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ARTICLE



## Social, emotional and intercultural competencies: a literature review with a particular focus on the school staff

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### ABSTRACT

Framed by the EU-project Hand in Hand focusing on Social, Emotional and Intercultural (SEI) competencies among students and school staff the paper discusses implementation and professional competencies based on a literature review. Five themes were identified: 1) Intercultural/transcultural competency is not often referred to in the same research as social-emotional learning, though socio-emotional aspects appear to be 'in the core', 2) it is crucial to be aware of agency among school staff in a SEI-implementation, 3) successful implementation is about more than the activities in the specific program, it is rather about elements in synergy and professional learning over time, 4) the subtle balance between adaptation and fidelity might best be addressed in an adaptive curriculum emphasizing active ingredients, and 5) this is a field with many intervention studies, but it is urgent to consider if the psychometric measures are sufficiently sensitive to catch the subtle changes related to SEI-competencies.

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## Introduction

A dynamic change is shaping our globalizing world with numerous challenges to society and citizens in relation to poverty, disparity, climate change, resource depletion, demographic change and migration, referred to as the Grand Societal Challenges by the European Commission. Schools are required to have a renewed focus on the way we interact with and relate to each other, and several large-scale research projects have contributed with evidence about the importance of social emotional learning (SEL) (Domitrovich et al. 2017; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki Taylor, and Schellinger 2011; Greenberg et al. 2003; Rucinski, Brown, and Downer 2017). We also know from research that supporting teachers in developing professional competencies in using SEL-

approaches, and support for the implementation, can be critical for these potential affordances (Durlak and DuPre 2008; Durlak 2016). So, in-service teacher education can be crucial for the effects of a SEL-implementation, and based on the background literature it seems that some designs of activities for school staff are more likely to support a successful implementation than others; 'A whole school approach', working locally with both school staff like teachers and school leaders as well as students, is emphasised (Jennings and Greenberg 2009).

The present review is conducted in the frame of an EU-project 'Hand in Hand' running 2017–2020 in five European countries: Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Slovenia and Sweden. Project aims are to design and test a generic whole school approach for supporting teachers and students' social, emotional and intercultural (SEI) competencies. Including also intercultural competencies the project is targeting the need experienced in Europe and internationally for building more respectful and inclusive school environments appreciating diversity (e.g. Taylor and Siddhu 2012). We know that there is a need for qualifying and using more time and resources on teacher professional development (TPD) when implementing SEL-approaches (Jennings and Frank 2015). We would furthermore hypothesize based on experiences from former projects (Jensen, Skibsted, and Christensen 2015) that the teachers' thorough and reflective work with factors such as empathy, compassion, cooperation and cohesion is needed in order to create an inclusive learning environment.

So, we have in the Hand in Hand project an evidence and experience-based rationale for working explicitly with teacher competencies. The literature review presented in this paper has been used to inform the iterative development of program activities, i.e. how to involve and support the teachers during implementation (see more about the specific program at the Hand in Hand website). The findings are here presented and discussed in a more generic sense to contribute to the international knowledge base, where more knowledge in this field of implementation of SEL programs and teacher professional competencies is asked for (Durlak 2016).

## Background

### *Social-emotional competencies and the intercultural aspects*

A substantial amount of scientific work points to the positive impact of SEL on children's social, emotional and cognitive development (Durlak et al. 2011; Greenberg et al. 2003; Payton et al. 2008). Social-emotional competencies are often defined by the five interacting fields of: 1) self-awareness (the ability to understand one's own emotions, personal goals and values), 2) self-management (the ability to regulate affect and calming oneself down, 3) social awareness (the ability to understand others and take the perspective of those with different backgrounds and cultures, and to act with empathy and compassion), 4) relationship skills (the ability to communicate clearly, to negotiate and to seek help, when needed) and the ability to 5) take responsible decisions (Durlak et al. 2015). This is known as the CASEL framework (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning).

As referred to in the introduction SEL will be more and more important the more our world is globalizing. Additionally, globalization calls for intercultural competencies, since

people with different societal backgrounds meet and collaborate in their daily lives and also in schools. As Nussbaum (2012, 301) states:

[It is...] very urgent right now to support curricular efforts aimed at producing citizens who can take charge of their own reasoning, who can see the different and foreign not as a threat to be resisted, but as an invitation to explore and understand, expanding their own minds and their capacity for citizenship.

Intercultural competence and SEL can be seen as interrelated, for example is awareness of culture an element in the definition of social awareness in the CASEL framework, however not with a specific focus on intercultural competencies in the SEL research so far. Empathy, self-awareness, self-management and good communication skills are often referred to as crucial parts of intercultural competence (Stier 2003). Stier (2003) refers to emotional coping and interpersonal and situational sensitivity in the definition of intercultural competence. Furthermore, the overcoming of what is called the self/other-binary is emphasized in research on intercultural competence including e.g. skills of interpreting and relating (Blell and Doff 2014). In addition to these socioemotional aspects intercultural competence also refers to essential knowledge-based elements like knowledge about one's own and other's culture, discrimination and cultural conflicts (Deardorff 2006). For now, we will in the paper refer to SEI competencies as SEL including socioemotional aspects of intercultural competence. In the results, we will return also to the differences e.g. in the research traditions.

### **Teachers' SEI competencies**

The CASEL framework has been used to discuss teachers' competencies (Schonert-Reichl et al. 2015), but most SEL-studies have focused on children's competencies. More and more scientific findings however points to implementation, and teachers' active role, as crucial for effect from programs in general (Adelman and Taylor 1997; Berkel et al. 2011), and specifically in relation to SEL programs (Abry et al. 2013; Durlak 2016; Durlak and DuPre 2008). Awareness of the teachers' own social-emotional competencies is also growing (Cornelius-White 2007; Jennings and Greenberg 2009). A meta-analysis found that person-centred teacher variables have an above-average finding-level association with positive student outcomes (Cornelius-White 2007, 130). The Dutch-Canadian pedagogue Max van Manen (2015) states inspired by Herbart (1851/1957) that teachers' ability to act with tact is the foremost quality of a good teacher. Pedagogical tact is the teacher's ability to meet the student with respect, with tactfulness. The concept of tact is related to the word 'tactile' and tact therefore connotes the teacher's ability to 'touch' the student ('touch' as mental sensitivity and responsivity). But it does also refer to the teacher's ability to let himself be 'touched' by the student guided by the students' reactions and states of being in the concrete situation. Also, the American philosopher Nel Noddings (2012) points to the importance of teachers' sensitivity, openness, and responsivity. According to Nodding (2012) attentiveness (receptiveness and listening) is a core-quality of the good teacher, who should be aware of the students expressed needs and not their assumed needs. Van Manen and Noddings primarily points to the teacher's sensitivity to their students, but other educational researchers have stressed the importance of the teacher's sensitivity toward himself and his own emotional life

(e.g. Hargreaves 1998; Malm 2009). Teaching is ‘an emotional practice’ (Hargreaves 1998, 835), and feelings as anxiety, guilt, uncertainty, commitment and vulnerability has a major impact on the teacher’s practice and has to be recognised and dealt with as fundamental part of teachers’ professional work (Malm 2009). Professional dialogues, education in social-emotional development and emotional responses and mindfulness-meditation has been suggested as tools for professional development of social-emotional competencies (Jennings and Greenberg 2009).

So, teaching is an emotional practice, but also a social and relational practice, and former Danish/European projects inspiring the Hand in Hand project have specifically used the conceptualization ‘relational competence’ defining this as:

The professional’s ability to ‘see’ the individual child on its own terms and attune teacher behaviour accordingly without giving up leadership, as well as the ability to be authentic in the contact with the child. And as the professional’s ability and will to take full responsibility for the quality of the relation (Juil and Jensen 2017).

The relational competence of the teachers is seen as the foundation for creating an inclusive environment in the classroom, where it is possible to develop SEI-competencies for both students and teachers (Jensen, Skibsted, and Christensen 2015; Juil and Jensen 2017).

Summing up, based on the background literature high-quality TPD seems important when implementing SEI-programs, but so far there has not been much research looking into TPD connected to the various programs for students (Jennings and Frank 2015), and there is a need to condense what is known from research looking into specifically SE+I and teacher competencies.

## Research question

What central aspects and elements can be based on a review of the research literature be identified concerning successful implementation, and school staff’s development of professional competencies, in the particular field of supporting students’ social, emotional and intercultural (SEI) competencies?

## Methodology

So far, most reviews in the field have been drawing on experimental studies of effect (e.g. Cornelius-White 2007; Durlak et al. 2011; Greenberg, Domitrovich, and Bumbarger 2001). But the idea that a systematic review can and shall include only effect-studies and using statistics, following a pre-specified linear path is challenged (Gough, Oliver, and Thomas 2017; Snilstveit, Oliver, and Vojtkova 2012). Depending on the focus of the review and the research area narrative synthesis relying primarily on the use of words and text to summarise and explain the findings might be better suited (Snilstveit et al. 2012; Popay et al. 2006). The present review is not aimed for synthesising evidence focusing on the effectiveness of some particular kind of intervention, but on developing a new/refined model merging SE+I and identifying aspects relevant in TPD and implementation. We are interested in what picture emerge more than if something works and how well. Teachers’ SEI competencies is

not a well-researched area. We therefore expected to include research from diverse fields applying a wide range of quantitative and qualitative methods. Aligned to these aims a narrative synthesis was best suited (Gough, Oliver, and Thomas 2017; Popay et al. 2006). The analysis consisted of producing a summary from each study under the headlines in the review template of: rationale, themes discussed, aims and research questions, methodology and main results. In the next step of analysis themes were identified across studies, this was beside the literature on narrative synthesis informed by the analytical approach thematic analysis widely used in qualitative and mixed methods research (Braun and Clarke 2006). Themes were identified in an iterative analytical approach including the three main researchers identifying and refining overarching themes across papers following the procedure of e.g. collating initial notes from the first readings into potential themes followed by gradually refining the specific of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 87).

One of the potential pitfalls when working with thematic synthesis, where summaries of the findings from the included studies are arranged in cross cutting themes, is that all studies are treated equally, whether they have two or 200 participants. Tabulating results might help to mitigate this problem (Gough, Oliver, and Thomas 2017). In the last section of the results, we provide a tabulated overview of and discuss specifically the methodology in the reviewed papers. Furthermore, we have aimed for transparency by producing a catalogue with all included studies elaborating on methodology in each study and condensing the results (the catalogue is published on the Hand in Hand website).

## Review procedure

The systematic search for international peer-reviewed research was conducted in march 2017 in three databases ERIC, PsycINFO and Teachers Reference Centre. We searched for research published in the period from 2000–2017. Across three key concept areas the following search terms were combined: ('professional development' OR 'professional learning' OR 'in service teacher training' OR 'in service education' OR 'professional competencies') AND ('social and emotional learning' OR 'intercultural' OR 'mindfulness' OR 'Self awareness' OR 'Self management' OR 'social awareness' OR 'relationship skill' OR 'responsible decision making' OR 'Emotional contagion') AND ('teacher'). 238 peer-reviewed papers were found. We had several initial searches and e.g. realizing that no papers referred to both 'intercultural' and 'implementation' in the search string above we included an additional search without 'intercultural competence' but with 'implementation' combined with the other search words.

The next step was manual sorting of all identified studies with the inclusion criteria of the research having a transparent methodology and a specific focus on teachers' professional development of social and emotional and/or intercultural competence as general teacher competencies. Studies focusing on a particular subject like second language teaching or intercultural competencies from e.g. staff mobility programs were excluded. From this process 36 papers were identified as included and suitable

for full text study. A summary of each was made using the review template, leading to the catalogue used in the collaborative analysis. Exclusion criteria were furthermore thoroughly discussed for each paper.

## Results and discussion

From the iterative process of condensing key-points in each of the identified papers, combined with a thematic analysis across papers, five major themes were identified. Each theme is presented below first condensing from the reviewed literature and then moving gradually into a discussion.

### ***Theme 1: SEL, intercultural competency and intercultural sensitivity***

From the background-literature it was evident that the socioemotional aspects of intercultural competencies are central like when Stier (2003) refers to emotional coping and interpersonal and situational sensitivity as aspects in the definition of intercultural competence. It has been argued that culture defines SEL, and that there is an intimate connection between cultural sensitivity, social structures and social emotional competencies (Hecht and Shin 2015). Reviewing the research, it was however also clear that in spite of this, SEL research and research referring to intercultural competencies follow each their research traditions, with few or no cross-references and not often referring to the same theoretical background. A main part of the research using the conceptualization intercultural competence appears to be about initiatives for particular groups e.g. initiatives with student, teacher and researcher exchange or international schools (Ateşkan 2016; Heyward 2002), or about teaching in a specific subject, e.g. language teaching. Most of these studies were not passing the manual sorting as they were out of the scope of the review, but some studies though referring to specific communities did highlight TPD in a generic sense. An example is a project showing promising results by involving both Jewish and Arab Israeli teachers fostering dialogue by participating teachers telling defining life stories as a mean to develop empathy and understanding (Elbaz-Luwisch and Kalekin-Fishman 2006). Another example is from a Greek minority school with 100% non-Greek students inquiring into if action-research in an intercultural context can improve teachers' treatment of otherness in the classroom (Magos 2007). The analyses revealed that the beliefs and attitudes of the teachers changed so that they were more pleased with their relationship with students and more satisfied in their jobs, and that they changed their general accommodation of otherness compared with teachers from control-group.

The review also included a theoretical paper arguing about a three-stage approach to TPD with an aim of the in-service education of promoting teachers as changing agents (Li 2013). This approach is emphasizing teachers' developing knowledge and skills about diversity, changing their attitudes towards self and students, and developing intercultural educational practice through the processual stages of 1) cultural reconciliation, 2) cultural translation and 3) cultural transformation.

Opposite to research and development about intercultural competence often targeting specific groups the largest part of the SEL studies are researching into

specific programs like CARE, PATHS or RULER (more on these programs under theme 3). There are however in the review an example of SEL-research including the particular target-group of immigrant students with behavioural problems (Doikou-Avliidou and Dadatsi 2013). Outcomes on social functioning and social position were found in this small-scale intervention of a SEL programme. The psychometric measures showed a tendency for better peer relations, and the teachers referred to positive changes as the students were less distracted, expressing thoughts and feeling more openly and were becoming less aggressive. So, there are positive results with this specific groups, but in general the generic approach targeting all students is recommended (Durlak et al. 2015).

The studies highlighting both social emotional elements and intercultural competencies refer to various definitions and terms e.g. intercultural sensitivity. Intercultural sensitivity can be defined as critical consciousness of own cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses to cultural difference that reflects how individuals construe intercultural differences (Bennett 2013). There are studies presenting evidence that TPD interventions focusing on intercultural sensitivity have an effect of teachers' intercultural competence measured using a specific Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI<sup>1</sup>) (DeJaeghere and Zhang 2008; DeJaeghere and Cao 2009). The TPD approaches took various forms based on the teachers' specific needs, but all were focused on developing cultural self-awareness, values and identity through activities revealing one's cultural assumptions and behaviours.

So, intercultural sensitivity is used as a conceptualization in the rare research focusing both on socioemotional and intercultural aspects and TPD. Intercultural sensitivity is however not the same as intercultural competency. Hammer, Bennet, and Wiseman (2003) attempted to overcome some of the murkiness of definitions by drawing a distinction. From their perspective, intercultural sensitivity is the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences whereas intercultural competence is the ability to think and act in intercultural appropriate ways (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003, 422). Their distinction between knowing and doing in intercultural competent ways offers a fitting prelude to the themes that have emerged from most contemporary work on intercultural competencies. Referring back to Nussbaum (2003) and Blell and Doff (2014) it can be argued that there is a need for more research and development focusing on intercultural competence as a generic competence for all school-students preparing them for citizenship and involving (teachers and) students' recognition of diversity overcoming the self/other-binary and developing critical cultural and transcultural awareness, skills and attitudes. Based on this we suggest to expand the description of social awareness, from e.g. the CASEL framework referred to in the background section, to emphasize SE+I competencies:

The ability to take perspective of and to have empathy and compassion with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand, accept and recognize social and ethical norms for behaviour, to be aware of cultural synergies overcoming the self/other binary and making space for different point of views recognizing also the influence and importance of family, school and community (definition of social and transcultural awareness used in the Hand in Hand project)

## ***Theme 2: agency among school staff: beliefs, emotions and the ability to navigate in complexity***

Teachers are the primary implementers of specific programs, and both their beliefs about and support for SEL, and their confidence, can likely influence program delivery, evaluation and outcomes (Brackett Reyes, Elbertson, and Salovey 2012; Cornelius-White 2007). But still, as stated by Kimber, Skoog, and Sandelic (2013), the situation is that there so far has been an extensive body of research looking into SEL, but no clear answer to how teachers should be trained. Based on teachers' diaries along the process of implementing the program SET (social and emotional training) in Sweden it is concluded that training of the teachers generates both general teacher improvement and better implementation of the program (Kimber, Skoog, and Sandelic 2013). The results point among other things to a need for teacher collaboration and to work specifically with teachers' unease in relation to SEL as part of in-service teacher education.

Issues about teacher beliefs, attitudes and emotions, like teacher unease, is raised using a wide range of concepts and theoretical framings. Anyon (2016) concludes on three main factors influencing implementation fidelity: 1) Intervention-characteristics like compatibility with staff members' beliefs, 2) organizational capacity, e.g. ability to integrate the intervention into existing structures and routines, and 3) the intervention support system. Brackett et al. (2012) refer based on factor analysis to three reliable scales, with the three C's: 1) Teacher Comfort with teaching SEL, 2) Commitment to learning about SEL, and 3) perceptions about whether their school Culture supports SEL. Teachers who had low expectations for SEL efforts or felt uncomfortable teaching SEL were less likely to implement the program with quality and fidelity (Brackett et al. 2012).

The importance of teacher beliefs is also raised in relation to the potential for teachers keeping up developing their practice after a specific program is finished. Martinez (2016) concludes that experience of teaching SEL had a positive impact on the teachers' pedagogical thinking about SEL. Continuous implementation of SEL develops teachers' pedagogy and deepens their commitment to the whole child. The implications highlighted is that teachers would benefit from in-service training models, that include their concrete enactment of SEL teaching, such as coaching, that involve reflecting, observing, and receiving feedback (Martinez 2016).

A concept frequently used across studies is self-efficacy (Bandura 1997), for example in a Norwegian study looking into teachers experience from a SEL program in relation to their classroom practice (Larsen and Samdal 2011). Participating teachers claimed that the program had made them more sensitive and conscious about the importance of social competence training and more democratic, context-sensitive and student-centred. Students were experienced as calmer and more harmonious and collaboration with parents was positively affected (Larsen and Samdal 2011). Emerson et al. (2017) in a systematic review and narrative synthesis about mindfulness-based interventions for school teachers also refer to the effects on teachers' self-efficacy. They emphasize reducing teacher stress as a main outcome, supporting gains in emotion regulation and self-efficacy as intermediary effects and mindfulness and self-compassion as mechanisms of action.

Teachers' belief about SEL has been investigated also using quantitative methodology (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran, and Merrell 2009). Findings show that 98,9% of the teachers reported, that they believe SEL to be important, noting however that a majority (67,4%) of these US teachers also reported that a SEL curriculum was being implemented in their classrooms. So, the situation might be different in European countries where SEL programs are less frequent (national catalogues: Hand in Hand website). It is concluded that schools should take an active role during implementation, and that receiving support from a variety of professionals would be helpful for teachers. Furthermore, it is concluded that contemporary policy focus on academic demands decrease the opportunity for SEL (Buchanan et al. 2009).

So, it is crucial in TPD related to a SEI-implementation to work explicitly with teacher beliefs, emotions and abilities, and to include supervised classroom implementation to support teacher agency. Morgan et al. (2014) refer explicitly to teachers' ability to be holding complexity and in general this is a field with a high level of complexity. These aspects emphasised across the reviewed research is very much about teacher motivation. Ryan and Deci (2017) refer to the three main aspects of (teacher) motivation: feeling competent, i.e. teacher-efficacy, but also having some autonomy and not at least connectedness, i.e. working in a school culture supporting collaboration among school staff.

### ***Theme 3: the specific program or rather elements in synergy and processes over time?***

Many of the reviewed studies refer to particular SEL programs for students, including the CARE program (Emerson et al. 2017; Jennings et al. 2011, 2014, 2017; Schussler et al. 2016), the RULER approach (Brackett et al. 2012; Castillo, Fernández-Berrocal, and Brackett 2013), The Responsive Classroom (Abry, Rimm-Kaufman, and Curby 2017; Anyon 2016), CALM (Harris et al. 2016), ERIS (Freeman, Wertheim, E.H. and Trinder 2014; White et al. 2013), PATHS (Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn and Downer 2012) and OPEN CIRCLE (Kress et al. 2004). Many of those are programs specifically using the CASEL-framework and some additional studies refer to this framework at an overall level (Martinez 2016; Meyers, Tobin, and Huber 2015). Specific CASEL programs are also mentioned when discussing implementation. Durlak (2016, 339–40) refers to 'The child development project', Responsive Classroom, PATHS and SEAL. There are also specific programs just referred to by one author like SET (social and emotional training) in Sweden (Kimber, Skoog, and Sandelic 2013), the Second Step program in Norway (Larsen and Samdal 2011) and the FRIENDS program in Australia (Lizuka et al. 2014).

Explaining in details about the aims and content in all those programs are out of scope of this paper, but it is an interesting issue that so much research refers to specific programs for students, also when searching specifically for teacher competencies and TPD. There are in the reviewed research examples of convincing results at student level, so evidently some SEL-programs have shown to be more effective than others. According to Durlak et al. (2011, 2015) effective SEL approaches often incorporate the four elements: 1) Sequenced: connected and coordinated set of activities to foster skill development; 2) Active: active forms of learning, 3) Focused: at least one component that emphasizes developing personal and social skills, and 4) Explicit: targeting specific

social and emotional skills. But referring to the research question in the present review the key point is that some of the important issues related to TPD and implementation actually appear not to be first and foremost program dependant. To be recommended by CASEL the programs have to offer TPD before implementation, and ongoing support is also recommended. But the actual TPD in the CASEL-programs ranges from online self-directed instruction, to short one-day workshops, to more sustained and intensive activities (Jennings and Frank, 2015). Knowing that meta-analyses have shown a considerable difference in student gains comparing programs that are considered well implemented and those with implementation problems (Durlak 2016) the emphasis on specific programs in the research might be misinterpreted: it could lead to the false conclusion at a school or in a municipality of anticipating convincing results at student level if just choosing the right program. Based on this review it is evident that successful programs must work specifically with TPD not just making (online) materials available for the teachers. And as emphasised above in-service teacher education with processes over time supporting the teachers in (collaboratively) trying out and reflecting on the new approaches. Castillo, Fernández-Berrocal, and Brackett (2013) compared teachers who attended the RULER training with teacher having eLearning training. The teacher participating in thoroughly designed TPD activities had more positive scores on several outcomes related to teacher engagement, positive interactions with students, and burnout than those using e-resources. These findings remained statistically significant after controlling for trait affect and personality, dimensions traditionally related to engagement and burnout among teachers. It is also evident that generic teacher pedagogical and relational competencies are crucial. Collie, Shapka, and Perry (2011) refer to a range of school climate variables and among those 'student-teacher relation' was the most consistent predictor of effect on e.g. professional commitment.

Summing up, successful implementation is about much more than the activities in the specific program, it is rather about elements in synergy and professional learning processes over time, supported by well-designed TPD.

#### ***Theme 4: implementation: adaptation, fidelity, and active ingredients***

As mentioned the average student gains from SEL-programs evidenced in reviews and meta-studies do differ much depending on implementation quality:

We should not think about SEL programs as being effective; it is well-implemented SEL programs that are effective (Durlak et al. 2015, 12).

The important role that adaptation can play in program implementation might be the most provocative finding of this review (Durlak and Du Pre 2008, 341).

Beside the crucial need for outside assistance and the conclusion that professional development for school staff is crucial for effect Durlak (2015, 2016) points to different components of implementation, e.g. fidelity, quality, dosage, adaption, participant engagement, program reach, program differentiation and control or comparison conditions. Two factors are in particular highlighted: 1) teachers who emerged as positive role models for others seemed to be influential in sustaining the schools' commitment and motivation, and 2) programmes that were integrated and became part of the entire school and its daily practices were more

likely to be continued opposed to programs in only some classrooms, (Durlak 2016). Anyon (2016) emphasise three main factors influencing implementation fidelity: 1) Intervention characteristics like compatibility with staff members' beliefs, 2) organizational capacity, e.g. ability to integrate the intervention into existing structures and routines, and 3) the intervention support system. Freeman et al. (2014, 853) presents a synthesized model of facilitators of implementation based on interview research. Major components are: 1) Ensuring a whole schools vision and process, 2) pre-programme engagement confirming commitment and alignment of researcher and teacher visions, 3) facilitative programme structure and processes such as linking the current programme to existing programmes and processes at the school, 4) leadership and support for staff in the change process, 5) the nature of the program content and 6) monitoring and feedback processes to sustain motivation.

So, ownership is important at both teachers and school level. In particular Durlak (2016) and Durlak and DuPre (2008) refer to the subtle balance between program fidelity and adaptation. Thus it is important to maintain the active ingredients in a certain program, but also that the teachers have the professional competence for adapting program activities to the particular students, at a specific school, teaching certain content in a specific context. The subtle balance between adaptation and fidelity might best be addressed by thinking in an adaptive SEI-curriculum describing explicitly the active ingredients in the curriculum, and areas where adaptation could be suggested.

### ***Theme 5: methodology in the reviewed research***

The character of this last theme is a little different from the others, as it is not perspectives raised in the research, but rather a theme appearing in the analysis across studies. In the process, we gradually grew to see the various methodological approaches in the reviewed research as raising implications in relation to the research questions.

Except from two survey-studies (Buchanan et al. 2009; Collie, Shapka, and Perry 2011) the rest of the 26 identified studies were studies of intervention: Three defined as action-studies, one as a case study and twenty-one as intervention-studies (Table 1). Of the twenty-one intervention-studies, nine had randomised control group, the rest of the intervention-studies relied on pre-and-post intervention-measures. Most studies used a mixed method design, but with a small trend to older studies using only quantitative measures.

Some of the studies found significant impact at e.g. teacher competencies from programs and TPD focused on social, emotional and intercultural aspects (Castillo, Fernández-Berrocal, and Brackett 2013; DeJeghere and Zhang 2008; DeJegehere and Cao 2009; Harris et al. 2016; Jennings et al. 2014, 2017; Porsche et al. 2014). But in general, the studies reviewed here found moderate effects. Several studies found that teachers reported about positive changes e.g. in qualitative semi-structured interviews, though the same studies only found trends and no general significant effect when using psychometric measures. Teachers for example reported about less student distractedness and aggressiveness and that students grew to be better at expressing their thoughts (Doikou-Avliidou, And, and Dadatsi 2013), that they themselves had become more tolerant and aware of cultural diversity (Dolev and Leshem 2016), and they also referred in self-reports to positive changes in their practice (Jennings et al. 2011). Some recent studies have used classroom observation as an outcome measure (Abry, Rimm-Kaufman, and Curby 2017; Anyon 2016; Jennings et al.

**Table 1.** Methodology in the reviewed research.

Quantitative measures	Qualitative measures	Mixed method
<b>Intervention studies – randomised controlled</b>		
Murray, Rabiner, and Carrig 2014 Brackett et al. 2012 White et al. 2013		Abry, Rimm-Kaufman, and Curby 2017 Castillo, Fernández-Berrocal, and Brackett 2013 Harris et al. 2016 Jennings et al. 2017 Jennings et al. 2014 Jennings et al. 2011
<b>Intervention studies – pre-post-measures</b>		
DeJaeghere and Zhang 2008 DeJaeghere and Cao 2009	Schussler et al. 2016 Freeman, Wertheim, and Trinder 2014 Larsen and Samdal 2011 Kimber, Skoog, and Sandelic 2013	Doikou-Avliidou, And, and Dadatsi 2013 Dolev and Leshem 2016 Anyon 2016 Jennings 2015 Porsche et al. 2014 Lizuka et al. 2014
<b>Action research</b>		
	Magos 2007 Martinez 2016 Morgan et al. 2014	
<b>Case-studies</b>		
	Meyers, Tobin, and Huber 2015	
<b>Surveys</b>		
Buchanan et al. 2009 Collie, Shapka, and Perry 2011.		
<b>Other, e.g. reviews and theoretical discussions</b>		
Durlak 2016 Elbaz-Luwisch and Kalekin-Fishman 2006 Emerson et al. 2017 Jennings and Greenberg 2009 Kress et al. 2004 Li 2013 Malm 2009 Roeser et al. 2012 Sameshima 2007		

2011, 2014, 2017; Murray, Rabiner, and Carrig 2014; Magos 2007). Though classroom observation is a time-consuming method it has the obvious advantage compared to self-rating-scales, that the possible ‘blind-spots’ in the teachers’ self-awareness is addressed by looking at their actual practice. Interestingly only two of the studies reviewed addresses students’ perceptions of changes following implementation (Doikou-Avliidou, And, and Dadatsi 2013; Lizuka et al. 2014). Students perspectives on e.g. classroom climate and teacher-student-relationship would be obvious fields of investigation in the future.

So, teachers in general believe that social emotional competencies are important (Buchanan et al. 2009) and there are many studies reporting about perceived positively changes (Jennings et al. 2011). This is however a field with many intervention studies, using a range of different scales and measures. There seems to be a need for methodological development and a thorough mix of methodologies could be recommended bearing in mind the complexity of the field. And it is urgent to consider if the psychometric measures are sufficiently sensitive to catch the subtle changes related to teachers’ SEI-competencies, their beliefs and their professional relational competencies to support students in developing SEI competencies.

## Conclusion

A range of central aspects and elements have been identified concerning successful implementation, and school staff's development of professional competencies, in the field of supporting students' SEI-competencies. From the iterative process of condensing key-points in each of the identified research papers, combined with a thematic analysis across papers, five major themes were identified. First of all, intercultural competencies are not often conceptualized referring to the same research base as SEL, but socio-emotional aspects appear to be a central aspect of intercultural competence, and based on the review a definition of social and transcultural awareness is suggested. This definition illustrates how a focus on SEI-competencies refer to, but also further elaborate on the insights from the solid research base on social emotional learning (SEL). Furthermore, based on the reviewed research it seems crucial to be aware of ownership and agency among school staff, when preparing for a SEI-implementation, and to work explicitly with teacher beliefs, emotions and abilities to navigate in complexity. Successful implementation is about more than the activities in the specific SEL/SEI program, it is rather about elements in synergy and professional learning over time, and the subtle balance between adaptation and fidelity might best be addressed by thinking in an adaptive curriculum emphasizing active ingredients. Finally, looking at the methodology across studies it is concluded that this is a field with many intervention studies, but that the psychometric measures might not be sufficiently sensitive to catch the subtle changes related to SEI and teacher competencies.

Looking forward, it can be suggested to focus specifically on the implementation processes, i.e. supporting teacher agency and ownership, when working with social, emotional and intercultural competences in in-service teacher education programs. Teachers' professional competence for adapting program activities to their particular students have to be acknowledged, thinking more about implementation as a co-creation process between teachers and researchers/program-developers.

## Note

1. IDI measures individual's construction of cultural difference along a continuum from mono-cultural to intercultural worldviews using the five scales: denial/defence scale, reversal scale, minimization scale, acceptance/adaptation scale and encapsulated marginality scale. The scale refers to the development of intercultural sensitivity highlighted by Bennett (2013) where, differences first are denied, then people act defensive, then differences get minimized, then differences are accepted, people learn to adapt to differences in their communication, and finally they understand that culture is something constructed non-essential and they manage to free themselves from cultural influences to a certain extent and learn to switch between different cultural frames.

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