

# Teacher social-emotional skills are key to successful implementation of new practices

July 28 2015, by John Fedele

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Teachers with strong social-emotional skills tend to implement new social-emotional intervention programs more faithfully, according to a study conducted by a University of Pittsburgh education professor published in the Society for Prevention Research's journal, *Prevention Science*. This study is part of a larger special issue on schools' readiness to implement new interventions, edited by Pitt's Shannon Wanless and her colleague Celene Domitrovich from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

"Often, interventions are not implemented with high fidelity in schools. If we knew beforehand who would be likely to implement well or to struggle, then we could offer those teachers extra support to increase their likelihood of success," said Wanless, assistant professor in Pitt's Department of Psychology in Education and lead author of the study. "Implementing with high fidelity—adhering to the program's core components—is important because it increases the likelihood that programs have a positive impact on children's skills."

"In some situations, we might even decide to offer a different kind of training to build capacity so they would be more 'ready to implement' the [intervention](#) in the future. Based on our recent study, building capacity would include increasing teacher's social-emotional skills."

Wanless and her group analyzed a group of 126 fourth-and fifth-grade teachers from the treatment group of a [randomized controlled trial](#) of the Responsive Classroom approach, an academic intervention that aims to

improve the instructional and social-emotional climate in the classroom. Prior to training, the researchers assessed factors believed to have the potential to represent the teachers' readiness to implement the Responsive Classroom approach: observed emotional support; teacher-rated use of intervention practices; teacher-rated self-efficacy; teacher-rated collective responsibility; education level; and years of teaching experience.

"We hoped to discover what teacher characteristics could be seen before training in the intervention began, to give us a clue as to whether or not the teacher would be likely to implement the intervention well, or with 'high fidelity.' These characteristics would be so useful to the field because they would give us a hint before we spend money on training and coaching, if this intervention is going to be used well," she said.

"What we found in the study is that other variables such as teacher demographics and background did not significantly relate to implementation. What did relate—in fact the only thing that related in this study—was how strong their social-emotional skills were, measured by the emotional-support dimension of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, a measure created at the University of Virginia's Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning," said Wanless.

Emotional support, as defined by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, reflects teachers' interactions with children in four dimensions: positive climate, negative climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for students' perspectives. It focuses, broadly, on the "overall feeling of warmth and respect in the classroom."

"In schools of education, we should be training [teachers](#) to develop their social-emotional skills because it will increase their capacity to engage in future professional-development training and to implement cutting-edge teaching practices well," Wanless said. "Social-emotional skill [training](#) in

teacher education programs may be one important way to prepare education students to successfully navigate new interventions as the field evolves throughout their careers."

Provided by University of Pittsburgh

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