

## Equity & Social and Emotional Learning: A Cultural Analysis

### Purpose

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has the potential to help mitigate the interrelated legacies of racial and class oppression in the U.S. and globally. Currently, that potential is under-realized. In this brief, we outline how CASEL's core SEL competencies reflect issues of equity, highlight programs and practices that support the development of these competencies to promote educational equity, and offer some implications for the growing demand for SEL assessments.

This brief is part of our initial efforts to analyze, revise, and supplement what is known about SEL to foster the development of citizens who contribute to an increasingly interconnected, diverse global community. SEL refers to a process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions; set and achieve positive goals; feel and show empathy for others; establish and maintain positive relationships; and make responsible decisions.

Mounting evidence of the positive impacts of SEL programs has prompted practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to advocate for the adoption of such programs<sup>1</sup>. However, questions have been raised about whether guiding frameworks, prominent programs, and associated assessments adequately reflect, cultivate, and leverage cultural assets and promote the well-being of youth of color and those from under-resourced backgrounds<sup>2</sup>.

Educational equity means that “every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education regardless

<sup>1</sup> Jones, S.M. & Kahn, J. (2017). *The Evidence Base for How We Learn Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Development*. National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute

<sup>2</sup> Castro-Olivo, S. M. (2014). Promoting social-emotional learning in adolescent Latino ELLs: A study of the culturally adapted Strong Teens Program. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 29(4): 567-577; AspenInstitute Education & Society (2018). *Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens: A Call to Action*. Washington, DC

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of race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, family background, or family income.” Striving for educational equity challenges us to examine biases and interrupt inequitable practices so we can create inclusive, multicultural school environments that cultivate the interests and talents of children, youth, and adults from diverse backgrounds<sup>3</sup>.

Addressing the social, emotional, and academic needs of youth from these historically marginalized groups is a pressing matter. According to current projections, the U.S. will be a “minority-majority” nation in less than three decades<sup>4</sup>. An increasing number of school-aged children and youth reside in poor or low-income families and communities. Racial/ethnic and class inequalities in education, health, and wealth compromise the life chances of these youth, which ultimately undermines the vitality of their communities and threatens the nation’s security and productivity. As such, we ask:

**How can SEL be leveraged to help youth from historically marginalized race/ethnic and socioeconomic groups to realize their fullest potential as contributing members of an increasingly complex and diverse global community?**

Below, we examine the cultural and historical context for understanding the relationship between SEL and equity, and then explore prospects for equity elaborations to the CASEL five core competencies. Next, we point to programs and practices that can help cultivate these competencies and the importance of adult professional development in making these efforts maximally effective for diverse children and youth. We conclude with some implications for SEL assessment.

We recognize that the circumstances surrounding marginalization, exploitation, and oppression are varied and complex. In this brief, we focus primarily on issues of educational equity and SEL with regard to race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status as a first step toward addressing this complexity.

## How Did We Get Here? Situating Equity and SEL in a Cultural and Historical Context

Racial/ethnic and class issues continue to vex American society. Cultural analysis suggests that issues of racism derive largely from an over-emphasis on the accumulation of wealth within American culture<sup>5</sup>. Historically, this cultural value prompted some to exploit others for personal advancement. White elites promulgated racialized and cultural stereotypes to recruit poor and working Whites into a hierarchical economic system that exploited them, but also empowered them to oppress and further exploit people of color. Meanwhile, these stereotypes inculcated within people of color a sense of dehumanization and willingness to accept marginalized status<sup>6</sup>.

Many current economic, health, and educational inequities can be understood as remnants and vari-

<sup>3</sup> Aspen Education & Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers. 2017. *Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Education Chiefs*. Washington, D.C.; National Equity Project. (n.d.). <http://nationalequityproject.org/>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2014). Washington DC.

<sup>5</sup> Watson, D. C. (2016). Dominance and prestige in materialism. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 18(2): 359-376.

<sup>6</sup> Allen, T.W. (2012). *Invention of the White race* (2nd edition): New York: Verso.

ants of this foundational set of political, social, and psychological arrangements. Therefore, it is critical to consider issues of equity and SEL against the backdrop of these historical and contemporary racial/ethnic and socioeconomic tensions and possibilities.

## Equity and SEL: Toward Transformative Social and Emotional Learning

Promoting the optimal development of all students, especially preK-12 students who have historically been under-served, can be a contentious, complex, and long-term undertaking. But it is one that benefits all. Given the prominence of the CASEL framework and its attention to citizenship as a long-term developmental imperative, there is heuristic and practical value in viewing children and youth as the next generation of informed, engaged, and justice-oriented citizens.

Consistent with the pursuit of educational equity, we recently offered the concept of *transformative SEL* to reflect our interest in making explicit issues such as power, privilege, prejudice, discrimination, social justice, empowerment, and self-determination in the field of SEL<sup>7</sup>. Transformative SEL connotes

TRANSFORMATIVE SEL CONNOTES A PROCESS WHEREBY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS BUILD STRONG, RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS FOUNDED ON AN APPRECIATION OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES, LEARN TO CRITICALLY EXAMINE ROOT CAUSES OF INEQUITY, AND DEVELOP COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS TO COMMUNITY AND SOCIETAL PROBLEMS.

a process whereby students and teachers build strong, respectful relationships founded on an appreciation of similarities and differences, learn to critically examine root causes of inequity, and develop collaborative solutions to community and societal problems.

### The CASEL 5 competencies through an equity lens



Figure 1

The CASEL 5 SEL competencies (figure 1) of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making represent large categories for organizing a range of intra- and interpersonal knowledge, skills, and abilities<sup>8</sup>. We view these competencies as interrelated, synergistic, and integral to the growth and development of justice-oriented, global citizens. Below, we consider each competency through an equity lens—what we refer to as “equity elaborations.”

**SELF-AWARENESS.** Self-awareness encompasses individual psychological characteristics such as labeling one’s feelings, relating feelings and thoughts to behavior, accurate self-assessment of strengths and challenges, self-efficacy, and optimism.

<sup>7</sup> Jagers, R.J. (2016). Framing social and emotional learning among African-American youth: Toward an integrity-based approach. *Human Development*, 59, 1-3.

<sup>8</sup> Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J.A., Domitrovich, C.E. & Gullotta, T.P. (2015). Social and emotional learning: Past, present and future. In J.A. Durlak, C.E. Domitrovich, R.P. Weissberg and T.P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice* (pp. 3-19). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

**Potential concerns.** Dominant U.S. cultural norms promote materialism or acquisitive individualism, an orientation associated with health problems and unethical behavior<sup>9</sup>. These norms are even more problematic when wealth and Whiteness are conflated and uncritically accepted as indicators of success. This fosters a sense of White racial entitlement and dominance, as well as negative biases and stereotypes about people of color and those from low-income backgrounds.

**Potential opportunities.** Self-awareness is foundational for equity. The sense of self for all young people includes, for example, cultural values and orientations and collective identities (e.g., ethnic-racial group, socioeconomic status, and gender).

Other cultural orientations or values provide an alternative sense of self/other and are an important asset to some ethnic and racial groups, including Latino, Asian American, and African American youth<sup>10</sup>. For example, a communal orientation toward one's family, ethnic/racial group, or community reduces psychological distress and risky behaviors and promotes a range of positive socioemotional outcomes, including school engagement and prosocial helping behaviors<sup>11,12</sup>.

An expression of communalism that specifically refers to ethnic or racial group membership is termed ethnic-racial identity (ERI)<sup>13</sup>. Components of ERI relevant to self-awareness include beliefs about the importance of ethnicity or race to the sense of self (centrality) and the degree to which that group membership is seen as positive and affirming. ERI can have implications for beliefs about personal and collective efficacy and agency. It develops through a process that includes youth inquiry into the meaning of their group membership (exploration) and developing a sense

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<sup>9</sup> Piff, P.K., Stancato, D.M., Côté, S., Mendoza-Denton, R., & Keltner, D. (2012). Higher social class predicts increased unethical behavior. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109(11), 4086-4091

<sup>10</sup> Knight, G. P., Carlo, G., Mahrer, N. E., & Davis, A. N. (2016). The socialization of culturally related values and prosocial tendencies among Mexican-American adolescents. *Child Development*, 87(6), 1758–1771; see Stein, G. L., Cupito, A., Mendez, J., Prandoni, J., Huq, N., & Westerberg, D. (2014). Familism through a developmental lens, *Journal of Latina/o Psychology*, 2(4), 224-250. doi:10.1037/lat0000025., for a review; Kiang, L., Andrews, K., Stein, G. L., Supple, A. J., & Gonzalez, L. M. (2013). Socioeconomic stress and academic adjustment among Asian American adolescents: The protective role of family obligation. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42, 837–847. doi:10.1007/s10964-013-9916-6; Shen, Y. S., Kim, S. Y., & Wang, Y. J. (2016). Intergenerational transmission of educational attitudes in Chinese American families: Interplay of socioeconomic status and acculturation. *Child Development*, 87(5), 1601-1616. doi: 10.1111/cdev.12545; Neblett, E., & Carter, S. (2012). The protective role of racial identity and Africentric worldview in the association between racial discrimination and blood pressure. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 74(5), 509-516. doi:10.1097/psy.0b013e3182583a50

<sup>11</sup> Kiang et al., 2013; Lieber, E., Nihira, K., & Mink, I. (2004). Filial piety, modernization, and the challenges of raising children for Chinese immigrants: Quantitative and qualitative evidence. *Ethos*, 32(3), 324–347. doi:10.1525/eth.2004.32.3.324; Neblett & Carter, 2012; Stein et al., 2014

<sup>12</sup> Knight et al., 2016; McHale, S. M., Updegraff, K. A., Kim, J. Y., & Cansler, E. (2009). Cultural orientations, daily activities, and adjustment in Mexican American youth. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38(5), 627-641. doi:10.1007/s10964-008-9321-8; Rivas-Drake, D., & Marchand, A. (2016). Academic socialization among Latino families: Exploring the compensatory role of cultural processes. *Research in Human Development*, 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/15427609.2016.1194708>; Schwartz, S. J., Unger, J. B., Baezconde-Garbanati, L., Zamboanga, B. L., Córdova, D., Lorenzo-Blanco, E. I., & Villamar, J. A. (2015). Testing the parent–adolescent acculturation discrepancy hypothesis: A five-wave longitudinal study. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 26(3), 567–586. doi: 10.1111/jora.12214; Stein et al., 2014; Telzer, E. H., Yuen, C., Gonzales, N., & Fuligni, A. J. (2016). Filling gaps in the acculturation gap–distress model: Heritage cultural maintenance and adjustment in Mexican–American families. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 1-14. doi:10.1007/s10964-015-0408-8

<sup>13</sup> Sellers, R. M., Smith, M. A., Shelton, J. N., Rowley, S. A. J., & Chavous, T. M. (1998). Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity: A reconceptualization of African American racial identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 2(1), 18-39.

of clarity about its role in their lives (resolution)<sup>14</sup>. A healthy sense of ERI is important for psychological, academic, and social well-being<sup>15</sup>.

**SELF-MANAGEMENT.** Self-management includes regulating one's emotions, stress management, self-control, self-motivation, and setting and achieving goals.

**Potential concerns.** Schools, like most other U.S. social institutions, tend to prioritize prevailing middle-class, American culture. Student success requires acculturation, or at least a familiarity with American core cultural meanings, norms, and practices. For low-income youth and immigrant youth, this can induce acculturative stress, which occurs when youth encounter a cultural mismatch between the expectations and norms of their host (e.g., U.S.) and their home (heritage). Such stress has been associated with a number of mental health problems and maladaptive behaviors among diverse U.S. and immigrant-origin youth<sup>16</sup>.

Discrimination experiences are related but distinct from acculturative stress. Discrimination refers to the perception of unfair treatment or the subordination of an identifiable social group<sup>17</sup>. Racial/ethnic discrimination has a number of interpersonal and institutional manifestations and is a common experience for people of color<sup>18</sup>. Experiencing discrimination is associated with a host

- <sup>14</sup> Umaña-Taylor, A. J., Quintana, S. M., Lee, R. M., Cross, W. E., Rivas-Drake, D., Schwartz, S. J., & Seaton, E. (2014). Ethnic and racial identity during adolescence and into young adulthood: An integrated conceptualization. *Child Development*, 85(1). doi: 10.1111/cdev.12196; Rivas-Drake, D., Seaton, E. K., Markstrom, C., Quintana, S., Syed, M., Lee, R. M., & Yip, T. (2014). Ethnic and racial identity in adolescence: Implications for psychosocial, academic, and health outcomes. *Child Development*, 85(1), 40-57. doi: 10.1111/cdev.12200; French, S. E., Seidman, E., Allen, L., & Aber, J. L. (2000). Racial/ethnic identity, congruence with the social context, and the transition to high school. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 15(5), 587-602. doi: 10.1177/0743558400155004; French, S. E., Seidman, E., Allen, L., & Aber, J. L. (2006). The development of ethnic identity during adolescence. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(1), 1-10; Rivas-Drake, D. & Witherspoon, D. (2013). Racial identity from adolescence to young adulthood: Does prior neighborhood experience matter? *Child Development*, 84(6), 1918-1932.
- <sup>15</sup> Miller-Cotto, D., & Byrnes, J. P. (2016). Ethnic/racial identity and academic achievement: A meta-analytic review. *Developmental Review*, 41, 51-70; Rivas-Drake, Seaton, et al., 2014; Rivas-Drake, D., Syed, M., Umaña-Taylor, A., Markstrom, C., French, S., Schwartz, S. J., & Lee, R. (2014). Feeling good, happy, and proud: A meta-analysis of positive ethnic-racial affect and adjustment. *Child Development*, 85(1), 77-102. doi: 10.1111/cdev.12175; Smith, T. B., & Silva, L. (2011). Ethnic identity and personal well-being of people of color: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58(1), 42-60. doi:10.1037/a0021528
- <sup>16</sup> Gil, A., Vega, W., & Dimas, J. (1994). Acculturative stress and personal adjustment among Hispanic adolescent boys. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 22(1), 43-54.; Gil, A., Wagner, E., & Vega, W. (2000). Acculturation, familism, and alcohol use among Latino adolescent males: Longitudinal relations. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 28(4), 443-458.; Romero, A. J., & Roberts, R. E. (2003). Stress within a bicultural context for adolescents of Mexican descent. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 9, 171-184. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.9.2.171>; Sirin, S., Ryce, P., Gupta, T., & Rogers-Sirin, L. (2013). The role of acculturative stress on mental health symptoms for immigrant adolescents: A longitudinal investigation. *Developmental Psychology*, 49(4), 736-748.; Rodriguez, N., Flores, T., Flores, R. T., Myers, H. F., & Vriesema, C. C. (2015). Validation of the Multidimensional Acculturative Stress Inventory on adolescents of Mexican origin. *Psychological Assessment*, 27(4), 1438-1451.; Hurwich-Reiss, E., & Gudiño, Omar G. (2016). Acculturation stress and conduct problems among Latino adolescents: The impact of family factors. *Journal of Latina/o Psychology*, 4(4), 218-231.
- <sup>17</sup> Neblett et al., 2012; Umaña-Taylor, A. J. (2016). A post-racial society in which ethnic-racial discrimination still exists and has significant consequences for youths' adjustment. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 25(2), 111-118.
- <sup>18</sup> Fisher, C. B., Wallace, S. A., & Fenton, R. E. (2000). Discrimination distress during adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 29, 679-695; Rosenbloom, S. R., & Way, N. (2004). Experiences of discrimination among African American, Asian American, and Latino adolescents in an urban high school. *Youth & Society*, 35(4), 420-451; Sellers, R. M., Copeland-Linder, N., Martin, P. P., & Lewis, R. L. (2006). Racial identity matters: The relationship between racial discrimination and psychological functioning in African American adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 16(2), 187-216; Wong, C., Eccles, J., & Sameroff, A. (2003). The influence of ethnic discrimination and ethnic identification on African American adolescents' school and socioemotional adjustment. *Journal of Personality*, 71(6), 1197-1232.



of negative socioemotional health outcomes<sup>19</sup>. Importantly, reactionary and self-defeating responses to cultural and racialized stress and micro-aggressions often result in punishment of students of color<sup>20</sup>.

**Potential opportunities.** The current U.S. educational context requires youth of color and other marginalized groups to cope with acculturative stress and ethnic/racial and class-based discrimination. The cultural and ERI aspects of self-awareness discussed above could provide more adaptive coping strategies by enabling youth to see acculturative pressures and discrimination as reflections of societal ills rather than as personal affronts. Instead of becoming emotion-focused and disengaged, students could become more focused on identifying situational or societal challenges and pursuing individual and collective solutions<sup>21</sup>.

**SOCIAL AWARENESS.** Social awareness connotes perspective-taking; empathy; respecting diversity; understanding social and ethical norms of behavior; and recognizing family, school, and community supports.

**Potential concerns.** Students from diverse racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds are often placed at risk by the dominant culture of schools. This can lead to stress, alienation, and disengagement, which undermine school success<sup>22</sup>. Additionally, U.S. and global diversity is growing, leading to greater interaction among people from various racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. There tends to be an emphasis on differences rather than commonalities, which limits the possibilities for devising mutually satisfactory and constructive social arrangements.

**Potential opportunities.** A critical social awareness would help young people recognize and distinguish among the potentially competing cultural and race-related messages and expectations. Students would benefit from noticing the importance placed on various types of diversity—both for members of their group and for other distinct groups—in specific classroom, school, and community settings. This includes discerning issues of race and class in each context and the cultural demands and affordances of these settings<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Fuller-Rowell, T. E., Cogburn, C. D., Brodish, A. B., Peck, S. C., Malanchuk, O., & Eccles, J. S. (2012). Racial discrimination and substance use: Longitudinal associations and identity moderators. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 35, 581–590. doi:10.1007/s10865-011-9388-7; Greene, M., Way, N., & Pahl, K. (2006). Trajectories of perceived adult and peer discrimination among Black, Latino, and Asian American adolescents: Patterns and psychological correlates. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(2), 218–238. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.42.2.218; Gibbons, F. X., Hsiu-Chen, Y., Gerrard, M., Cleveland, M. J., Cutrona, C., Simons, R. L., & Brody, G. H. (2007). Early experience with racial discrimination and conduct disorder as predictors of subsequent drug use: A critical period hypothesis. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 88S, S27–S37; Niwa, E. Y., Way, N., & Hughes, D. L. (2014). Trajectories of ethnic-racial discrimination among ethnically diverse early adolescents: Associations with psychological and social adjustment. *Child Development*, 85(6), 2339–2354; Rivas-Drake, D., Hughes, D., & Way, N. (2008). A closer look at peer discrimination, ethnic identity, and psychological well-being among urban Chinese American sixth graders. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37(1), 12–21; Sellers et al., 2006; Simons, R. L., Simons, L. G., Stewart, E. A., Chen, Y., & Brody, G. (2003). Incidents of discrimination and risk for delinquency: A longitudinal test of strain theory with an African American sample. *Justice Quarterly*, 20, 501–528; Wong et al., 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Solorzano, D. G., & Bernal, D. D. (2001). Examining transformational resistance through a critical race and Latcrit theory framework: Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context. *Urban Education*, 36. DOI: 10.1177/0042085901363002; Gregory, A., & Fergus, E. (2017). Social and emotional learning and equity in school discipline. *The Future of Children*, 27(1): 117–136.

<sup>21</sup> Neblett et al., 2012; Berkel, C., Knight, G., Zeiders, K. H., Tein, J., Roosa, M. W., Gonzales, N. A., & Saenz, D. (2010). Discrimination and adjustment for Mexican American adolescents: A prospective examination of the benefits of culturally related values. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 20(4), 893–915.

<sup>22</sup> Allen, A., Scott, L.A., & Lewis, C.W. (2013). Racial microaggressions and African American and Hispanic students in urban schools: A call for culturally affirming education. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 3(2), 117–129; Yeager, D.S., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Hooper, S.Y., & Cohen, G.L. (2017). Loss of institutional trust among racial and ethnic minority adolescents: A consequence of procedural injustice and a cause of life-span outcomes. *Child Development*, 88 (2), 658–676.

<sup>23</sup> Brannon, T. N., Markus, H. R., & Taylor, V. J. (2015). “Two souls, two thoughts,” two self-schemas: Double consciousness can have positive academic consequences for African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108(4): 586–609.

Further, students would be able to gauge whether and in what ways they are involved in power relationships and dynamics that disadvantage others. This recognition would enable them to envision ways to co-create a safe and constructive learning environment.

**RELATIONSHIP SKILLS.** Relationship skills connote building relationships with diverse individuals and groups, communicating clearly, working cooperatively, resolving conflicts, and seeking help.

Potential concerns. Issues surrounding relationship skills can result from mismatches in self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness. Because of differences in the understanding of norms, social roles (e.g., age, gender), and related rules about emotional displays, students and adults can misinterpret each other's attempts to cooperate, share, and engage in collaborative problem-solving. This can cause student-student and student-teacher disagreements to escalate into entrenched conflicts and lead to an overemphasis on compliance rather than growth and fairness as guiding principles in resolving conflicts<sup>24</sup>.

Potential opportunities. Cultural competence and cultural fluency represent important equity-focused competencies. Through cultural competence skills, adults can develop a historically grounded, strengths-focused facility with the relational skills that are valued in the students' culture of origin. Adults can also cultivate cultural fluency, which refers to the capacity to effectively learn about and negotiate cultural differences (e.g., "code-switching"). The development of such fluency requires a sense of cultural humility, in which one recognizes the limitations of one's own culture and sees diversity as a potential asset<sup>25</sup>.

**RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING.** Responsible decision-making refers to considering the well-being of self and others; recognizing one's responsibility to behave ethically; basing decisions on safety, social, and ethical considerations; evaluating realistic consequences of various actions; and making constructive, safe choices for self, relationships, and school.

Potential concerns. Racial/ethnic and class inequities are often justified by blaming them either on the person or the group, rather than attending to systemic or structural explanations for differential treatment and outcomes. This can result in interpersonal decisions that reflect and are reflected in institutional (school) policies and practices that reproduce and/or exacerbate existing educational and economic inequities<sup>26</sup>.

Potential opportunities. Fostering equity through SEL suggests decision-making that positions students and adults to engage in initiatives and to co-create structures and processes that are inclusive, equitable, and mutually supportive. As examples, students should be invited to build community in classroom, school, and neighborhood settings. Nurturing students' understand-

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<sup>24</sup> Gregory & Fergus, 2017

<sup>25</sup> Danso, R. (2016). Cultural competence and cultural humility: A critical reflection on key cultural diversity concepts. *Journal of Social Work*. DOI: 10.1177/1468017316654341

<sup>26</sup> Danso, 2016

ing of systemic or structural explanations for differential treatment and outcomes, together with relationship skills, can be done in settings that are group-specific or those that include members of multiple ethnic/racial and socioeconomic groups.

**CONCLUSIONS.** We recommend that communal values and a positive ethnic-racial identity be included as key components of self-awareness, particularly for marginalized youth whose culture and ethnic/racial group membership has been disparaged historically or is currently diminished within mainstream cultural institutions, such as schools. Supporting the development of these assets should buffer children and youth from the negative impacts of internalized, interpersonal, and institutional oppression and provide pathways for constructive, collective responses.

Further, all youth should be cognizant of the cultural features and power dynamics of interactions and contexts that include peers and adults from diverse ethnic/racial and economic backgrounds. This would allow them to appropriately deploy interpersonal skills and abilities to advance collective well-being. Based on these recommendations, Table 1 outlines proposed revisions to recent definitions of CASEL core competencies.

CASEL 5 Competencies	Equity Elaborations
Self-awareness	Involves understanding one’s emotions, personal identity, goals, and values. This includes accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations, having positive mindsets, possessing a well-grounded sense of self-efficacy and optimism. High levels of self-awareness require the ability to understand the links between one’s personal and sociocultural identities and to recognize how thoughts, feelings, and actions are interconnected.
Self-management	Requires skills and attitudes that facilitate the ability to regulate emotions and behaviors. This includes the ability to delay gratification, manage stress, control impulses, and persevere through personal and group-level challenges in order to achieve personal and educational goals.
Social-awareness	Involves the ability to take the perspective of those with the same and different backgrounds and cultures and to empathize and feel compassion. It also involves understanding social norms for behavior in diverse settings and recognizing family, school, and community resources and supports.
Relationship skills	Includes the tools needed to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships, and to effectively navigate settings with differing social norms and demands. It involves communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when it is needed.
Responsible decision-making	Requires the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make caring, constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse settings. It requires the ability to critically examine ethical standards, safety concerns, and behavioral norms for risky behavior; to make realistic evaluations of consequences of various interpersonal and institutional actions; and to take the health and well-being of self and others into consideration.

*Revisions to Weissberg et al. (2015)*



## Promising Approaches, Programs, and Practices Advancing Equity-Elaborated SEL

Schools have been the focus of most SEL efforts, and the CASEL 5 competencies are at the center of a model for schoolwide SEL implementation. However, prominent and popular SEL programs often focus on student skill development and don't explicitly address the cultural assets mentioned above<sup>27</sup>.

Below, we describe some school-based programs and practices that might foster transformative, equity-elaborated SEL competencies. Schools are cultural institutions and advance (consciously or unconsciously) dominant racialized cultural norms, values, and practices. Efforts like transformative SEL that seek more equitable educational experiences for students must offer viable alternative strategies to this tendency. Accordingly, this section concludes with a discussion of how equity-elaborated teacher social and emotional competencies relate to effective implementation and desired outcomes of the identified programs and practices.

There is a range of cultural infusion strategies<sup>28</sup>. Of these, *sociocultural, evidential, and constituent-involving* strategies are the most germane to equity-elaborated SEL. The first of these, *sociocultural strategies, integrate the target group's cultural norms, values, and behaviors into program content and activities, and thereby represent our interest in advancing communal values and relations.*

The other two, *evidential and constituent-involving* strategies, are more consistent with issues of racial/ethnic and class identity<sup>29</sup>. Evidential strategies include providing some form of data demonstrating that a given problem affects members of the target group. Constituent-involving strategies are perhaps the most impactful and sustainable, as they seek to engage members of the target group in the development, delivery, and evaluation of the program or intervention.

Below we offer a variety of approaches and practices—cultural integration, community-building, promotion of identity, equity integration and participatory methods—that have the potential to address some of these considerations.

### *Cultural Integration*

The approach of cultural integration involves culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy. These two practices reflect sociocultural and constituent-involving strategies, and include the following features: connecting student's cultural assets and references to academic concepts and skills, employing curricula that encourages student reflection on their own lives and society, supporting student cultural competence by facilitating learning about their own and other cultures, and

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<sup>27</sup> Jagers, 2016; Simmons, D. (2017). Is social-emotional learning really going to work for students of color? Education Week. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2017/06/07/we-need-to-redefine-social-emotional-learning-for.html>

<sup>28</sup> Kreuter, M.W., Lukwago, S.N., Bucholtz, D.C., Clark, E.M. & Sanders-Thompson, V. (2003). Achieving cultural appropriateness in health promotion programs: Targeted and tailored approaches. *Health Education and Behavior*, 30, 133-14

<sup>29</sup> Jagers, R.J., Mustafaa, F. & Noel, B. (2017). Cultural integrity and African American empowerment. In M.A. Bond, C. B. Keys & I. Serrano-García (Eds.), *Handbook of Community Psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

pursuing social justice through critiques of discourses of power. Literature in the field provides findings about how educators can employ culturally relevant education across academic content areas<sup>30</sup>.

Recent program reviews indicate the following:

1. There is a range of cultural infusion strategies used alone or in combination in programs,
2. Programs are conducted in various settings (family, school, and/or community), and
3. The rigor of evaluation designs varies substantially

However, several reviewed programs infuse sociocultural values in their theoretical orientation, program content, and program delivery. Further, a number of programs that include a school component or are school-based have been found to have positive effects on health and academic outcomes for Black and Latino youth<sup>31</sup>.

### *Community-building*

While the preponderance of evidence-based SEL programs focuses on student skill development, a few programs foreground classroom community-building. Such approaches reflect a sociocultural strategy since they leverage a communal orientation and advance constructive interdependence.

Component practices of these approaches include: morning meetings/advisory; individual and classroom goal setting and social contracts; modeling and practicing of classroom routines; empowering teacher language; planning and reflection on student products; collaborative problem-solving among students; and balanced discipline strategies that highlight student self-control<sup>32</sup>.

Classroom communities promote school and civic engagement and improved academic outcomes<sup>33</sup>. Cooperative learning approaches utilize similar pedagogic practices. A large body of research shows that the positive effects on academic outcomes, psychological adjustment, and interpersonal relationships can be produced across diverse students in different settings<sup>34</sup>.

However, although these programs and practices can create more inclusive classroom and school settings, it is necessary to explicitly consider issues of race/ethnicity and class to advance an equity-focused SEL agenda.

<sup>30</sup> Arsonson, B. & Laughter, J. (2016). The theory and practice of culturally relevant education: A synthesis of research across content areas. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(1): 163-206.

<sup>31</sup> Jagers et al. 2017; Loyd, A. B., & Williams, B. V. (2016). The potential for youth programs to promote African American youth's development of ethnic and racial identity. *Child Development Perspectives*, 11(1):29-38; Marsiglia, F.F. & Booth, J.M. (2015). Cultural adaptation of interventions in real practice settings. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 25(4) 423-432

<sup>32</sup> Kwame-Ross, et al., 2011; Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Larsen, R. A., Curby, T. W., Baroody, A. E., Merritt, E., Abry, T., Wanless, S. (2014). Efficacy of the Responsive Classroom approach: Results from a three-year, longitudinal randomized control trial. *American Educational Research Journal*. doi:10.3102/0002831214523821; Schaps et al., 1996

<sup>33</sup> Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014; Jagers et al., 2017

<sup>34</sup> Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. (2016). Cooperative learning and teaching citizenship in democracies. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 76: 162-177.

### *Promoting Ethnic-Racial Identity Development*

A recent review found nine programs that employ evidential and constituent-involving program materials and interpersonal interactions aimed at improving the ethnic/racial identity of Black adolescents. Six of these nine programs report positive effects on ERI<sup>35</sup>.

A separate review identified five school-based programs that include ethnic/racial identity in their theoretical orientation, program activities, and/or evaluation. These programs vary with regard to methodological approach (e.g., qualitative, quantitative) and rigor (e.g., sample size, use of randomization), yet several report positive program effects, including increased ERI among Black youth.

Our scan revealed fewer applied studies on the promotion of ERI among Latino youth, in particular. However, a recent efficacy trial found that a classroom-based intervention promoted identity exploration for both youth of color and their White classmates<sup>36</sup>. Additionally, there is growing evidence that brief interventions into stereotype threats can have positive academic and social impacts for various marginalized groups<sup>37</sup>.

### *Integrating Equity Content into Subject Area*



*Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO)* is an example of a program designed to integrate issues of race/ethnicity into regular social studies and language arts instruction. It employs evidentiary strategy, leveraging historical examples of conflict, injustice, and discrimination to teach tolerance, social skills, and civic responsibility. The program targets teaching practices and classroom climate.

There is some evidence that Facing History improves students' psychosocial competence and reduces racist attitudes and fighting among White youth and improves teacher sense of efficacy with use of democratic (i.e., inclusive) teaching practices<sup>38</sup>.

In addition to adopting programs like FHAO, schools can surface issues of equity in their regular core academic coursework. The specific emphases they choose can determine the nature of students' understandings of racial and socioeconomic injustices.

<sup>35</sup> Loyd & Williams, 2016; Metzger, I., Cooper, S. M., Zarrett, N., & Flory, K. (2013). Culturally sensitive risk behavior prevention programs for African American adolescents: A systematic analysis. *Clinical Child Family Psychology Review*, 16: 187-212.

<sup>36</sup> Umaña-Taylor, A. J., Douglass, S., Updegraff, K. A., & Marsiglia, F. F. (2017). A small-scale randomized efficacy trial of the Identity Project: Promoting adolescents' ethnic-racial identity exploration and resolution. *Child Development*. DOI: 10.1111/cdev.12755; Dee, T., & Penner, E. (2016). The causal effects of cultural relevance: Evidence from an ethnic studies curriculum (CEPA Working Paper No.16-01). Retrieved from Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis: <http://cepa.stanford.edu/wp16-01>

<sup>37</sup> Steele, C. M. (2011). Whistling Vivaldi: And other clues to how stereotypes affect us (issues of our time). W.W. Norton & Company; Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2011). A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students. *Science*, 331 (6023): 1447-1451.

<sup>38</sup> Barr, D. J., Boulay, B., Selman, R. L., McCormick, R., Lowenstein, E., Gamse, B., Fine, M., & Leonard, M. B. (2015). A randomized controlled trial of professional development for interdisciplinary civic education: Impacts on humanities teachers and their students. *Teachers College Record*, 117: 1-52.

For example, research suggests that collaborative inquiry-based learning encourages greater growth in high school students' racial consciousness than does traditional "no-nonsense" schooling. However, the focus on closing the achievement gap in no-nonsense schools promoted greater growth in students' critical awareness of social class inequities. It is noteworthy that coursework aimed at encouraging upper-income White adolescents to take social responsibility for addressing social inequities was found not to be effective<sup>39</sup>.

### *Project-based, Experiential, and Participatory Learning*

Project-based<sup>40</sup> and experiential learning opportunities, such as service learning, can increase social and civic skills across diverse groups of students<sup>41</sup>.

Additionally, there has been considerable attention to positive impacts of youth participatory action research (YPAR) on social, emotional, and academic outcomes for children and youth. YPAR is a youth-led approach that support young people in using scientific research methods to design and evaluate their efforts to address local issues that affect them and their communities. Among diverse children and youth, YPAR has a positive influence on school-based academic pursuits and outcomes, as well as active school and community engagement for social change<sup>42</sup>.

TRANSFORMATIVE SEL REQUIRES EXPLICIT CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE ROOT CAUSES OF RACIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUITIES TO FOSTER THE DESIRED CRITICAL SELF-AWARENESS AND SOCIAL AWARENESS IN YOUNG PEOPLE.

**CONCLUSIONS.** The literature points to a number of approaches, programs, and practices that are consistent with transformative SEL as they help advance aspects of equity-elaborated social and emotional competencies for children and youth. Community-building approaches appear within the SEL literature currently. Such programs foster constructive communal relations and thereby encourage participatory democracy in the classroom.

<sup>39</sup> Mistry, R. S., Brown, C. S., Chow, K. A., & Collins, G. S. (2011). Increasing the complexity of young adolescents' beliefs about poverty and inequality: Results of an 8th grade social studies curriculum intervention. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41: 704-716; Seider, S., Graves, D., El-Amin, A., Soutter, M., Tamerat, J., Jennett, P., Clark, S., Malhotra, S., & Johannsen, J. (2017). Developing sociopolitical consciousness of race and social class inequality in adolescents attending progressive and no excuses urban secondary schools. *Applied Developmental Science*. DOI: 10.1080/10888691.2016.1254557; SSeider, S. (2008). Resisting obligation: How privileged adolescents conceive of their responsibilities to others. *Journal of Research in Character Education*, 6(1): 3-19.

<sup>40</sup> Condliffe, B., Quint, J., Visher, M. G., Bangser, M. R., Drohojowska, S., Saco, L., & Nelson, E. (2017). Project-based learning: A literature review (Working Paper). MDRC.

<sup>41</sup> Chung, S., & McBride. (2015). Social and emotional learning in middle school curricula: A service learning model based on positive youth development. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 53: 192-200.

<sup>42</sup> Ozer, E. J. (2016). Youth-led participatory action research: Developmental and equity perspectives. In S. S. Horn, M. D. Ruck, & L. S. Liben, (Eds.), *Equity and Justice in Developmental Sciences: Theoretical and Methodological Issues* (189-207). NY, New York: Oxford University Press; Kornbluh, M., Ozer, E. J., Allen, C. D., & Kirshner, B. (2015). Youth participatory action research as an approach to sociopolitical development and the new academic standards: Considerations for educators. *Urban Review*. DOI 10.1007/s11256-015-0337-6; Ozer, E. J., & Douglas, L. (2015). Assessing the key processes of youth-led participatory research: Psychometric analysis and application of an observational rating scale. *Youth and Society*, 47(1): 29-50.

However, transformative SEL also requires explicit critical examination of the root causes of racial and economic inequities to foster the desired critical self-awareness and social awareness in young people. Brief interventions can ameliorate the dampening effects of stereotypes on youth outcomes. Programs that focus on identity development and/or systematic efforts to integrate issues of race, class, and culture into the academic content can have greater utility to the degree that they advance a notion of citizenship that is global and justice-oriented.

Project-based and participatory approaches may have the greatest purchase, as they provide a context for youth to synthesize critical academic, social, and emotional competencies in addressing issues they deem relevant in the broader national and international contexts.

### The Importance of Adult SEL

We would be remiss if we did not mention the pivotal role of adult social and emotional competencies in advancing transformative SEL. Recent work has demonstrated that some mindfulness interventions have yielded positive results for teachers and their students<sup>43</sup>. However, research also suggests that teachers often have less productive relationships with lower-income students and students of color than with their White students from better resourced backgrounds<sup>44</sup>.

This may be due in part to the cultural and class assumptions and preferences that most teachers have, regardless of their own racial/ethnic background<sup>45</sup>. As such, teacher cultural awareness and sensibilities warrant systematic attention. Further, teacher racial identity is a relevant but under-examined consideration for equity and SEL. Such awareness would aid teachers in avoiding the fallacies of color-blindness, power-blindness, and humanist-caring, which obscure the sociopolitical realities of youth of color and low-resourced students<sup>46</sup>.

We assume that these competencies would better position teachers to be more equitable and facilitative of empowering students from diverse backgrounds. Pre- and in-service training that best support such insights by teachers tend to encourage concrete activities that reflect authentic, asset-focused interest in the lived experiences of students (e.g., home visits, service learning)<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Jennings, P. A., Brown, J. L., Frank, J. L., Doyle, S., Oh, Y., Davis, R., ... Greenberg, M. T. (2017). Impacts of the CARE for teachers program on teachers' social and emotional competence and classroom interactions. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(7), 1010-1028. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000187>

<sup>44</sup> Allen et al., 2013; Yaeger et al., 2017

<sup>45</sup> Hurley, E.A., Boykin, A.W., & Allen, B.A. (2005). Communal versus individual learning of math-estimation: African American children and cultures learning contexts. *Journal of Psychology*, 139(6), 513-527.

<sup>46</sup> Castagno, A.E. (2013). Multicultural education and the protection of Whiteness. *American Journal of Education*, 120, 101-128; Jupp, J. C., Berry, T. R., & Lensmire, T. J. (2016). Second-wave white teacher identity studies: A review of white teacher identity literatures from 2004 through 2014. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4): 1151-1191.

<sup>47</sup> Brannon, T. N., & Walton, G. M. (2013). Enacting cultural interests: How intergroup contact reduces prejudice by sparking interest in an out-group's culture. *Psychological Science*, 24(10): 1947-1957; Rubin, B. C., El-Haj, T. R. A., Graham, E., & Clay, K. (2016). Confronting the urban civic opportunity gap: Integrating youth participatory action research into teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 67(5): 424-436.



## Implications for SEL Assessment

The introduction of equity-elaborated competencies and promotion of transformative SEL have implications for SEL assessment work. Asserting the cultural integrity of people of color and those from low-income backgrounds raises the specter of measurement bias and equivalence. Bias can occur at the level of the construct, method, and/or item. Equivalence can be gauged in terms of structure, measurement, and scale<sup>48</sup>. These issues are given serious consideration in international and cross-cultural research. Such attention is warranted when SEL assessments are employed with distinct domestic and immigrant groups.

The issues raised here also argue for basic and applied research to include additional indices that capture these cultural assets. While a number of valid and reliable assessments of, for example, cultural orientations, ERI, and related coping strategies can be found<sup>49</sup>, they have not been included systematically in SEL studies as outcomes or intervening variables (moderators or mediators).

Like other SEL competencies, the various equity elaborations have developmental courses that need to be examined via systematic research<sup>50</sup>. We have a limited understanding of how the equity-elaborated social-emotional competencies might be related to one another among various segments (e.g., grade, race/ethnicity, SES, urban, rural) of the student population. Given the emphasis on communalism, constructive interdependence, and intergroup contact, our assessments need to attend to the composition and dynamics of peer networks and their role in relationship and community-building efforts<sup>51</sup>.

We also see collaborative problem-solving as an essential interpersonal-level skill set to cultivate and assess<sup>52</sup>. This would better position the field to test fundamental assumptions regarding equity-elaborated SEL theory, research, and practice.

Adult social and emotional competencies should garner significant attention in assessment efforts. For example, there is a growing recognition that teacher social-emotional competence is pivotal to the growth and development of students. However, there are relatively few teacher SEC assessments. Given that most teachers are middle-class White women and students are increasingly diverse, it is critical that adult assessment include indicators of race and class identity, attitudes, and beliefs. Such measures might be useful in helping us understand recent research pointing to, for example, the

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<sup>48</sup> van de Vijver, F., & Tanzer, N. K. (2004). Bias and equivalence in cross-cultural assessment: An overview. *Revue europeenne de psychologie appliquee*, 54: 119-135.

<sup>49</sup> Davidov et al., 2010; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014

<sup>50</sup> Jones & Kahn, 2017

<sup>51</sup> Rivas-Drake, D., Schaefer, D., Saleem, M., Medina, M., & Jagers, R. (in press). Adolescent intergroup contact attitudes across peer networks in school: Selection, influence, and implications for cross-group friendships. *Child Development*.

<sup>52</sup> OECD (2015). *Skills for social progress: The power of social and emotional skills*, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264226159-en>

dramatic benefits of same-race teachers for Black boys, and the socioeconomic and race/ethnic biases evident in teacher ratings of student effort<sup>53</sup>.

Also, such measures would be important to teacher professional development, as well as to examinations of implementation and outcomes of efforts aimed at community-building and/or explicit instruction around issues of race and class with diverse groups of children and youth.

We welcome the increased attention in the SEL and school improvement literatures to factors such as classroom and school climate. These represent important correlates and outcomes of SEL programming. We suggest that these indices incorporate perceptions of racial, class, and gender equity as well. Additionally, more needs to be known about social and emotional learning in family and community settings, especially as socializing agents within these settings may offer messages regarding racial/ethnic relations and civic life. This is particularly important in contexts where potential status incongruences might exist.

Brief survey measures are of course important for SEL efforts to be done at scale (e.g., district and state); however, interviews and observations may be warranted to augment and improve surveys. The use of these mixed methods, design research, and youth participatory action approaches could provide important insights, especially among teachers and students already engaged in equity-focused SEL programs and practices. The lessons learned could be made flexible and portable for deployment in other school settings.

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<sup>53</sup> Gershenson, S., Hart, C.M.D., Lindsay, C.A., Papageorge, N.W. (2017). The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers. IZA Institute of Labor Economics. Retrieved from <http://ftp.iza.org/dp10630.pdf>; Kozlowski, K. P. (2015). Culture or teacher bias? Racial and ethnic variation in student--teacher effort assessment match/mismatch. *Race and Social Problems*, 7(1), 43-59. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12552-014-9138-x>

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## The Measuring SEL Series of Frameworks Briefs

The *Establishing Practical Social-Emotional Competence Assessments of Preschool to High School Students* project as guided by the Assessment Work Group (AWG) is dedicated to helping advance the effective use of data to inspire practice in SEL. In deciding how the AWG could best contribute to advancing the field and complement rather than compete with other efforts underway to address the challenges of multiple frameworks and inconsistent use of language, the AWG Frameworks Subgroup, led by Stephanie Jones and Roger Weissberg, developed four series of briefs designed for practitioners. Each series and each brief in the series is designed to help advance how people think about the issues and make reasonable choices that work best for them and their context. We hope they provide a set of “building blocks” that systems and practitioners can use to advance and improve their SEL efforts. Learn more at <https://measuringssel.casel.org>

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These briefs are about what frameworks are, how they are useful, the challenges and opportunities they present in practice, and defining criteria that are helpful when considering what frameworks to use.

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These briefs explore efforts underway to categorize and align ways of thinking about comparing unique frameworks. The briefs also describe tools available to aid systems and practitioners in their selection and use of a framework.

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These briefs identify critical issues that frameworks must address or that influence how they are used that are important to consider when selecting and using frameworks, such as equity and SEL, and developmental considerations.

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These briefs each describe an individual framework currently in use. They are intended to illustrate how frameworks can be analyzed and help practitioners learn to evaluate frameworks on the types of criteria that matter most in their settings. *(The briefs are not an endorsement of these frameworks.)*

*The Assessment Work Group is committed to advancing dialogue on key issues in the field and stating a perspective when appropriate. The views and opinions expressed in these briefs reflect the general position of the Assessment Work Group. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of CASEL or any of the individual organizations involved with the work group.*