

Session 5 – A More Equitable Approach to SEL

Materials:

- Agenda charted on the board or chart paper, or provided as a handout
- AV equipment to play video: [Sesame Street: Will.i.am Sings "What I Am"](#) (elementary)
- AV equipment to play video: [Diamond Studded Shoes](#) (secondary)
- Handout of current iteration of Morningside Center's SEL Wheel
- Handout of song lyrics
- Individual results from [Emotional Intelligence Test](#)
- Linked article: "Why Emotional Intelligence Is Important in the Workplace"

Opening Ceremony: Diamond Studded Shoes

Play the 1:51 minute music video: [Sesame Street: Will.i.am Sings "What I Am"](#) and then the 3:21 minute music video "[Diamond Studded Shoes](#) by Yola. Prior to playing, distribute the lyrics handout for each song. Invite participants to pay attention to how each song relates to SEL, humanity and equity.



Talk Participants Through Today's Agenda

- Opening: Will.i.am and Yola Videos - Exploring SEL and Equity
- Check Agenda
- Emotional Intelligence: Small Group Discussion and Skit
- Emotional Intelligence: Large Group Share
- The Culturally Affirming SEL Wheel and Domains
- Stand Under Activity
- Closing: Diamond Studded Shoes, Take 2

Emotional Intelligence: Small Group Discussion & Skit

In small groups of 3 -5, have participants read this [very brief article](#) independently: and then create a silent skit about why emotional intelligence is vital in the workplace. Have each group assign a narrator to articulate scene themes. Be sure that the need for emotional intelligence stands out *more* than any drama displayed.

Emotional Intelligence: Skit Performance

Back in the large group, invite groups to perform their skits.

The Culturally Affirming SEL Wheel

Distribute the current iteration of the Morningside Center SEL wheel. Give participants time to independently review. Then in pairs or small groups of three or four, have participants share 1) something about the wheel that is resonating with them and 2) a question they have about it. Consider having pairs and/or groups chart this information to share out with the larger group.

Then provide some additional framing, using the following talking points:

- **This SEL wheel and its accompanying holistic approach are continually in process.** The wheel is a living document subject to revision and change based on the learnings we continue to acquire. SEL is a life-long journey.
- **The intended audience of the wheel is *everyone*** (school leaders, staff, families, community members), not just students. SEL starts with us. As adults, we must develop our capacity to reflect upon our emotions, to continue to learn how to honor the dignity of others and understand their lived experiences, to develop a positive relationship with the land, to stand up for justice and work toward liberation for all. **We model for our students what we're learning.** We understand that our best learning happens when we come together as a community.
- **If SEL isn't culturally affirming and equitable, it isn't SEL.** SEL must be systemic. It must be woven into the fabric of school culture. It cannot exist in isolation or solely in classrooms. It must center the identities and lived experiences of all students, of all staff, of everyone. It must prioritize student voice and agency to advocate and take action for just communities. It must focus on strong and collaborative relationships between adults and children.
- **It's more about the "we" rather than the "me."** SEL is not about an individual's mastery of competencies or achievement of personal goals. Rather, culturally affirming SEL prioritizes the needs of the group and emphasizes the importance of community.
- **Competencies, skills and habits of mind are the elements that comprise the five domains of culturally affirming SEL are not acquired in a linear fashion.** We all have are strengths and challenges and therefore will be in different places in terms of our abilities to embody each of the domains and their accompanying elements. Our progress could vary from day to day, from moment to moment depending on the situation and context. And that's okay.

Stand Under: Culturally Affirming SEL Domains

Post signs of each of the five domains (*self-awareness, social awareness, agency and voice, relationship nurturing and social responsibility*) in different spots in the room.

Invite participants to look back at the wheel, select the domain in which they feel most confident, and then move their bodies under that corresponding sign. Once all participants have selected a sign to stand under, invite them to share why they are standing where they are.

Now ask participants to look back at the wheel and decide what domain they think is most important. Again, they should move under that sign and share why they chose that domain as the most important.

Thank participants for reflecting on the wheel and engaging in conversation around it.



Journaling

Invite participants to take out their journals and to write in response to the following journaling prompt, spending 5 minutes putting their thoughts, feelings and understandings to paper:

- Thinking about the lyrics of the two songs by the artists, Will I. Am & Yola, the results of your test and your group skit, and what connections you've begun to make to the culturally affirming SEL wheel.

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

Closing: Diamond Studded Shoes, Take 2

Consider playing Yola's "Diamond Studded Shoes" again. Emphasize the closing lyrics as you wrap up today's session:

*We know it isn't, it ain't gonna turn out right
... We know it isn't, and that's why we gots to fight*

*For the life and soul of the world we know
Fight, 'cause the promise is never gonna be enough*

Ask participants:

“What is one thing you want to fight for when it come to the soul of education?”

Additional Resources: Session 5

Additional Written Resources:

["Why We Can't Afford Whitewashed Social-Emotional Learning"](#) by Dena Simmons

["When SEL is Used as Another Form of Policing."](#) Communities for Just School Fund (2020)

["Social, Emotional, and Academic Development Through an Equity Lens."](#) Report by The Education Trust (2020)

["Reclaim Social-Emotional Learning: Centering Organizing Praxis for Holistically Safe Schools."](#) Community for Just Schools Fund (2020)

Handout: Will.i.am "What I Am" Lyrics

If what I am is what's in me

Then I'll stay strong - that's who I'll be

And I will always be the best

"Me" that I can be

Keep on reaching high (high!)

Never gonna quit

Just keep getting stronger

There's only one me, I am it

Have a dream I'll follow it

It's up to me to try

And nothing's gonna bring us down (no!)

Never give it up, gotta go

Because I know

I'll keep getting stronger

Oh! I'm a keep my head up high (high!)

Keep on reaching high (high!)

Never gonna quit

I'll be getting stronger

What I am is super

What I am is proud

What I am is friendly

What I am is grouchy

What you are is magical

What you are is special

And nothing's gonna bring me down (no!)

Never gonna stop, gotta go

Because I know

I'll keep getting stronger

There's nothing I can't achieve

Because in myself I believe in oh

And what I am is thoughtful

What I am is musical

What I am is smart

And what I am is brave

What I am is helpful

What I am is special

There's nothing I can't achieve

Because in myself I believe in oh

Gonna hold my head up high (high!)

Keep on reaching high (high!)

Never gonna stop

I'll be getting stronger

Nothing's gonna bring me down (no!)

Never give it up gotta go, oh... yeah

I'll keep getting stronger

Gonna keep our heads up high (high!)

Handout: Yola "Diamond Studded Shoes" Lyrics

Everybody's saying
That it's gonna be alright
But I can't help but wonder
If it's gonna be on my dime
We are the powers
Throwing up against the tide
Burning our reserves of courage
And working just to make it alright

When we know it isn't
We know it isn't, we know it isn't
We know it isn't, it ain't gonna turn out right
We know it isn't, we know it isn't, oh no
We know it isn't, that's why we gots to fight

You and I are trying
But we don't get to decide
When the man comes for our paychecks
Don't you tell me it'll be alright
We aren't the rich ones
Some of us will barely get by
They buy diamond studded shoes with our taxes
Anything to keep us divided

You know it isn't
We know it isn't, we know it isn't
We know it isn't, it ain't gonna turn out right
We know it isn't, we know it isn't, oh no
We know it isn't, that's why we gots to fight

For the life and soul of the world we know
Fight, 'cause the promise is never gonna be enough

Watching and waiting for answers
Hoping we might see the light
You beat it into us like a hammer
So don't you tell me it'll be alright

When we know it isn't
We know it isn't, we know it isn't

We know it isn't, it ain't gonna turn out right
We know it isn't, we know it isn't, oh no
We know it isn't, and that's why we gots to fight

For the life and soul of the world we know
Fight, 'cause the promise is never gonna be enough ...

Handout: A More Equitable Approach to SEL

Since its start in schools in the late 1960s, SEL as a field has been rapidly expanding. These days more than 90% of schools and districts, report that they are working to support the Social and Emotional Learning of their students.

And, of course, focusing on student development beyond academics can be a good thing in school, as Dr. James Comer first showed in his Comer School Development Program. Schools *should* play a role in helping students develop more holistically, if for no other reason than the studies that show that developing students' social and emotional competence is directly related to improved academic outcomes, life success and overall wellbeing.

We need to make sure, though, that developing student social and emotional competency is done with integrity, with an understanding of the children and young people in our schools, and the cultures and contexts they grow up in.

School is where students should have ample opportunity to learn about themselves, their emotions, their behaviors, how to manage them and how to interact with others, which has traditionally been a good starting point for SEL. In too many schools however, SEL stops there. It is too narrowly focused on changing individual student behaviors, perceived as upsetting or disruptive of the existing school expectations and culture.

In this way, SEL often seeks to control student behavior "[rather than implementing](#) practices that build relationships and create learning environments that support positive social and emotional growth. This is especially true in schools and districts that serve large populations of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, exposing these students to environments that could do more harm than good."

To make SEL more inclusive and relevant for all our students, then, we need to move away from it as a way to "fix our kids" and look, instead, at the underlying reasons for student behavior. We need to also address the environments within which our students learn.

To do so requires a shift in focus, away from our students, to critically examining adult beliefs, mindsets and competencies, while *fixing* educational policies and practices to help our schools become the kind of welcoming places where ALL students can feel a sense of belonging, care and support.

Many of the skills that have been prioritized in the SEL field to date, have assumed a white, middle class, normative lens, that does not consider the lived experience of many of our students.

So, we need to ask ourselves: How do we reformulate SEL so that it is culturally responsive and inclusive, so that it is trauma informed and healing centered? How can we make sure that we are not *only* holding space for a white, middle-class, straight normative approach in our classrooms? This requires the kind of collaborative approach Dr. Comer has been promoting, in which we listen to children and families and meet the needs that we know have resulted from ...

According to the recently published [EdTrust Report on Social, Emotional and Academic Development](#) “school and district leaders will need to continually assess whether their policies foster belonging, challenge students, and provide the supports students need to thrive.”

Discussion Questions:

- Having read this handout, what's your IFET (Impression, Feeling, Experience, or Thought)?
- Is SEL already being implemented at your school? If so, how?
- Now consider *how* it's being implemented based on the handout you just read. Who is being served? What is (not) considered?