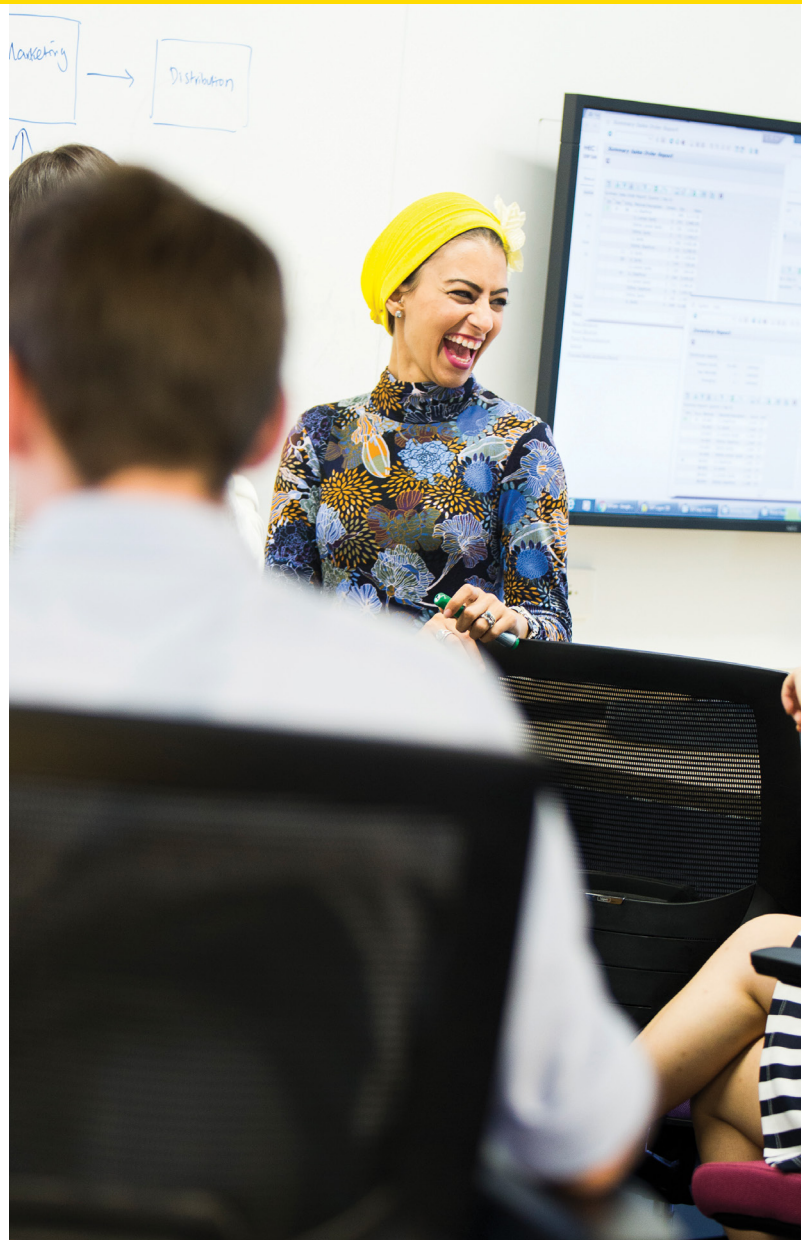




12

Social-emotional competence among students



Research Brief

What is the problem?

The primary aim of social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum is to encourage students to apply behaviours that are socially and emotionally competent.

After all, we want students to be caring and kind members of society.

Most SEL programs focus on teaching these behaviours to students however, knowing about socially and emotionally competent behaviours is not necessarily enough to ensure that students actually apply them in the real world.

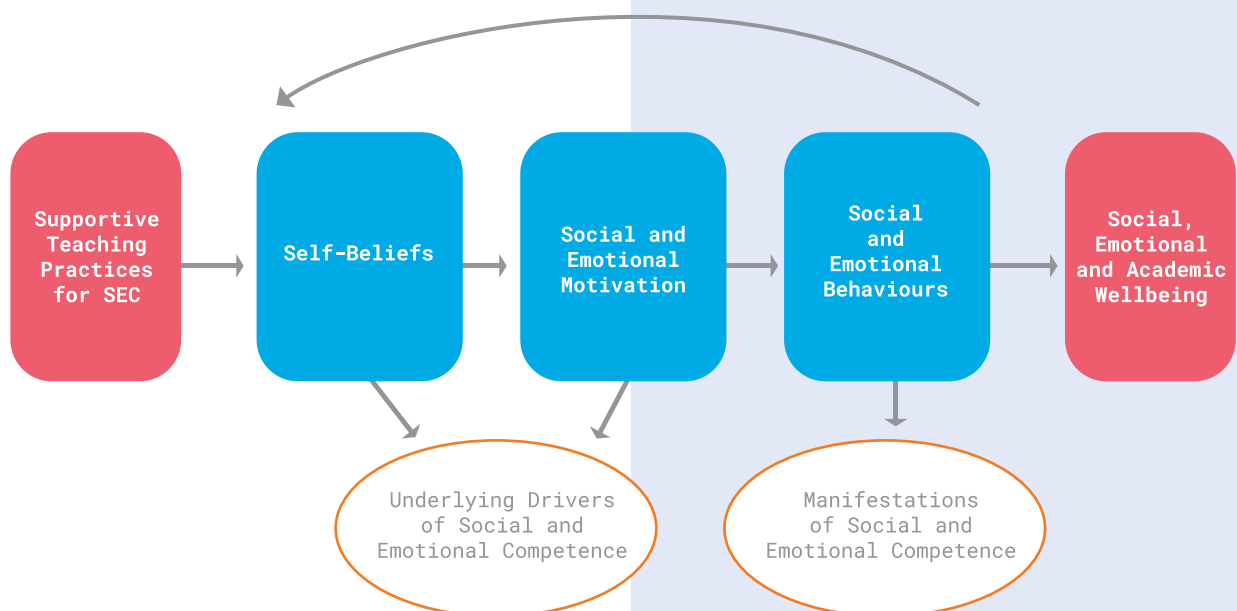
To understand what influences students to apply the behaviours they learn in school, it is essential to consider underlying drivers.

The study used a framework called the Social and Emotional Competence School Model (Collie, 2020).

Situated at the left of the model are supportive teaching practices, which are essential for guiding the development of the social and emotional competence.

In the central part of the model, the underlying drivers (self-beliefs and social and emotional motivation) are shown to promote social and emotional behaviours. In turn, these underlying drivers and behaviours boost wellbeing.

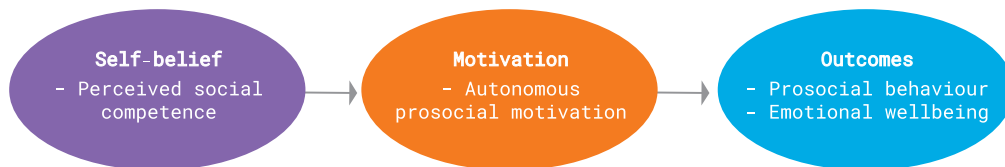
In a recent study, associations among underlying drivers and behaviours were examined, along with links to emotional wellbeing.



What the study examined

The study examined two underlying drivers from the model: one self-belief and one motivation.

The study looked at whether the self-belief was associated with motivation and, in turn, the behavioural and wellbeing outcomes.



What were the main variables?

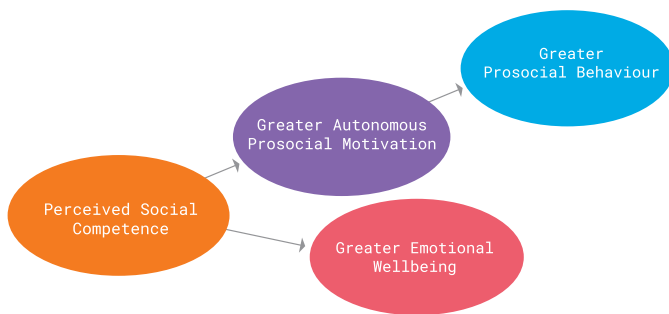
Variable	Definition	Sample Item
Perceived social competence	Students' self-belief that they can engage in social interactions constructively	I feel capable at resolving disagreements at school by being respectful to the other people involved
Autonomous prosocial Motivation	Students' motivation to be prosocial because they enjoy or personally value acting that way	I put effort into helping students who are hurt or upset at school...: - because I enjoy being kind - because I believe this is important to do
Prosocial behaviour	Actions that students undertake to benefit others. This variable was reported by parents.	My child is kind to younger children
Emotional wellbeing	Students' experiences of more positive emotions and fewer negative emotions	Thinking about yourself over the past 7 days, to what extent do you generally feel: - attentive, determined... - upset, hostile...

Who were the participants?

- The sample comprised of 408 secondary students from Victoria and Queensland in Australia
- 44% were female
- Average age was 14 (range 13-16) years

What did the study find?

- Perceived social competence was linked with greater autonomous prosocial motivation and, in turn, greater prosocial behaviour.
- Perceived social competence was associated with greater emotional wellbeing.



Practical implications:

Perceived social competence appears to help students be more motivated to engage in prosocial behaviours and, in turn, actually engage in prosocial behaviour (as reported by parents).

Perceived social competence also appears to lay a foundation for greater emotional wellbeing.

Helping students to build a sense of competence related to social interaction is important.

There are documented strategies teachers can apply in the classroom to boost students' perceived social competence:

- provide rationales for the importance of being a positive member of the school community
- listen to and acknowledging students' perspectives about how they are feeling
- provide choices for how students manage their social-emotional interactions
- welcome students' input in relation to classroom rules and norms
- provide clear goals, rules, and expectations for social and emotional interactions
- offer task-focused feedback on how students can be considerate in their responses to others during group discussions

The bottom line

Underlying mechanisms matter for students' prosocial behaviour and so targeting these in interventions and SEL is important. This study provides an idea of where efforts can be targeted to boost the mechanisms—namely building students' self-beliefs about social competence.

About the Researcher



Rebecca Collie

Rebecca J. Collie, PhD, is a Scientia Associate Professor of Educational Psychology in the School of Education at the University of New South Wales, Australia. Rebecca conducts research in the broad areas of wellbeing, motivation, and social-emotional development using quantitative research methods. Previously, Rebecca worked as a primary school teacher in Melbourne. For further details, see:

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