

**EISENHOWER FELLOWSHIPS – 2009 Multi Nation Program**  
[www.eisenhowerfellowships.org](http://www.eisenhowerfellowships.org)

**María José Rodríguez**  
**Preventative Programs Director, Social Department**  
**Sociedad Protectora de la Infancia**  
**Santiago, CHILE**

---

María José Rodríguez is an educational psychologist with extensive experience in assessing and advising schools on enhancing teaching processes, providing teacher training, and consulting on education policy. In her current role Ms. Rodríguez is responsible for designing and coordinating new programs to prevent school dropouts and child labor in Chile. She seeks to build upon her work and abilities to become a leader in promoting the social and emotional development and well-being of children in her country. While on fellowship, Ms. Rodríguez examined the design, implementation and evaluation of school-based and after-school programs that incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) in the curricula and have proven effective in enhancing children's personal and social skills.

While the primary focus of Ms. Rodríguez' fellowship was to look at schools and programs that dealt with social and emotional learning, before doing so she needed to understand the context within which all schools and programs function. As such, she met with the U.S. Department of Education, National Education Association and the Office of Head Start, among other organizations, to understand current thinking on education in the United States and learn about some of the most notable programs and policies. Ms. Rodríguez asked these organizations about broad aims to address the social and emotional education of children and found no explicit interest in addressing results related to social and emotional learning. This demonstrated that for the issue to be a priority its importance must be recognized on a national level (and at the state level in the United States).

Throughout her program Ms. Rodríguez found that social and emotional learning goes by a few different names in the U.S., including "character education". In meetings with organizations such as Character Education and the Center for Social and Emotional Learning, emphasis was placed on the fact that a key aspect of implementing a successful program to address the social and emotional needs of students needs to consider each school's particular uniqueness.

Ms. Rodríguez spent a week at The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) based at the University of Illinois in Chicago. CASEL is a leading organization that publishes many reports about social and emotional learning related to school programs that have been proved to work and other useful resources of professional interest. Here she had the opportunity to discuss SEL programs, their implementation, and assessment, and review training programs to aid teachers in implementing SEL in their classrooms and schools.

The experiences and visits to schools and after-school programs brought forth the difficult reality of assessing the results of programs designed to strengthen the social and emotional abilities of children, particularly in the long-run. Upon her return to Chile, Ms. Rodríguez plans to share her findings with key stakeholders in the Chilean educational system in order to continue her passion for providing young people with the appropriate social and emotional tools. She hopes that one day, in Chile and elsewhere, SEL will be an important part of teacher education programs as well as a standard part of school curricula.