

An Ethnographic Study on Socio-Emotional Learning Program under the COVID-19 Pandemic: Teachers' Perspective

J. J. N. Tabasa, N. B. Delgado, D. G. S. Ariz
(Preschool Supervisor), (School Directress, R.S.W.), (Gradeschool Supervisor)
MindHaven School Inc., Roxas City, Capiz, Philippines

janjadet@yahoo.com, nenetdel@yahoo.com, arizyhan@gmail.com

F. S. Emboltura
R.N., M. Ed.-SPED
College of Liberal Arts, Sciences, and Education, University of San Agustin, Iloilo City, Iloilo, Philippines
femboltura@usa.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

For an Inclusive Progressive School working to help young people with and without needs in this COVID-19 pandemic time, addressing the need for it's the teachers to stay connected to one another is not a self-indulgent activity. On top of technological, academic, and student behavioral problems due to transition from face-to-face delivery to Distance Learning delivery, there is a real necessity to figure out how to help teachers help themselves and how to help the team resolve and transform conflict and empathize and feel strongly synergized to one another in attaining the larger mission of the school. Maximizing by modifying the existing valuable tools of the school's Socio-Emotional Learning Program (that was already in full swing even before the pandemic) offers an answer to these needs. The study showed how the modification of an existing Socio-Emotional Learning Program, which primarily focused on the students and parents, shifted its target audience to produce an intentional, holistic, and responsive Socio-Emotional Learning Program for teachers during COVID-19. This study aims to find out a.) How a Socio-Emotional Learning Program was modified to become a safe venue for teachers to have an intimate facilitated space for themselves to sustain their Socio-Emotional Learning, thus mitigating the mixed mental health challenges of extreme stress, exhaustion, and disengagement during COVID-19, and b.) How the teachers responded personally and professionally to the modifications done to the Socio-Emotional Learning Program.

BACKGROUND

“The five most-mentioned feelings among all teacher were: anxious, fearful, worried, overwhelmed and sad. Anxiety, by far, was the most frequently mentioned emotion”

(Result of the survey by the team at the Collaborative for Social Emotional and Academic Learning, known as CASEL, to unpack the emotional lives of teachers during the COVID-19 crisis.

-Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, 2020

The reasons educators gave for these stress-related feelings could be divided into two buckets. The first is mostly personal, including a general fear that they or someone in their family would contract COVID-19, the new coronavirus. The second pertains to their stress around managing their own and their families' needs while simultaneously working full-time from home and adapting to new technologies for teaching¹.

Before the COVID-19 crisis, study showed that 85 percent of teachers reported that work-life imbalance was affecting their ability to teach. These studies found that the general causes of teacher stress and burnout are related to a lack of strong leadership and a negative climate, as well as increased job demands, especially around testing, addressing challenging student behaviors, a lack of autonomy and decision-making power, and limited-to-no training in social and emotional learning (SEL) to support educators' and students' emotional needs.²

Now, during COVID-19 without enough time to adjust to the new normal of online learning; instead there are high expectations & even unrealistic expectations of teachers" becoming distance learning experts overnight to support uninterrupted learning for all their students while also caring for the ever-evolving demands of their families, "it's no surprise that 95 percent of the feelings they reported recently are rooted in anxiety³. Many educators, however, are keenly and understandably focused on "getting the academics right" with online learning. With their classrooms, student relationships, and support systems upended by the school closures, social-emotional learning may not be a priority. The worst things we can do for our teachers, students, and families is de-prioritize SEL during the pandemic," "It is next-to-impossible to expect teaching and learning to occur in a crisis without attending to our emotions. School buildings can be stressful places, but they are also places where educators have built strong relationships. In the article written by Walker in 2020 as he interviewed Turner who is a passionate teacher, leader & innovator of SEL in, that being in school each day can be a big comfort, and educators don't have that right now. Furthermore, he said that staff connection, empathy, and support is just as important as what we need to do for our students in this crisis.

The Covid-19 challenges to teachers

1. Disruption of established instructional programs and routines.

In the wake of COVID-19, educators are facing unprecedented challenges, including the disruption of established instructional programs and routines, the rapid transition from in-person teaching to remote learning, the emotional toll of isolation due to social distancing efforts, and uncertainty about personal safety and health.⁴

Pandemic is a crisis most people, including educators, never have imagined & it has been the source of them experiencing mixed emotions of intense grief, greater anxiety, fears, stress and burnout than ever before.

2. Mental Health & Well Being

Under Pandemic, the prevalent feeling of Grief is not only because many lost their family members to this virus but because "Grief is the process of missing something lost in life." The journey the mind makes after a loss is called the grieving process".⁵ Covid -19 caused Grief from great losses from financial to social conditions to what was normal life before its occurrence.

¹ Brackett M., & Cipriano C., (2020). *Teachers Are Anxious and Overwhelmed. They Need SEL Now More Than Ever.*

² Moeller, J. et al., (2018). "Highly engaged but burned out: intra-individual profiles in the US workforce", *Career Development International*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 86-105.

³ Brackett M., & Cipriano C., (2020). *Teachers Are Anxious and Overwhelmed. They Need SEL Now More Than Ever.*

⁴ Porter T., (2020). *Reflecting on Teacher Wellbeing During the COVID-19 Pandemic.*

⁵ Roberts M., (2011). *The Everything Guide to Stress Management. Adams Media, a division of F+W Media, Inc. 57 Littlefield Street, Avon, MA 02322 USA.*

Sadly, for most people, again teachers included, the grieving process was covered by school closures, and thus the need to transition from face to face to Distance learning was operated on under panic & crisis mode.

3. Balancing personal & professional life.

Moreover, teachers struggle when they can't envision a way to meet their daily responsibilities as caregivers & as teachers of their own children at home, of their students in online classes, responding to parents demands and being bombarded (- from the hierarchy of the Education Department)-by these lofty and wide-ranging expectations of juggling attendance to online teachers' training, to reporting .When faced with too many simultaneous and competing demands but feel like they don't have anyone to turn to for help, they become insecure & fearful & demoralized. These feelings are aggravated especially when they lack the tools- internet connection, laptops & other supplies that they need to serve their students

In a survey from August to September by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the vast majority of teachers reported working longer hours, and only a quarter said their school offered adequate support for mental health.⁶

SCHOOLS RESPONSE IN SUPPORT OF THE TEACHERS CHALLENGES

The time has come for *all* schools to address the missing link in what will help educators' thrive—a greater focus on *all* adults' health and well-being. If we want our educators to be successful—both personally and professionally—schools must be places that bring out the best in them.⁷

Educators, scientists, public health experts and policymakers have spent decades—rightly, though with varying degrees of success—on *optimizing the educational environment for children*, by focusing on safe, culturally responsive and engaging classroom environments that meet the needs of diverse learners and develop the whole child. As a behavioral geneticist focused on the mind-body effects of stress and the development of resilience, I believe it is clear that in order to do this well, we must also focus on *optimizing the school environment for teachers*.⁸ Providing this environment is a real challenge that has to be accepted with a fruitful responsive program like CASEL.

CASEL's Definition of SEL (2020 Update):

“Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities.”

⁶ Louisiana Policy Institute for Children, (2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on Louisiana's Child Care Providers.*

⁷ Brackett M., & Cipriano C., (2020). *Teachers Are Anxious and Overwhelmed. They Need SEL Now More Than Ever.*

⁸ Walker S.O., (2020). *Teachers Are Living in a Tinderbox of Stressful Conditions. These Scientific Approaches Can Help.*

CASEL will continue emphasizing how environments, relationships and broader contexts shape learning and development

SEL is most beneficial when school leaders and educators enhance both the competencies of young people and adults and the systems in which those competencies are promoted.

Given the uncertainties and challenges of today's world, our education systems should prioritize SEL to build healthy relationships, engage students and support adults to contribute to more equitable schools and communities.⁹

While it is difficult to find bright spots in a pandemic, we now have an opportunity to reflect on how to foster teacher wellbeing practices that encourage teachers to build and strengthen caring relationships with one another and with their students and prioritize designing and sustaining classrooms where everyone feels emotionally and physically safe and supported.¹⁰

Defining Teacher Wellbeing

Teacher wellbeing can be described as the reaction to the individual and collective physical, environmental, and social events that shape how educators respond to their students and colleagues.¹¹ Leaders can create a positive school environment that can boost teacher wellbeing and improve academic achievement by respecting educators as professionals, granting teachers autonomy and voice, creating opportunities for relationship building, and setting realistic goals.¹²

In The National Level

In the Philippines, Briones, during a televised meeting with President Duterte on August 31, said that DepEd has always been aware of ensuring the mental stability of both students and its personnel – both teaching and non-teaching. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has a great impact on the way people behave during this time. Psychosocial problems, Briones said, “have emerged” among students. “Before, we had guidance counselors but their focus was the learners,” Briones said. “Now, even the teachers, regional directors, and even undersecretaries need psychosocial support,” she added.¹³

Local Level at MindHaven School : An Inclusive School's Response to support Teachers.

SCHOOL'S HISTORY

Fortunately, for Mindhaven School , the teachers, just like their counterparts all over the world , are not exempted from stress ; anxieties ; conflicts among themselves ; dealing with parents issues & their students challenging behaviors . However, what made them more resilient amidst this pandemic is the school's established Socio-Emotional Learning Program embedding Restorative Justice Practices.

MindHaven School has been practicing Restorative Justice (though under a different name) since 1993 through its Inclusive Program. Restorative Justice has always been a critical component in the school's Socio-Emotional Program for children both with and without needs evidently showcased by our “Bata Mo, Bata Ko” Socio-Emotional Learning Program. “Bata Mo, Bata Ko” is a Filipino saying which translates to “Your child is my child”, harkening to the adage that that it takes a community to raise a child. The main objective and goal of this Socio-Emotional Learning Program is to provide a quality sequential and developmentally appropriate curriculum (for toddlers to primary school age) in Socio-Emotional Learning that develops self-awareness,

⁹ NIEMI K., (2020). *Niemi: CASEL Is Updating the Most Widely Recognized Definition of Social-Emotional Learning. Here's Why.*

¹⁰ Porter T., (2020). *Reflecting on Teacher Wellbeing During the COVID-19 Pandemic.*

¹¹ Graham A., & Truscott, J. (2019). *Meditation in the classroom: supporting both student and teacher wellbeing? International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education, 3(13), 1–13.*

¹² Albrecht, N. J., (2019). *Responsibility for nurturing a child's wellbeing: teachers teaching mindfulness with children. Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 47(5), 487–507.*

¹³ [Malipot M.H., \(2020\). Briones: Mental resilience of students, teachers a 'big challenge' for DepEd.](#)

self- management , social awareness, relationship skills under which conflict resolution or restorative justice practices are observed, to arrive at responsible decision-making and which addresses inclusivity (especially of children with disabilities and from poor families) and sustainability with significant collaboration of the school, families, and community

The children are at the heart of the program....

“It is through this program that stakeholders developed needed socio –emotional concepts, knowledge and skills to create and nurture individual, group and communal peace. The sheer magnitude of program implementation required all of us to work together showing that efforts towards peace and reconciliation can only succeed with a collective approach built on connectedness, trust, courage, dialogue, collaboration, hope & faith.

Establishing the program overcame so many challenges but it does not stop there. Sustaining a culture of peace is a continuous journey of conflict transformation as it has to be seen as the essence of a new humanity, a new global mindset with empathy and compassion based on inner respect for uniqueness, embracing oneness with people & nature and acceptance of diversity.¹⁴

For teachers of MSI, school lockdown disrupted the continuity & consistency of teachers implementation of Collaborative Socio-Emotional Learning now that the program is delivered virtually to parents, students & among teachers themselves. This alone caused great burden with feelings of guilt, insecurities, anxieties that can result to isolation, mis communications & disconnection from the team.

Emotions are contagious, especially during crisis—for better and for worse—and underlie both learning and retention at all ages and stages on the developmental spectrum. Hence the critical need to focus on improving the health of the *entire relational dynamic system* that exists within a school. Moreover, emotions in professional relationships is the foundation of teachers wellbeing to optimize professional performance to continue to develop and instill Socio-Emotional practices among students so as to foster academic re-engagement while bolstering student health and well-being even in remote learning. To buffer stress, and both create and sustain the necessary conditions for emotional and physical healing, education systems and individual schools must prioritize teacher wellness as the first step in student recovery.¹⁵

They key to the sustainability of Socio -Emotional Learning in MSI is the Team of Teachers, staff & administration under pandemic whose mental health condition is directly affected by these new conditions.

Bottom line: Teachers cannot help to stabilize their students nor their classroom environments unless they are healthy themselves.¹⁶

Theoretical framework:

Implementation of these programs started since its foundation almost 30 years ago up to the present under its Innovative Inclusive Program. “As a result of this Socio-Emotional Program, positive relationships & significant growth and development have been observed especially in children with needs & a collaborative & responsive culture has been created in school.¹⁷

¹⁴ [*Delgado N.B. et al., \(2019\). Restorative Justice as Practiced in School: A Study of an Inclusive School's Approach in Developing the Socio-Emotional Skills of Children with Special Educational Needs.*](#)

¹⁵ [*Walker S.O., \(2020\). Teachers Are Living in a Tinderbox of Stressful Conditions. These Scientific Approaches Can Help.*](#)

¹⁶ [*Walker S.O., \(2020\). Teachers Are Living in a Tinderbox of Stressful Conditions. These Scientific Approaches Can Help.*](#)

¹⁷ [*Delgado N.B. et al., \(2019\). Restorative Justice as Practiced in School: A Study of an Inclusive School's Approach in Developing the Socio-Emotional Skills of Children with Special Educational Needs.*](#)

However, if in previous years the teachers acted as the key facilitators of this process among their students, & parents to resolve issues & conflicts, this time the focus shifted to teachers themselves under the NEW normal context through Weekly Virtual Circle.

This ethnographic case study focused mainly on how, under pandemic context, MindHaven School's Brain-Based Triad program-(Home-base, School-Based, and Community-Based Program) Progressive Inclusive Program responds to teachers' Mental health needs by creatively employing the Modified, & Integrated Socio-Emotional Learning & Restorative Justice Practice, using the a) Taxonomy of Academic & Behavior Intervention Framework for students; b) The Zones of Regulation Framework c) The Transtheoretical Model (Stages of behavior) to monitor the total wellbeing of the teachers, while observing the same basic practices & process through Weekly Virtual Circle.

WHAT ARE THE ZONES OF REGULATION?

The Zones of Regulation framework and curriculum teaches students scaffolded skills toward developing a metacognitive pathway to build awareness of their feelings/internal state and utilize a variety of tools and strategies for regulation, prosocial skills, self-care, and overall wellness. This includes exploring tools and strategies for mindfulness, sensory integration, movement, thinking strategies, wellness, and healthy connection with others. The Goals of the Zones Curriculum for the students and for teachers are: Identifying their feelings; Understand their feelings in context; effective regulation tools; when & how to use tools; problem solve positive solutions; understand how their behaviors influence others' thoughts & feelings and ultimately move towards Independent Regulation.¹⁸

The Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity was developed based on existing research to support educators in evaluating and building intervention intensity and considering the integrated academic and behavioral supports needed by many students with intensive needs.¹⁹

The Transtheoretical Model (also called the Stages of Change Model), developed by Prochaska and DiClemente in the late 1970s), It focuses on the decision-making of the individual and is a model of intentional change. The TTM operates on the assumption that people do not change behaviors quickly and decisively. Rather, change in behavior, especially habitual behavior, occurs continuously through a cyclical process. The TTM is not a theory but a model; different behavioral theories and constructs can be applied to various stages of the model where they may be most effective.²⁰

Thus this study aims to explore “1. How MindHaven School's Brain-Based Triad program (Home-base, School-based, and Community-based Program), Progressive Inclusive Program responds to teachers' Mental health needs under Covid-19 by creatively employing the Modified, & Integrated Socio-Emotional Learning & Restorative Justice Practice, using the a) Taxonomy of Academic & Behavior Intervention Framework for students; b) The Zones of Regulation Framework c) The Transtheoretical Model (Stages of behavior) to monitor the total wellbeing of the teachers, while observing the same basic practices & process. 2. How did the teachers' respond personally & professionally to the modifications done in the Socio-Emotional Learning Program.

¹⁸ Kuypers L., (2011). *WHAT ARE THE ZONES OF REGULATION?*

¹⁹ Fuchs, L. S. et al., (2017). *The Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity*. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 50(1), 35–43

²⁰ LaMorte W.W. (2019). *The Transtheoretical Model (Stages of Change)*. *Boston University School of Public Health*. p.6.

METHODOLOGY

- A. Research Design and Data Collection Procedure and Analysis.
- B. This study used Ethnography as it is a type of social research involving the examination of the behavior of the participants in a given social situation and understanding the group members' own interpretation of such behavior. The data of this research was collected through in-depth and semi-structured interviews with the study participants, 12 teachers of MindHaven School whose ages range from 22-66 years old, all women. Online observations, focus group discussions, Staff Meetings & development, journal, document and archival explorations of Weekly virtual Zoom meetings. All these methods were used to craft communal and substantive accounts grounded on the stories of those who were deeply involved in these sessions. The researchers analyzed the data using Creswell's analysis in an ethnographic way and were engaged in the process of moving in analytic circles that go spirally upward, a process that allows one to produce a continually more detailed analysis.
- C. Setting. This study took place in MindHaven School Inc. It is a small, not-for-profit, inclusive private school offering Pre School and Grade School education services that earned government recognition in 1997, the same year that it offered Special Education services for the first time, starting with one child with autism and in 2007, the school's Elementary Level gained government recognition. The school "Whole Child, Whole School, Whole Community" Inclusive Program is a brain-based, research-based, evidence-based, practice-based, activity-based, play-based inclusive curriculum which incorporates and integrates principles from the latest in education research such as, among others, Multiple Intelligences Theory, Whole-Brain Learning, Learning Styles, Socio-Emotional Learning, Multi-Grade Program, Education for Sustainable Development, and Environment- Based and Culture-Based Education, eventually resulting in a developmentally-appropriate holistic program tailored to each child's uniqueness while cultivating him/her intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, physically, and socially. Lessons, activities, and programs are designed for children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, tenacity, compassion, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strengths.

FINDINGS

The Socio-Emotional Learning Program with embedded Restorative Justice Practices for teachers were modified to become a safe venue for teachers to have an intimate facilitated space for themselves to sustain Teachers' Socio-Emotional Learning even amidst Pandemic. Through WEEKLY VIRTUAL CIRCLE sessions, this aims to mitigate mixed mental health challenges of extreme stress, exhaustion, & disengagement during Covid -19. Thus the following modifications: These modifications are reflected in this framework:

FROM BEFORE COVID TO DURING COVID:

The framework shows the Process of modifications for the SOCIO-Emotional Learning Program to respond to the needs of the teacher:

Figure 1. Management Cycle

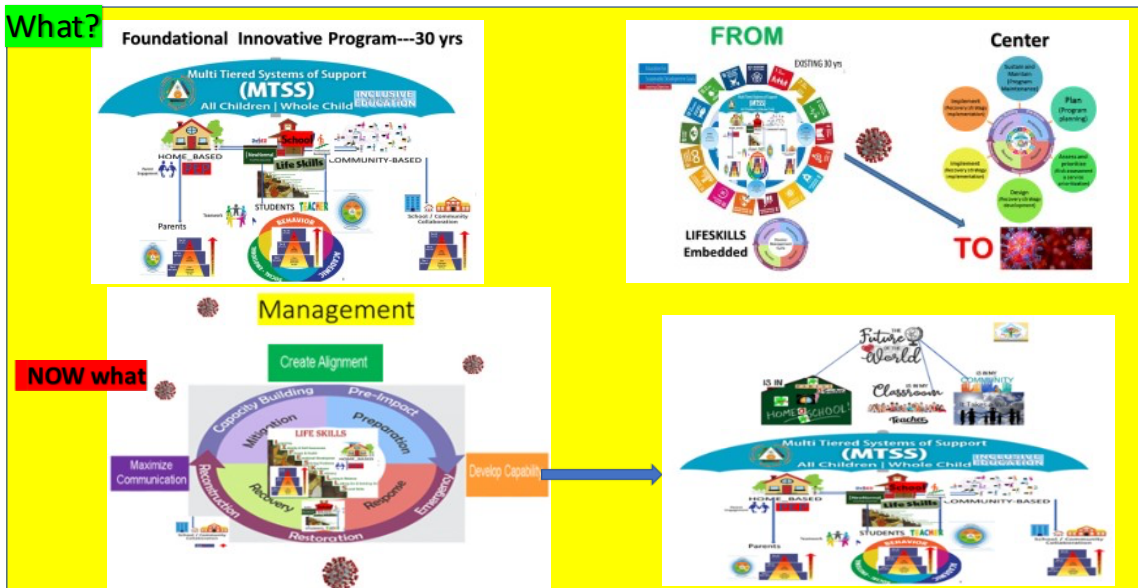


Figure 2. Planning to Evaluation

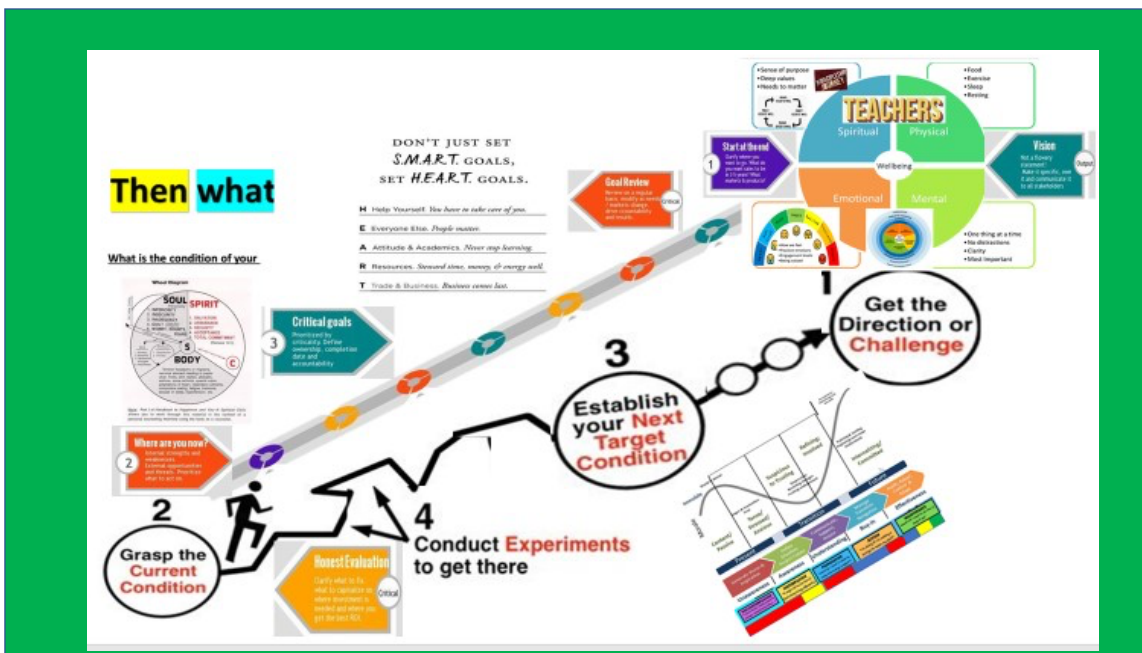


Figure 3- Teachers Modified SE Curriculum sustaining existing Inclusive Program



Since MSI adopted the CASEL 5 & that it can be taught and applied at various developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and across diverse cultural contexts the modifications were the following:

1. **SHIFTING OF TARGET PARTICIPANTS**- From students to teachers is the most crucial bases of Modifications of CASEL 5 by using the Developmentally Appropriate checklist.
2. **DISASTER MANAGEMENT CYCLE** : From Embedded to Center-- Sustaining The Whole Triad Program -by observing the General Framework of Management Cycle -from Planning , Implementation, Progress Monitoring, Assessment & Evaluation but with Disaster Management Cycle at the center of the management process described in the following;

A. Planning – Intentional Intensification for Teachers both as facilitators & as participants Sustained Brain-Based Learning Principles & strategies as an umbrella of the Triad Program; facilitating the sessions using Zones of Regulation Intervention tools; Framework of Intervention to both participants: Taxonomy of intensified Academic & Behavior Intervention based on the gathered data of both the students & the teachers. This is the bases for goal setting of both the students & teachers.

- **For students** - Outcome: PLOP- (Present Level of Performance) Identifying their current life assets Holistically in terms of strengths, weaknesses & limitations & setting goals for comprehensive personal & family relationship to team playing in professional development.

- **For Teachers** - Outcome: Data -Based PPPLSCP - Present Personal & Professional Learning & Self –Care Program- that intentionally & holistically respond to their identified physical, mental, emotional, social & spiritual needs.

B. Implementation – FROM students to teachers

- Sustained
 - Existing modified Multi -Tierred System of Support & Response to Intervention framework by utilizing the Taxonomy of Intervention CONTENT & DELIVERY
 - Universal Design for Learning; Differentiated Curriculum
 - Modified & comprehensive SE curriculum & Christian Discipleship curriculum that correspond to their age for individual & professional holistic needs.
- Increase one-on-one coaching in practicing the Kolbe Cycle of Experiential Learning as a teaching strategy in the Transfer of Knowledge stage by acquiring, learning, practicing & modeling to develop the skills.

C. Progress Monitoring – Transtheoretical Model as guide for individual & personalized monitoring of their Progress & to identify the specific gaps & needed actions between their present SE skills to what target SE skills they need to develop.

- **For students:** Sustained. it is usually done both through informal & structured feedback feed forward or through the channel of communication set up by the school such as Group Chat , Private messaging with their grade level teacher; from synchronous recording & asynchronous data from class dojo, journals, modules & other documents .
- **For teachers:** Increase per department daily informal communication with their Accountability partner & weekly virtual circles are also feedback sessions coming from team members. This model is used to gauge the progress or changes in mindset & behavior from one stage to the next reflected in application & Attention to Transfer -from specific to general application- of the Spiritual Growth curriculum. To identify the specific gaps & needed actions between their present SE skills to what target SE skills they need to develop- using the Transtheoretical Model as guide.

D. Assessment- Sustained for students; Increase Frequency for teachers

Developmentally Appropriate Socio-Emotional Learning checklist matching it with their Present Level of Personal& Professional Learning & Self-Care Program in learning- to identify , express their feelings & be aware of their daily level of alertness, understand their feelings in the new context, became aware of what, when , how & why use the tools, problem solve positive solutions; transform conflicts; understand how their behaviors influence others thoughts & feelings,& ultimately strengthen these skills to self-regulate.

E. Evaluation— Sustained Process based on the Teachers target goals to be developed in Socio-Emotional Learning competencies as a one of the stakeholders who embody the ideal characteristics & personality of implementors of the Mission, Vision , Goals of the School as an Inclusive Progressive Program with its Home-Based, School-Based, & Community-Based Program.

- Desired outcome - that the Teachers developed Socio-Emotional Learning Competencies can be manifested in their daily life not only personally & professionally but more importantly they can MODEL and DUPLICATE these skills to their families, to their colleagues, and to the community.
- Innovative program- Inclusion for teachers, accepting their DIVERSE various religious background & affiliation for Spiritual Growth.

The coronavirus pandemic, like many cataclysmic events of the past, has enhanced the appeal of faith and the notion of some sort of greater power. At a time of profound chaos, months or years away from a vaccine and seemingly a million miles from our former lives, some turn to faith "recent social upheaval have provided the optimal opportunity to embrace spiritual practices as a way to feel more whole and even healthy. "People are looking for guidance to feel better in their bodies, for confidence, and for higher meaning in their life."²¹ One possibility is that religiosity reduces the negative effects of insecurity and stress. Several studies have documented the health benefits of religion for stress related illness such as high blood pressure ²²and depression²³. Religious stress buffering could operate either through social support mechanisms ²⁴, cognitive coping mechanisms or both.²⁵

In MindHaven's School context whose team of teachers, although from different religious affiliations, is practicing Christian faith, the group adopted Christian Discipleship to be integrated in this revised Socio-Emotional Learning. This Weekly Virtual Circle sessions is the school's vehicle for the teachers so as not to disrupt ongoing professional training instead sustain [social-emotional competencies](#) they already have gained like strategies for self-regulation, healthy collaboration and stress management) Inclusion for Teachers:

Respecting their diverse background and religious affiliation by adopting Christian Discipleship as Spiritual curriculum. Its objective is to help the teachers understand, realize, reflect on the value & meaning of life & death beyond everyday realities. The deepening sessions are comprehensive & continuous individual exploration, deepening of science & faith to answer the question "WHY you believe WHAT you believe" and NOT just on blind faith or a pass-on/generational faith.

Since all teachers are Christians from different religious affiliations they unanimously agreed to adopt Christian Discipleship as their curriculum for Spiritual Curriculum

Discipleship Definition²⁶

The Gospel Message in the Early Church presents a more detailed explanation of biblical discipleship: "Becoming and being a flourishing follower of Jesus who embodies the character of Christ by engaging in a lifelong, personal pursuit of holistic transformation and doing so within a like-minded community of faith that's corporately committed to being and making other disciples."

²¹ Treleaven S., (2020). *Astrology, Tarot, and the Struggle to Make Sense of a Pandemic*.

²² Tartaro Jessica, Læcken Linda J., Gunn Heather E. 2005. "Exploring Heart and Soul: Effects of Religiosity/ spirituality and Gender on Blood Pressure and Cortisol Stress Responses.

²³ NIEMI K., (2020). *Niemi: CASEL Is Updating the Most Widely Recognized Definition of Social-Emotional Learning, Here's Why*.

²⁴ Chaeyoon L., Putnam R. D., (2010). "Religion, Social Networks, and Life Satisfaction." *American Sociological Review* 75, no. 6:914–33.

²⁵ Bradshaw M., Ellison C. G., (2010). "Financial Hardship and Psychological Distress: Exploring the Buffering Effects of Religion." *Social Science & Medicine* 71, no. 1:196–204.

²⁶ Fairchild M., (2019). *How Does the Bible Define Discipleship?*

- Behavioral support : Intentionally plan ,practice apply , monitor Weekly Circle sessions' of self- regulation skills & spiritual disciplines by duplicating & modeling these at home, with their students, in their team in school & in the community.

WHAT ARE THE TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO THE MODIFICATIONS PROCESS?

The teachers' respond personally & professionally with mixed thoughts & emotions to the modifications done in the Socio-Emotional Learning Program.

Generally, the Modified & Integrated Socio-Emotional Learning Program for the teachers through the Weekly Virtual Circle Sessions turned out to be a Transformative process which strengthens MSI teachers' caring, compassionate & responsive relationships. However, as they have to go through the process- from formulating their own Personal learning self -Care Program to the evaluation phase, these modifications solicited **mixed responses** from the teachers as they go through the stages of behavior from Pre-contemplation to Maintenance stage. From being the target participants instead of being the facilitators, the teachers express appreciation because such processes offered a venue for them to experience, learn & develop their Socio-Emotional Competencies in the following areas:

1. **To strengthening participatory environment--** teachers find the first few sharing sessions awkward, some feel intimidated & reserved when asked about their feelings but in succeeding sessions they started to feel that the climate fosters trust so they feel respected, supported, and engaged.

“at first I don't want to share my emotions & concerns for fear of being judged. I thought I would hide my weaknesses but now I feel valued & respected”

“We are collaborating with each other. And I am not afraid or shy to tell all my problems in the group. I'm very open to tell all your problems and everything. I can do some activities that it would be helpful to the children in his/her life”

Adapting to change usually takes time even under normal circumstances. It is much harder especially when it is imposed on us & there is no other option available like pandemic times. Common feelings of being demotivated, angry, disillusioned make people vulnerable to wallow in self -pity eventually depression. To most people what helps them to bounce back is when there is a support group to help them face reality, develop trust in yourself again & that they are valued.

2. **To deepening relationships—**they understood that emotions matter in any relationship; how one feels & interpret the feelings of others sends signals people to either approach or avoid us. They also came to be aware of their own pattern of automatic reactions of fight, flight, freeze or fawn. In contrast dysregulated emotions can be barriers to healthy relationships among themselves & also to their own families & students. Some even shared their traumatic childhood experiences.

“I was the kind of person that doesn't care about the people around me, how they feel;, sympathy and empathy were not on my vocabulary, even to the point that I do not want to be corrected, that I know everything and I don't want others opinion .I am so insensitive

“I made an impact to my family by sharing them how to pray intentionally.

“I was distant in the past because I don't want to be the “center” of attention but now learning these skills helped me formed new perspective about relationship building.”

Navigating a crisis with mixed emotions is a difficult process but accepting one's weaknesses & limitations. This actually help individuals also discover their sense of identity, their importance as a team player in a workplace community by taking off their masks & revealing their real selves only to realize that they are not alone in their desire to establish & deepen relationship with their family & with their colleagues.

- 3. To promoting inclusive school culture-** acceptance of their diverse background, opposing ideas & different religious beliefs produced sense of belonging, which plays a crucial role in their engagement to every session which offers an opportunity to enhance existing school-wide systems incorporating Socio-emotional practices.

"I am thankful and blessed because, through this, I can see the best version of myself. And in return, I wanted to help other people by introducing God to them, include people to let them know that we have HIM who is always there for us no matter who we are, This way people will be able to see the goodness within themselves."

"I feel safe in this environment. I am accepted regardless of who I am wherever I come from"
Culture Is about Connections of people feeling "belongingness "sharing the same values, perceptions & practices. In MSI's culture, there are many, overlapping, and cohesive interactions among stakeholders of the organization. This interactions result to integrating the organization's distinctive character of passion & compassion in their personal & professional lifestyle so it is widely spread and reinforced.

- 4. To forming authentic inclusive & collaborative partnerships with parents** - - they realize that building strong connections reinforces strong school & family relationships. Teachers acknowledge that families and caregivers are children's first teachers, and they have expertise about their holistic needs & development. Their contributions, engagements, perspectives are crucial to supporting, and sustaining not only their children's but all stakeholders SEL.

"each one has a role to play & can contribute to the overall mental health of team members"
Fundamental beliefs and assumptions like "All means All & All children can learn" are things that people in MSI community consider to be true. These perspectives are then translated into school norms & demonstrated in how teachers act & behave with their students, with the parents & among themselves thus tangible evidence -visual, auditory, physical & social interactions are the results of what are intangible -the authentic, collaborative & Inclusive partnership that prevails in the school.

- 5. To the rigorous & intentional ongoing planning, implementation, evaluation,** and continuous improvement by all members of the school.- -They experience & practice "- Teachers Voice/Agency"

"The topics helped me to intentionally learn & develop specific skills. These helped me to be productive personally & professionally."

"These sessions remind me to pray not just because I need something or want something to happen but to also to thank Him that I wake up every day, I have food in my table, I have something that I can share to others, appreciate these blessings."

The primary goals in the school is for students and staff members to feel emotionally and physical safe as reflected in school's policies and facilities promoting students .Abreast with this also is the belief to develop teachers & students responsibility & accountability both in Academics & Socio-Emotional Learning so the rigorous & intentional cycle of planning to evaluation is observed consistently.

- 6. To the continuous use of the SE Zone of Regulation Intervention Tools & monitoring their progress through the Transtheoretical Model** ---they feel empowered knowing that they are trained to apply these tools whenever, & wherever they need these in real -life situations.

“It also helped me developed and improved my self-growth, self-regulation, self-awareness and self-management”

Every single day will always be an opportunity to learn new things, learn from yesterday's mistakes and opportunity to plan ahead for the future.

THE ZONES OF REGULATIONS Teaches both teachers & s students: Vocabulary of emotional terms; How to recognise their own emotions ;How to detect the emotions of others (read others' facial expressions); What may trigger certain emotions; How others may interpret their behaviour; Problem solving skill. With these tools it is believe that they can demonstrate what Charles Swindoll said “Life is 10% what happens to us and 90% how we react to it”.

CONCLUSIONS

Many times the process of asking colleagues about feelings can be intimidating & intrusive but this experience shows that when schools have the courage to explore & initiate innovative program they could be more prepared to face unanticipated challenges even a crisis like covid-19. This MSI'S Teachers Weekly Virtual Modified Socio-Emotional Learning Session would not have been more responsive to teacher's mental health challenges personally & professionally under pandemic times if the SE & RJ Program have not been established in the previous years.

This Modified Integrated Holistic Socio-Emotional E weekly sessions benefited the teachers in three levels as:

- 1. Holistic Personal support** -- as these circles are congruent with mental, emotional, physical, social sciences & spiritual upliftment have been stimulating & supporting to teachers healthy [lifestyle practices](#); from breathing exercise, to using Zones of Regulations tools, to meditation on their bible reading & practicing spiritual disciplines
- 2. Professional Support System--** this is continuously sustaining the TEAM's high-quality relationships already established even before covid -19 practicing intentionality of encouraging & supporting each other to step up from one stage of behavior to another.
- 3. Family & community Support system--** as teachers who have SE competencies, they are now “special ambassadors “ of the school , to advocate,& duplicate themselves by modeling & Transferring these SE skills to their families & the community when opportunity allows it.

Consequently, these sessions helped the teachers promote deep human connection of acceptance & respect of each other's uniqueness & value while observing MSI's collective efficacy & collaborative RJ culture. All of these become the driving force in maintaining a holistic healthy habits thus building immunity serving as “Mother Nature's oxygen mask.”²⁷

The contribution of this Weekly Virtual Circles to the school -wide MSI program is substantially relevant to their integrative effort to complete the elements to contextualize the different Evidence -based approaches-from Academic to Socio-Emotional Learning Program- that the teachers have

²⁷ Walker S.O., (2020). *Teachers Are Living in a Tinderbox of Stressful Conditions. These Scientific Approaches Can Help.*

been previously applying primarily with the students & parents. Now, with their own version of personal & professional SEL learning applied to one social phenomenon especially under pandemic, which contexts require teachers optimized maintenance of functioning and performance, they feel more empowered & hopeful to face whatever challenges lie ahead in the coming days.

“What’s real in the mind is real in the body, and it is our perceptions not “objective” reality that drives our biochemistry. Accordingly, finding a silver lining even under the direst of circumstances instigates a biochemical “upward spiral” which fosters constructive thinking in a demanding moment and, over the long-term, protects health and psychological well-being.”²⁸

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