

PBL's Analysis on Embedding Social and Emotional Learning in College Classrooms

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Abstract: The classroom environment is an important place to effectively implement social and emotional education. College students' social and emotional competence can be improved by embedding social and emotional learning in curriculum learning. Among them, setting up special social and emotional courses or integrating social and emotional competence into subject teaching are effective embedding methods. Project-based learning, which combines learning interaction and cooperative learning, is an effective way to improve the competence to embed social emotions in the classroom. In the whole process, project-based learning constructs a triple relationship between students and themselves, students and others, and students and the collective, which can be highly integrated with the five social-emotional abilities and skills. However, in the process of project-based learning, a more detailed design is needed in the stages of project selection, project process, project completion, and project evaluation. The conclusion of this study provides useful enlightenment on how to improve a college student's social and emotional competence in the campus environment.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the economy, society, technology, and science, children and adolescents' bad behaviors such as truancy, alcoholism, school bullying, suicide, and violent crimes caused by psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, decreased interest, and severe depression are becoming increasingly serious. The "Survey Report on Mental Health Status of College Students in 2022" shows that the mental health status of key university and undergraduate students in China is poor, and the risk of depression is outstanding, which should be paid attention to. It is difficult for young people to acquire active citizenship only by academic knowledge. They need to have a wider range of abilities, such as responsible decision-making, emotional management, mutual cooperation, conflict resolution, resilience, and adaptation to environmental changes, to cope with the current social reality and challenges calmly (Sala *et al.*, 2020) [1].

Men's development is a complicated process. Marx believes that sociality is the essential attribute of man, and man is a practical existence with existential relationships, ethical relationships, and spiritual transcendence relationships with the objective world. The good development of emotion and sociality is the basis for a person to adapt to the social environment. Education is the

best way for students to grow and develop, and the knowledge, skills, and experience can only be obtained through practice in the educational situation. Nowadays, education emphasizes increasingly on promoting the development of students' social and emotional competence. The growth of college students' social and emotional competence is the process of accumulating social and emotional knowledge, improving skills, and changing attitudes in the experience of dealing with the relationship among themselves, others, and the collective in the educational situation. Social and emotional competence is demonstrated by the ability of college students to respond immediately and appropriately to social situations. This kind of experience expansion and ability construction is formed by the integration of learning, experience, and thinking in the specific study and life environment after study and long-term practice, which shows that students can effectively identify and manage emotions, care for others, and make responsible decisions.

Realistic social development leads students to show the desolation of social emotions and lack of ability under the complex social environment and multiple choices of survival and development. The pursuit of individuality, the maximization of self-worth, and a fiercely competitive environment have caused students to breed indifference to others and society, either by focusing only on self-struggle and alienating themselves from society, or by being selfish, ridiculing and despising others, or even by losing the basic criteria for judging right and wrong, good and evil. To improve students' social emotion ability, we need to pay attention to and guide students' social emotion learning. Social emotion learning is an activity to promote the development of students' social emotions, and it is a way and process for students to enter society with emotional experience activities. Curriculum knowledge has sociality, and students can recognize and understand society through knowledge learning, which provides a cognitive basis and knowledge basis for forming a sense of social reason. It is one of the most effective ways to cultivate and improve learners' social and emotional competence to integrate social and emotional education into school classroom teaching (Cefai *et al.*, 2018) [2]. Social emotion learning in classroom teaching aims to promote students' cognition of society, further understand themselves and improve themselves, and establish meaningful connections with society and the world. This paper will deeply explore the theoretical basis of embedding social and emotional learning into college classroom teaching, and based on project-based learning, find teaching methods that can effectively improve the effect of embedding social and emotional learning in the classroom.

2. Literature Review

There are three representative views on the definition of social emotional competence: First, CASEL first studied social and emotional competence and constructed the CASEL social and emotional competence model. Based on Gorman's emotional intelligence theory, CASEL divides social and emotional competence into five abilities: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision-making. Secondly, OECD draws lessons from the famous "Big Five Personality Model" of personality psychology, and defines social and emotional competence as "a subset of abilities, attributes, and characteristics related to individual success and social function", which is specifically divided into six abilities: task performance, emotional management, open thinking, getting along with others, cooperation and compound skills. Thirdly, taking the Social and Emotional Learning project jointly organized by the Teacher Work Department of the Ministry of Education of China and UNICEF as the representative, Du *and* Mao (2018) combined the "relational existence" theory of social constructivism and Chinese collectivism culture, and defines social and emotional competence as "the ability to recognize and manage the relationship with self, others and collective", which is specifically divided into self-cognition, self-management, others' cognition, others' management, collective cognition, and collective

management [3].

The development of social and emotional competence can significantly promote students' self-adjustment, improve interpersonal relationships, reduce problem behaviors, and increase prosocial behaviors, and improve academic performance (Durlak *et al.*, 2011; Taylor *et al.*, 2017) [4, 5]. The effect of social and emotional competence on individual success even exceeds cognitive factors (Yuan *et al.*, 2021) [6]. In order to improve students' social and emotional competence, we should first evaluate the social and emotional competence quantitatively. Marzano (2015) developed formative assessment criteria for social and emotional competence based on clear learning goals, progress of learning goals, and steps needed to achieve learning goals [7]. Siarova *et al.* (2017) further pointed out that formative assessment provides an opportunity to observe and evaluate students' personal abilities, social abilities, and learning abilities in the real context, which can support students' deep learning and promote their active participation in social interaction [8]. Lan *et al.* (2021) and Shao *et al.* (2021) put forward the connotation framework, principles, tools, indicators, and paths of social and emotional education assessment, and made a comprehensive formative assessment of learners' social and emotional competence [9, 10]. Yuan *et al.* (2021), Liu *et al.* (2021), and Tang *et al.* (2021) developed and studied indicators and tools for evaluating learners' social and emotional competence [6], [11, 12]. Chen *et al.* (2023) developed a scale suitable for measuring the social and emotional competence of Chinese college students [13].

Social and emotional competence is influenced by many factors. According to Bronfenbrenner's theory of moral ecosystems, individuals are nested in their environments, individuals and their environments interact with each other, and the development of individuals is influenced by their environments. Social and emotional competence is cultivated and developed in the interaction of individuals, families, schools, and other systems. Among them, the classroom environment is an important place to effectively implement social and emotional education. Supplementing and strengthening the relevant content in the curriculum is one of the main driving factors for students' social and emotional competence improvement (Cefai *et al.*, 2018) [2]. Social and emotional education regards "personal ability, social ability, and learning ability" as the key abilities of lifelong learning, which has become an important topic of EU curriculum reform. To solve the problem of students' lack of social emotion and the campus crisis caused by it, the education fields of various countries put forward the "Social and Emotional Learning" project to promote the development of students' social and emotional competence. Cui and Yang (2022) argued that the effective implementation of an emotional education program can promote teacher education students' professional identity and professional ethics, and develop understanding-based thinking about emotional education [14]. Guo and Wang (2022) believed that classroom teaching plays an important role in guiding students to carry out social and emotional learning, forming correct social concepts, establishing social responsibility, and developing social literacy, and pointed out that the contents of social and emotional learning in classroom teaching include four aspects: the social sense of reason, social morality, social aesthetic feeling, and social responsibility [15]. Yao and Chen (2022) discussed the influence of different family-rearing patterns on college students' social and emotional competence and pointed out that schools can produce substitution effects to make up for the deficiency of family rearing in cultivating college students' social and emotional competence [16]. Tang and Huang (2023) based on SSES data, through empirical research, found that school belonging plays an important role in promoting the effectiveness of social and emotional competence training in primary and secondary schools [17]. Huang *et al.* (2023), based on teenagers' samples, found that growth-oriented thinking is positively correlated with students' social and emotional competence, and pointed out that infiltrating social and emotional competence into daily teaching is an effective intervention measure to promote the development of students' social and emotional competence [18].

3. Classroom Embedding and Project-Based Learning of Social and Emotional Learning

School is the main place for college students to study and live, even a single place. School is also the place where students face social interaction challenges, and personal growth opportunities. Undoubtedly, the school is one of the main places to cultivate students' social and emotional competence. The college classroom is the main occasion for communication between teachers, students, and students. A large number of studies have demonstrated that embedding social and emotional learning in classroom teaching has a significant positive impact on improving students' social and emotional competence. If students' social and emotional learning needs in classroom teaching are ignored, precious developmental learning time and opportunities will be wasted. So how should we embed social and emotional learning into college classroom teaching?

3.1. Embedding Theory

The word "embeddedness" was first used by Karl Polan to explain economic phenomena in "The Great Transformation", then Grannovetter and other scholars gradually extended their analytical perspective to public management and other related disciplines. The college classroom is the contact place of knowledge transmission, and it is also the aggregation of emotional networks between teachers, or between students and students. Classroom teaching needs not only rigid rules and regulations, but also flexible emotional input, emotional transmission, and emotional support. Drawing lessons from Professor Grannovetter's classic thinking of embedding behavior into social relations, combining the expandability of embedding theory, the deep core of "emotional networks", and the collaborative logic of classroom learning individuals in the emotional network, this paper puts forward a brand-new analytical framework of "embedded socio- emotional collaboration" based on "embedding theory", emotional network and collaborative concept. The so-called "embedded socio-emotional collaboration" (as shown in Figure 1) means embedding emotions into classroom teaching as governance objects and means responding to students' emotional demands, enhancing students' social and emotional identity, mobilizing emotional resources in the classroom, internalizing emotional support outside the classroom, strengthening positive emotions and emotional links, softening the boundaries between college classrooms and society, reconstructing the internal relations and order in the classroom, building a network community of classroom social emotional abilities, and realizing organizational overall collaboration and effective governance.

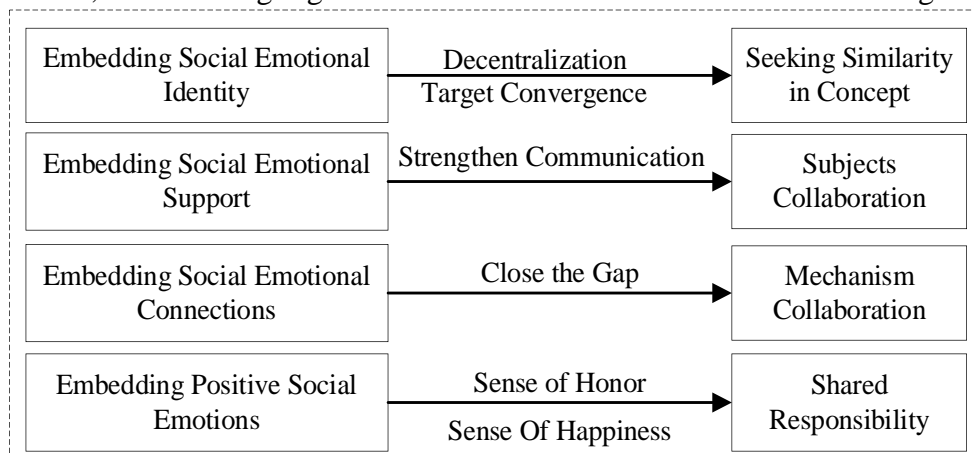


Figure 1: Embedded socio-emotional collaboration analysis framework

3.2. Embedding Social and Emotional Competence in Curriculum

Enriching social feelings and experiences, establishing social understanding and social concepts, and forming social care and social responsibility are the main ways of social and emotional learning. To cultivate students' social emotions and develop students' social accomplishments, classroom teaching must establish a meaningful connection between students and society, enrich students' social experience, pay attention to developing students' social understanding, strengthen social concerns in classroom teaching, enrich and sublimate social emotions in subject practice learning, and realize the meaning appreciation of social emotion learning to individual spiritual growth.

3.2.1. Establish Specialized Social and Emotional Competence Courses

Cultivate students' social and emotional competence through special courses, and take it as a clear teaching goal. Develop a spiral learning course of social and emotional competence that follows the law of students' physical and mental development. In the study, we should consciously seek the clues of emotional experience in the course, realize the emotional factors permeating the subject content, attach importance to the interaction between cognition and emotion, inspire our perception and insight into the social situation, and enhance the ability of emotional awareness, expression, and adjustment. To help students master and use social and emotional learning skills in an all-round way, schools in many countries offer special courses to implement social and emotional education. A systematic curriculum is characterized by clear teaching objectives, more explicit skills required of students, and stronger systematic and controllable teaching. The course "Lion Friends Exploring the Road" in America has a wide influence and adopts a series of teaching methods, such as team cooperation, group discussion, mutual teaching, group reflection, problem-solving, and so on. When teachers put forward discussion topics in the course "Lion Friends Exploring the Road", they will first encourage students to think independently, then let students discuss in groups, and finally, representatives of each group will share their experiences with all students.

3.2.2. Integration of Social and Emotional Competence into Curriculum Instruction

Any effective education is imperceptible, and social and emotional education is no exception. Social and emotional education should be effectively integrated into subject teaching, making it a hidden part of the curriculum, highlighting emotions, attitudes, and values. For example, in economics courses, market theory should be understood by observing and contacting economic reality. In the Common Core curriculum standards of American States, the "Mathematical Modeling Standard" requires students to understand individual or group needs in mathematics problems by mastering "social consciousness". In the Complex Text Standard, it is pointed out that students should master "social consciousness" to accept other people's views. Of course, the formulation of learning objectives, classroom listening skills, learning self-management, and so on are the main ways to cultivate social and emotional competence in subject teaching.

3.3 Project-Based Learning

3.3.1. Learning Interactive and Cooperative Learning

Learning interaction between teachers and students is an important campus channel for students to acquire knowledge. Teachers provide academic and professional support to students, promote the construction and maintenance of students' mental space, and accumulate psychological resources through "gain spiral effect", which becomes the psychological basis for students to acquire and improve social emotional abilities. Pascarella's report shows that in-class interaction between

students and teachers has a positive impact on students' academic achievement, sense of belonging, career planning, self-awareness, and social interaction skills.

Cooperative learning is a useful way to efficiently conduct teacher-student and student-student interactions. Ma *et al.* (2022) pointed out that cooperative learning is a teaching practice that effectively promotes the development of students' social and emotional competence, and cooperative awareness can promote five social and emotional competencies, among which cooperative ability has the greatest influence [19]. Therefore, setting up an effective curriculum system and choosing appropriate teaching methods can enhance students' cooperative cognition and provide students with more opportunities to develop their social and emotional competence. Project-based learning is a typical mode of learning interaction and cooperative learning.

3.3.2. Project-based Learning Skills Synergized with Social and Emotional Competence

Table 1: Social and emotional competencies vs. project-based learning skills checklist

Social and Emotional Education	Social and Emotional Education Skills	Requirements for PBL
Self-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying emotions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness • Recognizing strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-confidence • Self-efficacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to students • Giving students multiple choices • Empowering students with roles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing to fall behind • Providing timely feedback on progress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-directed learning
Self-management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impulse management • Stress management • Self-discipline • Self-motivation • Goal setting • Organizational skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms of class organization • Listening to students • Knowing your starting point <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a plan • Project management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-assessment
Social Consciousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzing perspectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Inclusion • Respect for others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating forms of class organization • Respecting students' perspectives • Designing open-ended problems • Collaborating with diverse individuals
Interpersonal Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Social participation • Relationship management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class debriefing • Communicating with group members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group contracts and roles • Giving and receiving peer feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback on results of group interactions
Responsible Decision-making Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying the causes of problems • Analyzing the external environment • Solving problems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation • Feedback • Ethical responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking authentic driving questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing your starting point <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Feedback or adjustments • Presenting the product • Feedback on skills and behaviors • Designing projects to serve the class

Project-based learning is a highly concerned teaching method. Project-based learning has always

advocated learning based on core knowledge and skills, that is to say, students should learn key skills while learning the core content and knowledge of the subject in class. At the same time, in the process of project-based learning, we can get emotional support such as supportive peer relationships, a sense of belonging, cultural response and tolerance, participation, cooperation, challenge, and high expectations. In the process of learning, three social and emotional relationships are constructed. First, the relationship between students and themselves. Project-based learning enables students to develop positive qualities of self-identity, self-confidence, and self-esteem based on an awareness of their own emotions, interests, values, strengths as well as weaknesses, and they are able to develop the ability to regulate their emotions in a timely manner, adapt to stress, reflect positively, and become more resilient and enterprising. Second, the relationship between students and others. Project-based learning needs empathy for others, can identify and understand others' attitudes, emotions, interests, and behaviors based on the cognition of others' consciousness, and can respect differences, effectively resolve conflicts, and establish and maintain friendly interpersonal relationships. Third, the relationship between students and collectives. Project-based learning raises students' awareness of collective values and collective norms of behavior, emphasizes the sense of collective belonging and collective honor, and correctly views the relationship between the individual and the collective. Individuals are required to adjust their relationship with the collective, clarify their rights and responsibilities in the collective, and be able to abide by collective norms. They are capable of prosocial behaviors such as solidarity, willingness to cooperate, and the courage to take responsibility.

CASEL's experts believe that social and emotional competence and project-based learning skills are highly integrated naturally, and high-quality design and teaching must naturally embed social and emotional competence into high-quality projects. Professor Mike Kaechele developed the corresponding relationship between social and emotional competence and project-based learning skills (as shown in Table 1). Therefore, the training goal of project-based learning points to students' comprehensive personality cultivation and core literacy growth, focusing on students' metacognition and empathy.

3.3.3. Essentials of Project-Based Learning

(1) Students choose their own projects. PBL is a good way to stimulate students' self-awareness. Teachers should give students the right to speak and choose. Teachers should provide students with the opportunity to choose their project topics in project-based learning, because choosing their projects is just an important starting point for students to integrate their personal and social identities. Let students have the whole process of project-based learning, and teachers guide students to determine project roles. In the process of participating in project design, students can realize their prejudices and opinions from others, and at the same time, they can connect feelings, values, and thoughts.

(2) Teachers should allow students to revise projects. The constant revision of the project essentially allows students to practice and revise in a low-risk environment before the final result is determined. The process of repeatedly revising project objectives can help students internalize the concept that "making mistakes is also part of the learning process" and let them learn how to "learn from failure". At the same time, teachers should permit students to make mistakes, which will stimulate students' courage and motivation to keep seeking knowledge. Furthermore, with the deepening of project-based learning, they will iterate their learning process, gain a growing mentality, and experience the improvement of self-efficacy.

(3) Endow students with ownership in the learning process. In the process of project-based learning, students should have every part of the process. In the part of project-based learning, students' ownership includes: students have the right to ask questions, students have the right to

query resources and engage in real research, students have the right to analyze data and draw their conclusions, students can generate their ideas when brainstorming and conceiving, students can modify their work, students can clarify the design intention of the work to the audience and find ways to send it to the audience.

(4) Students' autonomy in managing learning projects. Project management begins with goal setting based on the goals to be accomplished. Students need to know the goal, direction of the project and the possible state of present completion. It also involves breaking down the project into tasks and subtasks with clearly set deadlines. Teachers can visualize each part of the task, thus building a bridge between abstract thought and concrete actions.

(5) Students' self-reflection in the project completion stage. At the project completion stage, students can help themselves reflect on the learning process through a group evaluation mechanism. Establish a learning portfolio, reflect on the growth of learning with team members by showing their learning achievements, and set new directions for learning goals. In this process, students can determine their current knowledge and ability, and make clear the steps and measures to be taken in the future to improve their metacognitive ability. Eventually, it will bring deeper thinking and better study, and it will also bring more self-awareness awakening.

(6) Comprehensive and personalized teaching evaluation. The evaluation of project-based learning should be carried out at the whole and individual levels. The overall evaluation of the project team can improve students' sense of collective honor, while the individual evaluation of project team members needs more personalized standards. Among them, the evaluation of social and emotional education in the process of project-based learning must pay attention to the necessity of students experiencing the world as individuals, and cannot embed students into the prescribed "personality package", to avoid the risk of students' social conformity.

4. Conclusion

Social and emotional competence is a necessary ability for a person to adapt to the development and changes of the economy and society. College classroom is not only the source of students' professional knowledge, but also the key place to cultivate students' social and emotional competence. In the classroom of colleges and universities, we should train students to face the complex situation of growth and development, actively, pay attention to cultivating students' social and emotional qualities, develop their self-emotional control abilities, and form sound personality and personality characteristics in the positive emotional experience of individual and self, others and collective relations, to achieve the overall improvement of students' quality and the perfect development of human nature. We can embed social and emotional learning into classroom teaching by offering special courses and organically integrating subject teaching. Among them, project-based learning, which integrates learning interaction and cooperative learning, is an effective way to improve the ability to embed social and emotional factors in the classroom. In the whole process, project-based learning constructs a triple relationship between students and themselves, others, and the collective, which can be highly integrated with social and emotional abilities and skills. In the process of project-based learning, we should focus on the following points: students should choose their projects, teachers should allow students to revise projects and give students more rights in the whole process of project-based learning. In the project completion stage, students are required to summarize in time. Finally, when evaluating students' performance, they need to uphold the principle of comprehensiveness and individuality.

However, when embedding social and emotional competence into classroom teaching of different courses, it is necessary to choose a more appropriate embedding way according to the characteristics of the courses, and the setting of project scenarios needs to change according to the

courses and learning conditions. In this process, it is necessary to highlight the exemplary role of teachers.

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