

Session 4 – The History of SEL in Schools

Materials:

- AV Equipment to play video: [Dr. Terry Harris, TED Talk video: And How Are the Children?](#)
- Agenda charted on the board or chart paper, or provided as a handout
- Handout: SEL + RP + RE
- Handout: "A Short History of SEL"
- Journals and pens

Opening: And How Are the Children?

Play the 15-minute [Dr. Terry Harris, TED Talk video: And How Are the Children?](#) Relate to participants that Dr. Terry Harris is the Executive Director of Student Services, of the Rockwood School District in Missouri. In this role, he is responsible for school counselors, social workers, school safety, educational equity and diversity, residency and student health and well-being in the entire school district.

Then ask for some volunteers to share what stood out to them and what they have questions about.



Talk Participants Through Today's Agenda

- Opening: Dr. Terry Harris, TED Talk video: And How Are the Children?
- Check Agenda
- SEL+RP+RE
- Three Adjectives and a Noun
- SEL Definition and History
- The Comer School Development Program
- Journaling & Discussion
- Closing: And How Are The Children?

MSC Handout: SEL + RP + RE

Remind participants of the Morningside Center approach that combines

1. Social and Emotional Learning
2. Restorative Practices, and
3. Brave Conversations about Race

Explain that today you'll be focusing on part 1. Social and Emotional Learning.

SEL: 3 Adjectives and a Noun

Hand out index cards and ask participants to write three adjectives and a noun that describe the kind of person they're seeking to cultivate and nurture through their work as educators.

Invite them to imagine their students as they come up from kindergarten through elementary school, middle and high school, into higher education or a job. Who do they want their students to become as their "best selves"?

Do they want their students to be kind, caring, generous, persevering, loving, strong, etc. And for the noun, maybe they want their students to become teachers, professionals, activists, leaders, "good troublemakers," team players, healers, warriors?

Give participants a few minutes to think and jot down their words.

Going around the room, ask participants to share their three adjectives and noun. No explanation is needed for now. Be sure to share your own.

Ask: "What do we notice about the words that were shared?" Invite the group to note similarities/ differences.

More likely than not, the vast majority of what was shared focused on social and emotional learning, not academics. If this is the case, be sure to name this for the group. The focus of school is often teaching (and learning) academics. Please know that educators are actually hired to nurture the intellectual, physical, emotional, social, and civic potential of each student. Individual states have Code of Ethics or Codes of Conduct that speak to some version of this ethical code, but this is the hired expectation for what needs to be further developed for us to really be able to speak to "And How Are The Children?"

SEL Definition and History

Ask if someone would like to offer a definition or description of what they understand SEL to be. Also ask what, if anything, participants know about the history of SEL.

A Definition of SEL

Define social and emotional learning as:

- a culturally affirming, equitable and ongoing process by which we (both adults and children) develop our capacity to affirm and reflect upon our multiple identities; understand our feelings and how they impact us and others; engage in advocacy and enact solidarity; nurture and navigate strong relationships; demonstrate empathy and seek to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of others from diverse backgrounds and cultures; and take responsibility for improving our communities – from the classroom to the world
- Comprised of five domains: self-awareness, agency and voice, social awareness, relationship nurturing and social responsibility
- Encompassing a genuine honoring and valuing of humanity on both the individual and collective level
- Serving as a guidepost in navigating life's complexities

A Short History of SEL

Elicit and explain that social and emotional learning (SEL) has been intentionally and unintentionally, explicitly and implicitly, developed and nurtured throughout history, in societies and cultures across the globe. While SEL is often presented as a new and Western approach to education, it is neither. Distribute the "Short History of SEL" handout.

Large Group Reflection

Invite participants to share their **I**mpressions, **F**eelings, **E**xperiences, or **T**houghts (IFET) on this short history of SEL.



Journaling

Introduction to Journaling Introduce the idea of journaling, which we'll come back to again and again throughout this guide. Journaling is the practice of committing to paper one's thoughts, feelings, understandings, and possible explanations about ideas, concepts and/or experiences. We recommend providing staff with a physical notebook or inviting them to bring one of their own. According to research, **longhand "increases neural activity in part of the brain, that is similar to meditation. ... Writing is good for keeping one's gray matter sharp and may even influence how we think, as in 'more positively,' studies show. Apparently, sequential hand movements, like those used in handwriting, activate large regions of the brain responsible for thinking, language, healing and working memory.... Another often-overlooked benefit of writing by hand is that it just plain forces us to slow down and enjoy the moment – a novelty in today's world where immediacy reigns. Mindful writing rests the brain, potentially sparking creativity."**

Video: The Comer School Development Program

Explain that you'll be showing a video that features Dr. Comer and The Comer Development Program.

Play the Yale School of Medicine video: [The Comer School Development Program](#) (5:22 min).



Journaling

Invite participants to take out their journals. Say something about the power of journaling (see above) and explain that we'll be using this as a regular practice throughout the sessions in this guide. Invite participants to choose one of the following journaling prompts that most resonates with them and spend 5-7 minutes putting their thoughts, feelings and understandings to paper:

- Think about a teacher, or another adult in your life, who brought SEL into their relationships with you as a student or young person. Describe the relationships and how they brought SEL into it. How did SEL impact the relationship? How did the relationship impact you?
- Think about a student who may have helped you grow socially and emotionally. Describe the relationship and how they/you brought SEL into it? How did SEL impact the relationship? How did the relationship impact you?

As circle keeper, be sure to journal as well for your own personal reflection and healing.

Large Group Reflection

Invite some volunteers to share journaling reflections. Connect what's shared to the "And How Are the Children?" video as you close today's session.

Closing: And How Are the Children?

Invite participants to revisit today's opening ceremony: "And How Are the Children?" Based on what they've explored about SEL today, ask participants how they're feeling about what Dr. Terry Harris shared now.

Book Suggestion:

Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ by Daniel Goleman

Description: Everyone knows that high IQ is no guarantee of success, happiness, or virtue, but until Emotional Intelligence, we could only guess why. Daniel Goleman's brilliant report from the frontiers of psychology and neuroscience offers startling new insight into our "two minds"—the rational and the emotional—and how they together shape our destiny. Drawing on groundbreaking brain and behavioral research, Goleman shows the factors at work when people of high IQ flounder and those of modest IQ do surprisingly well. These factors, which include self-awareness, self-discipline, and empathy, add up to a different way of being smart—and they aren't fixed at birth. Although shaped by childhood experiences, emotional intelligence can be nurtured and strengthened throughout our adulthood—with immediate benefits to our health, our relationships, and our work. (352 pages)

Next Session Prep:

Provide participants with the [emotional intelligence test](#) and ask them to please take the test and save their results prior to the next session as they will be reflecting upon and discussing their results.

Additional Resources: Session 4

Additional Written Resources:

["Who Drives Social-Emotional Learning?"](#) by Belinda Chiu, Ed.D. and Elizabeth Sumida Huaman, Ed. D

["What is Social and Emotional Learning,"](#) GoGuardian

["Did You Know that SEL Emerged Because of A Black Man? The True History of SEL,"](#) Blog post by Byron M. McClure

["Finding Your Place: The Current State of K-12 Social Emotional Learning,"](#) Bryant, G., Crowley, S., & Davidsen, C., for Tyton Partners (2020)

["Three Ways That Handwriting With A Pen Positively Affects Your Brain"](#) by Nancy Olson

Additional Video Resources:

[The Comer School Development Program](#)

[Dr. Bettina Love on Cultural Memory in Youth Creativity and Hip Hop](#)

[Hip Hop, grit and academic success: Bettina at TEDxUGA](#)

[A Timeline of Social Emotional Learning](#)

Handout: SEL + RP + RE

Together with educators, we create joyful, productive, and equitable schools by weaving together three approaches:

Social & Emotional Learning (SEL)
Young people and adults learn and practice skills to help them do well in school and in life.

Restorative Practices (RP)
Young people stay connected through processes that foster a caring and equitable school community.

Racial Equity
School staff increase their cultural competency and ensure that school systems and structures elevate every child.

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Handout: History of SEL

[“Ideas of holistic education](#) that address the interplay of mind, body, and spirit, are not new. Aspects of SEL, including critical inquiry, mindfulness, compassion, and empathy, are part of learning systems in many world cultures. What is new in the greater scheme of human history is the industrial age shift to education for worker and civic development. In this sense, SEL is indeed a rethinking because it requires a return to globally diverse paradigms of learning and serves as an intervention towards correcting some of the damage done by education-for-hegemony or sameness.”

Researchers are coming to terms with what many cultures have always understood: The idea that there are different ways to define intelligence and that IQ only gets us so far. This knowledge existed long before Daniel Goleman popularized the idea of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Howard Gardner introduced his theory of multiple intelligences, in the 1990s. And yet not surprisingly, they, as Western white male academics, are frequently credited with the conception and power of these ideas. This while [“for millennia,](#) Indigenous and other civilizations across the globe have developed their [more holistic] knowledge systems and thrived.”

Recent research has shown a strong correlation between school-based SEL programming, academic achievement, life-success and overall wellbeing. These important findings have fueled a movement in the West that seeks to standardize and embed SEL into existing programming and pedagogy. And where learning outcomes and assessments are important to ensure reliability of programming, we need to make sure we pay attention to who designs our curricula and who teaches SEL to the young people we work with. For it to benefit our children and their communities, SEL needs to be shaped according to local needs and purposes. It needs to be inclusive and collaborative.

This is something that Dr. James P. Comer recognized back in the 1960s. Dr. Comer, was the first African-American full professor at the Yale School of Medicine, where, in the late 1968, he began piloting a program as part of the Yale University Child Study Center, that came to be known as the [Comer School Development Program](#).

Using a pioneering teamwork approach, the school promoted the collaboration of parents, educators and community to improve student development. Already back then, Comer recognized that SEL infused into school programming, could mitigate the harmful racial trauma inflicted on Black youth. He understood that culturally responsive and

healing centered approaches were needed in education, long before those fields came into being, as well.

Comer's research paved the way for Social and Emotional Learning to be introduced into our schools more intentionally. And yet the lack of recognition of Comer's essential contributions to the field of SEL, until quite recently, serves as a reminder of whose voice and scholarship are spotlighted and whose are marginalized, in academia, and in our schools in general.