost test scores between 11 and 17 points out of 100 (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

Despite professional knowledge that SEL is essential to developing and maintaining positive outcomes among students, practices that support SEL are often lacking in educational settings (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg, 2010). Effective practice, for instance, should include frequent opportunity for teachers to model appropriate behaviors and students to practice and develop positive relationships (Farmer, Farmer, & Brooks, 2010; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Systematic SEL programming should therefore not be considered supplementary or extracurricular, but necessary and fundamental so that students can learn.

### Restorative Justice Methods

Restorative methods are emerging alongside this more comprehensive school approach, particularly in response to the cultural malaise associated with the more traditional “zero tolerance” approach to discipline. Zero tolerance policies are associated with excessive enforcement, increase suspensions and expulsions within schools, and have a negative emotional impact on students (Roland, Rideout, Salinitri, & Frey, 2012). Restorative practices offer an alternative that builds relationships while addressing problems. Therefore, they are highly compatible with SEL.

Restorative methods quite literally aim to restore damaged relationships through conflict resolution, encouraging offenders to assume responsibility for their actions, or activities designed to build relationships within the school community at large (Teasley, 2014). At the heart of building relationships within a school culture is knowing what to do when conflicts arise. Having a common framework in place enables educators to focus on solutions and offer life-affirming responses rather than apply negative disciplinary actions to attenuate poor behavior. Furthermore, educators working in schools with restorative practices report higher levels of collaboration, collegiality, and mutual support (Mirsky, 2007). When SEL approaches are buttressed by restorative practices, student, teacher, and school

climate needs are better served, further addressing the comprehensive, all-school approach to student emotional growth.

### THE MECHANICS OF SEL

With many opportunities available for new knowledge development, it is an exciting time to study SEL practice. Although program evaluation research has typically scrutinized the impact of SEL programs immediately following implementation, approximately 85 percent neglect to examine skill retention in the long term (Payton et al., 2008; Rime-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015). In addition, while a number of SEL programs have been evaluated for short-term impact, implementation research still lags, leaving much outstanding knowledge about the impact that staff, administrators, and individual classroom culture can have on successful program rollout (Durlak et al., 2011). Furthermore, although SEL methods appear to be increasingly popular over punitive discipline, they have yet to be combined with restorative method approaches in efforts to elevate students’ social and emotional skills. The purpose of this article is to examine the impact of an SEL program, Social Harmony, based on student, teacher, and parent perceptions and experiences. This is the first time the program has been evaluated.

### Program Description

Social Harmony is derived from concepts including nonviolent communication (Rosenberg, 2001), restorative justice (Mirsky, 2007), anthroposophy (Steiner, 1995), and Barbara Coloroso’s (2008) book, *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander*, and also from theories of behavioral psychology, attachment theory, and brain science. Social Harmony is steeped in evidence-based practices; it is a three-tiered intervention available to schools at a rate of \$6,000 per tier (or module). Reflecting its roots in the multi-tiered systems of support model used in K–12 education (Elias et al., 2015), students who do not respond to a particular module receive progressive programming until symptoms abate. The first tier of the Social Harmony program involves activities for the whole school community, to which 80 percent of students are expected to respond. In Social Harmony, key stakeholders receive instruction in basic motivational principles, nonviolent communication, how to identify needs a child is trying to meet through disruptive behavior, and learn how to help students find new strategies to

meet such needs. Faculty are exposed to the different psychological theories underlying punitive, reward-based, restorative justice, and attachment-based systems of discipline.

Social Harmony is designed to be sustainable over time. That is, after the program is first introduced, a special committee repeats programming every year. A high school curriculum includes instruction in mindfulness, nonviolent communication, emotion processing, decision making, and games for teenagers to build emotional competence. Faculty and parents all learn relevant skills for engaging children.

For a small group (about 15 percent) of at-risk students in need of more support, a higher-tier intervention may include more intensive social and emotional skills training. That is where Tier 2 comes in. Where conflicts or special needs are identified, the special committee has a toolbox of interventions it can use to address the situation. Such strategies include encouraging older students to support younger ones, boilerplates for responsive in-class workshops, needs-based restorative justice meetings, or bibliotherapy.

Finally, for those who remain identified as not responding to the interventions being implemented at Tier 2, a still higher level of service, including one-on-one interventions, may be warranted. Tier 3 is offered when a student still needs that additional support. In such cases, they are given weekly individual help meetings. If challenges persist, the school can recommend outside psychotherapy, suspension, or expulsion (as a last resort).

Social Harmony empowers schools and teachers to use behavioral incidents as “teachable moments” through which students may take responsibility for harm they may have caused. Restorative approaches include circle process, restorative inquiry, perpetrator and target mediation, and formal restorative conferencing. This helps build intrinsic motivation while cultivating an ability to meet challenging situations with resilience and creativity. Social Harmony takes restorative approaches one step further to include needs-based conflict resolution and nonviolent communication. Needs-based conflict resolution differs from standard restorative justice practice in that it first identifies core needs, rather than the strategies used to meet those needs. Rather than focusing on who exhibited the “right” or “wrong” behavior, this opens up the possibility that all parties in conflict can establish new ways of meeting the needs identified. This approach establishes and promotes a safe,

positive, and respectful school climate in which members are able to resolve conflicts, stress, anger, and other challenging issues in a productive manner. Perhaps most important, Social Harmony deploys the entire school ecosystem to build self-sustaining programs. Once an in-house Social Harmony Committee is installed, it is charged with the ongoing task of training new faculty and parents.

Social Harmony has a foundation module that includes 13 hours of training and lecture and establishes the core of the program, the Social Harmony Committee. The committee comprises a group of approximately 10 rotating parents and school staff who agree to implement the Social Harmony program. This committee model further emphasizes the collaboration needed to maintain a comprehensive infrastructure that supports the SEL programming helps to sustain the program long term (Elias et al., 2015). The committee pledges to address social issues and resolve conflicts as they arise among students, faculty, and administrators; practice their new skills on a regular basis; and train new committee members and staff at large in a train-the-trainer model. After receiving five hours of instruction in needs-based conflict resolution, members are fully responsible for implementing Social Harmony, integrating its methods with existing school disciplinary code, and ensuring that the project is sustainable. Committee members are also asked to meet weekly to arbitrate in individual cases of conflict. This module also trains and invites rising eighth grade students to play a key role in conflict resolution with younger students and prepares all teachers to manage in-class conflicts.

Building on the foundation module are an additional 32 hours of instruction over a series of workshops for faculty, parents, and the Social Harmony Committee. The committee is trained to communicate nonpunitive disciplinary concepts to teachers, who then educate students through age-appropriate classroom instruction. Module 2 also involves parents. Workshops empower parents to collaborate with teachers and administrators in fostering positive class dynamics and train them to leverage needs-based conflict resolution so that they can communicate effectively about social issues with their children and school personnel. Parenting skills are emphasized throughout. Social Harmony Committee members are required to attend parent workshops so that they can lead them in the future. Teachers continue to learn best practices in discipline and, more specifically, how to discipline and

handle social and emotional issues consistently across classrooms.

### Program Setting

Social Harmony was piloted in a small, independent, secular school serving children from birth through eighth grade, Orchard Valley Waldorf School (OVWS). Guided by the Waldorf philosophy, the school provides developmentally appropriate, experiential education that integrates the arts into all academic disciplines for children and youths of all ages with the goal of inspiring curiosity, independence, and a lifelong commitment to learning. The school matriculates over 150 students and employs 40 full-time and part-time faculty and staff. It was challenging to ascertain the number of disciplinary infractions because OVWS does not keep track. OVWS implemented all modules.

### METHOD

To explore the participants' perceptions of the values and influences of Social Harmony, we used a concept mapping evaluation approach. Concept mapping is a mixed-methods research technique in which key stakeholders generate ideas anonymously on the Internet in response to a one-sentence prompt and sort them into themes with a virtual card sort task. Participants also rate each idea on a Likert scale on one or more dimensions of interest (for example, importance and degree of impact). Finally, rigorous multivariate statistical methods, including multidimensional scaling (Davison, 1983; Kruskal & Wish, 1978) and hierarchical cluster analysis (Anderberg, 1973; Everitt, 1980), are then applied to yield a pictorial map representing interrelationships among the ideas. This process is used widely in program development and evaluation, and in basic research throughout the social sciences, because it facilitates a rich understanding of disparate, nascent, or otherwise difficult-to-express concepts through numbers, graphics, and narrative (Trochim, 1989). We chose this method because it yields data more efficiently, is more versatile analytically, and is less expensive than traditional qualitative research. In addition, it gives voice to participants who not only provide data, but are also actively involved in data analysis and interpretation.

Concept mapping involves six steps: (1) preparation, (2) brainstorming, (3) structuring of statements, (4) representation of the statements, (5) interpretation, and (6) utilization (Trochim, 1989). The focus

prompt was, "One specific result of Social Harmony in our school has been . . ." Participants were invited to offer as many responses as possible.

### Statement Generation

Institutional review board support was secured and consent was obtained from school officials and parents before the entire school community was invited to participate in the process of anonymously generating responses to the focus prompt through a secure Web site using Concept Systems Global MAX software (Concept Systems, 2016). An informal assent questionnaire was forwarded to all minors. A total of 32 students in grades 7 and 8, alumni (age 12 and older), faculty members, parents, colleagues, and administrators who had been associated with the school for at least three years ultimately offered their responses. We cannot tease out from which category each participant came because the whole process was anonymous. Because submissions were anonymous, a response rate and average number of responses submitted per respondent could not be calculated (Brennan, Walkley, & Wilks, 2012). Once all entries were made and saturation was achieved (that is, no new concepts were appearing), duplicates were eliminated, statements were edited for grammar (Trochim, 1989), and all were invited to return to the structuring session, also conducted online, during which participants were asked to complete the virtual card sort.

### Statement Sorting and Rating

Ten (31 percent) respondents returned to sort the 80 statements into themes that made sense to them, based on the similarity of ideas, and label each to communicate what they believed the themes reflected. Instructions indicated that each could only be placed into one pile and that sorting should result in categories containing any number of statements between one and the total number of statements (Brennan et al., 2012). Finally, participants rated, on a scale of 1 to 5, the importance and noticeability of each result; that is, they scored how valuable each was and the extent to which their impact was noticeable. Ten (31 percent) completed importance ratings and seven (22 percent) completed noticeability. Because the Pearson correlation coefficient for importance and noticeability ratings was low ( $r = 0.23$ ), the two dimensions presumably reflect two largely independent constructs; taken together, however, they may serve as a proxy for impact. Individual

participants' responses remained confidential throughout the sorting and rating tasks, as no statements were associated with any names.

### Cluster Analysis and Multidimensional Scaling

The Concept Systems software performed cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling to permit visual representation of the sorted data across all participants in a map of the space between and across statements (Concept Systems, 2016). The analysis divided the statements into clusters through multidimensional scaling and transposed each cluster relative to one another on the concept map. As can be seen in Figure 1, items categorized together more often by participants appear closer together geographically than those considered dissimilar. Finalizing the boundaries of each cluster, we used “a systematic process to consider the range of ideas represented, the purpose and intended uses of the concept map, and the coherence, or explicit relationships among clusters, with relatively larger and smaller groupings” (Brennan et al., 2012, p. 339).

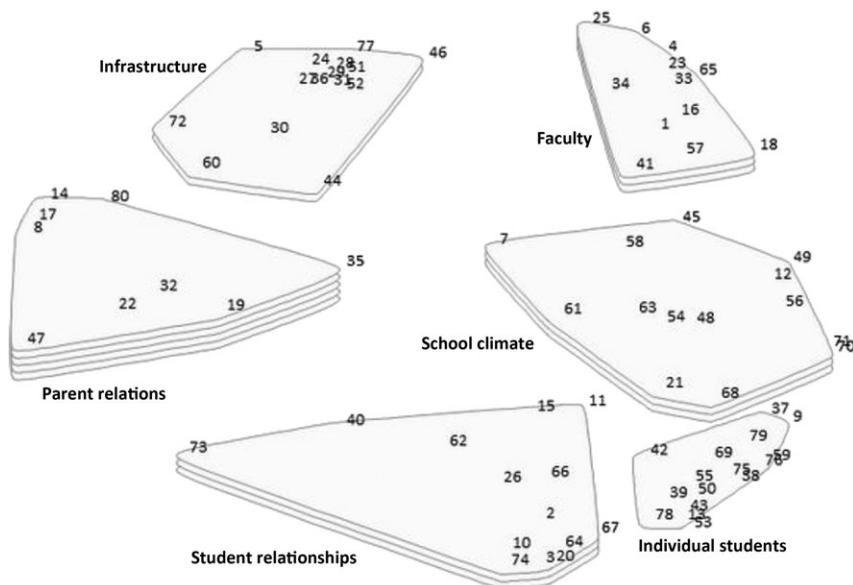
In the end, a six-cluster solution seemed most sensible, as it seemed to account for all statements thematically with few out of place. It should be noted that statements transposed to the center of a cluster are more representative of their respective clusters than are statements mapped to the margins (Abruzzo,

Haymovitz, & Bat-Chava, 2011). As such, it is common practice for marginal statements to be relocated from one cluster to any neighbor to increase topical coherence. In Figure 1, statements 73 and 40 were reassigned from Cluster 6 to Cluster 3, and statements 68 and 21 were reassigned from Cluster 4 to Cluster 2. Finally, although each cluster was labeled by the Concept Systems software based on the text that was given by respondents with responses most approximating the average sorting response, we renamed them for brevity and clarity.

### RESULTS

Eighty statements, organized into six overarching themes, emerged in response to the focus prompt. Each participant grouped the statements uniquely, with between 5 and 19 mutually exclusive groups of statements, and created labels that best described the groupings. Each participant's groupings were entered into the Concept Systems software, in which statements that participants frequently grouped together were clustered and plotted together. Clusters were composed of between one and 40 statements; in terms of geography, the smallest (highest coherence) contained 16, and the largest (lowest coherence) contained 14. Following are the six clusters generated by the software: (1) faculty, (2) school climate, (3) student relationships, (4) individual

**Figure 1: A Six-Cluster Bridging Map Consisting of 80 Statements from 32 Respondents**



students, (5) infrastructure, and (6) parent relations. The layers represent average bridging values for each cluster, with fewer indicating greater agreement among participants with respect to the statements therein. A thematic spectrum of impact can be seen emerging from the themes represented on the map, from left to right, limitations to successes.

An examination of 33 studies demonstrated that concept maps feature high reliability when their stress values—an index measuring goodness of fit, or, how well the model fits the original clusters provided by respondents—fall between 0.155 and 0.352, with a mean score of 0.285 (Trochim, 1989). The stress index of the present model was 0.235 after 16 iterations, which is lower than average, and suggests that it is a good fit.

In the following sections, cited statements are referenced according to their corresponding numbers on the map. Multiple statements are referenced when there was more than one addressing the same or similar themes.

### Faculty

A number of factors seemed to emerge from participants' perceived benefits of Social Harmony on teachers' experience. For one, "teachers feel supported in handling social-emotional situations when they arise" (1). Respondents also reported having a unified way of handling discipline (4), and experience relief (6), perhaps because faculty discussions are more efficient and clear (16). Participants also indicated that there was a heightened faculty awareness of the issues that students may be experiencing at school (18). Data revealed that "teachers have a specific protocol and language to talk about social issues at school" (23) and have more productive faculty meetings (25, 33, 66), one of which focuses on specific cases of children and teachers in need (34). The program was said to offer a "framework to handle disputes/conflicts of all kinds" (41) and an insight into disciplinary techniques (57).

### School Climate

Participants commonly reported that Social Harmony has been "incredibly inspirational and effective" (70) and that weekly meetings (58) have great potential for making change and developing social-emotional skills (54). Respondents perceived that "teacher to student relations have improved" (7), perhaps because student behavior was no longer viewed through a lens of "good or bad" (56), and

the environment was reported to feel safer for students (68). Specifically, students suggested that teachers "listen to us more and take us seriously" (12), "understand how we feel" (49), and send fewer students home (21). From teachers' point of view, school community members have a better vocabulary for feelings and needs (45, 63), which, presumably, has led to seeing social challenges more for their learning opportunity (61), and an increase compassion and understanding (48).

### Student Relationships

Participants' perceptions reveal that Social Harmony might have caused the school to be "more inclusive than in the past" (2). Two parents suggested that their children had a lot of support (3, 10). Students indicated that they are "better at talking to each other than we used to be on our own" (11), that they seek retaliation or revenge less (26), and that they gained "compassion and understanding from [peers]" (20). Students also suggested that "it is easier to confront [others] because people expect [it] and it is done a certain way" (66). The theme of enhanced student relationships reverberated through participants' perceptions of Social Harmony as the program that "is good for people . . . it is a safe place for them to be heard and validated" (62). Respondents reported that older students "are more comfortable helping support younger children" (64, 74) and "had a safe place they could talk about issues they were having with each other at school" (67). On the flip side, students mentioned some drawbacks of the program: "Sometimes you don't want to talk with the person you are fighting with" (73); "teachers sometimes make us have lunch together" (40).

### Individual Students

"Students are more comfortable approaching teachers to ask for support with social situations" (9) because, as one put it, "it is easier for grown-ups to help us solve fights" (42). This supports "student growth and retention" (37). It was reported that students developed a deeper awareness of multiple perspectives (38), became more comfortable with the process of expressing their feelings and needs (50), and no longer feared that they would be getting someone in trouble when reporting behavioral issues (39). Perhaps for this reason, they were "learning how to step up and not just observe" conflicts that arose (59). They were reported to be "closer to each

other” (43, 53, 13), “better at resolving fights” (69, 79), and “express their feelings without fear that they will be picked on” (55).

### Infrastructure

Respondents stated that “the program is a lot to organize and run effectively by faculty” (77) and that “there are not enough trained staff or school space to . . . implement Social Harmony well” (5, 51). Indeed, training was referenced more than once, such that “a discrepancy of implementation between faculty who received training and new employees who have not received training” (27, 36, 52) was salient for participants. Furthermore, presumably because of time constraints, “it is difficult for our teachers to be on the Social Harmony committee” (24). Further compounding the lack of training was the reported need for clear, consistent, in-house leadership: “teachers realize we need a strong, consistent leader to run Social Harmony” (28, 31, 72) and “our school needs someone to chair the committee who isn’t a full time teacher or staff member” (29). There was a sense that without the proper infrastructure, “we have reverted back to old school discipline methods” (30, 44). As a result, there is “some confusion with disciplinary procedures among faculty” (46).

### Parent Relations

“When we first came to the school, there seemed to be a strong Social Harmony presence with training in nonviolent communication and a developing understanding that punitive discipline is not the way to make change” (35). However, parents felt that “not enough information [has been] given to parents about how [Social Harmony] is being used” (8, 17) and that “[Social Harmony] was NOT used when needed last year between faculty, [students], and their parents” (80). Furthermore, while they were “not seeing the connection between parents and those who are on the Social Harmony committee as it was when [the former chair] started with such enthusiasm” (14), “some faculty and parents [have been] interested to find more effective ways to approach school climate” (19). Still, “Social Harmony committee meetings were held and parents felt a connection” (45).

### DISCUSSION

Literature suggests that social–emotional and restorative methods show promise in developing skills and

values, fostering healthy relationships, and supporting and rewarding positive behaviors that all appear to reflect in improved academic performance (Durlak et al., 2015; Payton et al., 2008). As successes of SEL and restorative justice approaches are documented, these methods appear to be gaining traction and are slowly replacing traditional punitive disciplinary models within schools. Social Harmony is one such program.

Interventions designed to influence all members of the school community tend to decrease disciplinary referrals and classroom misbehavior and improve school climate, and school staff can play an essential role in their implementation. The school social worker—as opposed to the school guidance counselor or psychologist—is perfectly situated to implement programs like Social Harmony in schools because social workers are systems thinkers, trained to address barriers to academics in nonacademic domains such as family, school, and community. Furthermore, it is in this sense that restorative practices are the domain of the school social worker because they are expert in social and emotional experience and understand what must be “restored” above and beyond the service of justice after conflict.

Our exploratory concept map evaluation of Social Harmony revealed a line of benefits and limitations as perceived by teachers, students, parents, and administrators. Specifically, study participants consistently reported that after the implementation of Social Harmony, they observed stronger preparedness and self-efficacy of faculty and staff members to identify and address social–emotional concerns, better relationships, more positive perceptions of self and others, and improved school climate. With regard to perceived limitations of Social Harmony, participants commonly pointed to the need for an identifiable leader to run the program and the importance of training all staff members and providing information to and involving parents.

Similar to other SEL and restorative programs (Durlak et al., 2011; Kramer, Caldarella, Young, Fischer, & Warren, 2014; Payton et al., 2008), Social Harmony shows promise in the areas of school climate, student relationships, and student perceptions of self and others as reported by teachers, parents, students, and administrators. The new aspect that we discovered in our exploratory evaluation of Social Harmony is the importance of having a common framework, language, and training within a school setting that appear to foster faculty and staff

preparedness and self-efficacy to identify and address social-emotional concerns.

However, our findings also show that parental inclusion and strong and consistent leadership were reported as lacking for the program to get institutionalized in the long-term. Institutionalization of the program is closely related to the retention of newly gained awareness, framework, and skills to handle social-emotional needs and concerns over time. Likewise, Rime-Kaufman and Hulleman (2015) found that teacher implementation efficacy and lack of programming planning that sustains the program over the course of the child's tenure in an educational program are factors that hinder the success of the SEL approach.

To successfully promote SEL, school administrators need to invest in a full-time leader, like the school social worker, who will coordinate social-emotional programs; activities; and training of staff, parents, and community members involved in the implementation. Presumably, this person would be prepared for the role with some understanding of personality, social psychology, interpersonal dynamics, and organizational theory. Master's-level school social workers may be the perfect fit because of their training in human behavior and the social environment, biology, counseling, evidence-based practices, advocacy, and social services administration. Prolonged support and coordination are necessary precursors for program institutionalization into the school setting.

Findings suggest that information provision to parents and their involvement in the program is another essential factor in program's success and promotion of SEL overall. Faculty and school administrators should inform parents about the specifics of social-emotional programs as well as actively engage them in programming and building a stronger school community (Greenberg et al., 2003).

## CONCLUSION

Limitations of the study include a small sample size, undetermined number of disciplinary transactions before and after the intervention, and the idiosyncratic Waldorf school environment in which it was implemented. Given the methodology, additional research is necessary to ensure that the findings are generalizable beyond the present school of interest. Nevertheless, Social Harmony, an SEL program rooted in restorative practices, seems promising. The perceived benefits and limitations of Social

Harmony from the exploratory concept mapping evaluation suggest that students, parents, and teachers feel overwhelmingly positive about the intervention. Future in-depth quantitative and qualitative evaluations of Social Harmony in other similar school settings are warranted. **CS**

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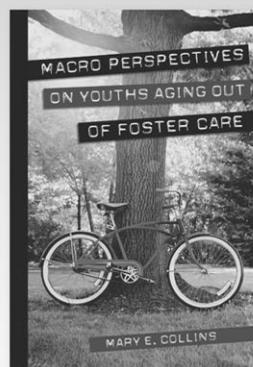
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# MACRO PERSPECTIVES ON YOUTHS AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

MARY E. COLLINS



For the past 20 years, there has been increased attention to the circumstances under which young adults leave the foster care system when they achieve age-defined adulthood. In the United States, this is referred to as “aging out” of foster care.

Typically, young people did not benefit from a reunification with their family or a permanent family situation with kin or through adoption.

*Macro Perspectives on Youths Aging Out of Foster Care* offers an extensive look at this problem through a macro orientation. Attempting to balance the primary focus on microsystems, and consistent with a social work perspective, this book aims to provide a greater emphasis on the larger macrosystems of society, policy, organization, and community. Successful or unsuccessful outcomes of the transition from foster care are heavily dependent on the processes and structures that make up the external environment. Youths exiting foster care may be especially influenced by the circumstances of the larger social context because they often lack the mediating advantages of a strong familial connection. After long stays in the foster care system, they may have limited support, skills, and resources required for a healthy, productive, independent adulthood.

*Macro Perspectives on Youths Aging Out of Foster Care* draws on research, theory, and practice to address the issues. It is a useful resource for practitioners in child welfare and youth services, researchers, and policymakers.

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