Assessment Through the Lens of Social and Emotional Learning

. . . powerful road blocks to learning can arise from the very process of assessing and evaluating the performance of the learner, depending on how the learner interprets what is happening to him or her.

—Rick Stiggins (2014)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Colleagues on the assessing journey will be able to

- Provide a brief overview of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
- Examine how assessment practices are connected to SEL
- Understand that assessing practices measure learning
- Identify how SEL assessing is possible through daily practice
- Discover how SEL assessing is a relationship builder

Welcome, colleagues. We hope you are intrigued by the title of this book, this chapter and are wondering what this is all about. Perhaps you are asking yourself, "Why 'assessing' and not 'assessment of'?" Maybe you are saying, "How

can the practice of assessing be done through a SEL lens? Don't we already have enough testing in our schools? or, it could be that you are wondering, "What do they mean by *this* version assessing?"

WHY APPLY SEL TO ASSESSING PRACTICES?

First, we are happy that you are curious about how assessing can be applied through the lens of SEL. The need for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools and communities has never been greater. Students, teachers, parents, and our communities have been impacted by COVID-19 and the global pandemic, social justice events in the United States such as *Black Lives Matter* and the *Me Too Movement*, and other socio-political movements around the globe including the invasion of Ukraine. As a society, we are experiencing many emotional reactions including confusion, frustration, exhaustion, and above all the loss of socialization, emotional disconnection, and isolation. However, the news is not all glum. These challenges are helping us to question long-held assumptions about our learners and learning. Some of us are reflecting and resetting priorities. We are feeling the need for more meaningful and deeper social connections - to be more compassionate, empathetic, kind, and humanistic.

The ever-increasing movement towards more purposeful inclusion of social emotional learning in our schools is a beacon of hope and inspiration. And, if you are involved in this positive movement forward, we are here to support you. This book is about you and your students. It is about making those deeper connections to self and others. It's about making assessment of learning more attainable, making assessment more formative than summative, it's about making assessment more student-centered, it's about making assessment more in line with SEL skills and competencies. We want to humanize the assessing process to counteract the four-letter word T-E-S-T.

Our foundational principle is that **all** teaching and learning intersects with social emotional learning.

All teaching and learning intersect with social emotional learning.

Frey et al. (2019) in their book *All Learning is Social and Emotional Learning* state, "we are teaching SEL even if we don't think we are doing so" (p. 3). Learning is emotional. Listen to the giggles of children reading *The Cat in the Hat*. Watch the brightened faces of young people as they suddenly "get" a concept. Learning is, indeed, emotional. The process of assessing is emotional and

often associated with fear, anxiety, and failure. These feelings are the antithesis of attaining positive SEL.

Social and emotional learning is everywhere, it is in everything we do, in the way we deliver instruction, and the numerous ways we assess student learning. Social and emotional learning is inextricably intertwined with daily classroom and instructional practices. When we teach with SEL we involve students in the assessment process and practices. The chapter's opening quote from Dr. Rick Stiggins, reminds us that we need to carefully provide feedback to our students about their social emotional competencies so it will influence their acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are integral to their academic and life success. Assessment practices through the lens of SEL continuously support learning.

Social and Emotional Learning assessing, therefore, needs to be in alignment with the intention of SEL competencies. Social and Emotional Learning assessing is about gently guiding each student towards deeper levels of self-awareness, social awareness, self-regulation and self-management, relationship building, and decision-making. SEL assessing is NOT about testing. SEL assessing is NOT about using commercially prepared materials that are not aligned to the SEL needs of the students in your classroom. SEL assessing is NOT about using data in any punitive or harmful manner. SEL assessing IS *about honoring and respecting the voice and mind of each child* to support their journey towards reaching their fullest potential.

To do this we need to consider a different model of assessing. If we only continue to use the same long-standing mindset about assessing to understand student academic progress, we will undermine the intention of SEL. We do not simply use an end of unit summative quiz or a one-time test to determine progress towards SEL growth, but rather we provide meaningful ongoing "feedback" and "feed forward" aligned to the SEL competencies WITH the learner's complete engagement in the process. Assessing is not something done TO the learner to get data. Assessing is a partnership; a relationship builder that provides essential information for growth.

To move towards a new model for SEL assessing, we need to consider what we understand about SEL and what we know about assessing, where we have been, and how we got to where we are now. The following brief history of SEL along with a cursory look at SEL research, provide the context for this timely guide that explains why it is essential to conduct formative assessment WITH students and how to better create assessing practices that promote SEL skill acquisition. The end goal is to ensure the acquisition of SEL competencies and skills for student growth and to

create a Student SEL learning environment WITH the learners that honors and respects their voices.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LITERACY TIMELINE

375 BCE	Plato's Republic, Greek Philosophy and Social Justice
BCE-17th Century	Ancient Civilizations & Founding of Religious Principles
1800	Character Education Movement & Moral Development (Europe)
1830	Horace Mann nineteenth-century champion of the common schools (Advocate for moral education)
1844	YMCA Young Men's Christian Association (England)
1852	YMCA Young Men's Christian Association (USA)
1897	Howard Crummel (Cultivation of Genius)*2020 Gholdy Muhammed
1906	Marie Montessori, Casa dei Bambini, Scientific Developmental Pedagogy, Teachers, Young Children, and Doctors
1910	Boy Scouts of America (BSA)
1912	Girl Scouts of America (GSA)
1920–1930s	Vygotsky (**sociocultural theory**)
1968	Comer School Development (Educating Poor Children)
1970s	Steiner & Perry, Emotional Literacy, Emotional Interactivity
1989	StephenR.Covey *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, SEL and Leadership
1990	Emotional Intelligence (EQ), Yale University, Peter Salovey & John D. Mayer
1996	Daniel Goleman, *Four Characteristics of Emotional Intelligence*

THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

As educators, it is important to recognize how the field of SEL has evolved and how social and emotional skills and competencies are embedded in everything we do. Social and Emotional Learning is experiencing a resurgence in the United States educational system and is now considered essential knowledge for fostering student success both in school and in life. While it may have a new name, SEL is not new. Social and emotional tenets were included in Plato's *The Republic* (375 BCE), where he described an integrated curriculum that included mathematics, languages, science, character development and moral judgment. Interesting that as early as the 1800's, a parallel approach to social and emotional learning, the Character Education Movement was founded as a way of living and behaving for children. Aligning with religious practices, morality, ethics, and civility the movement began in Europe and was later recognized in the U.S. In more contemporary settings, Character Education has been applied in both formal and informal learning. Organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Boy Scouts of America, and Girl Scouts of America integrated the principles of character education in their practices.

In 1830, Horace Mann, the father of the Common School Movement, advocated for universal education for all children, a concept quite radical for the time. In 1897, Howard Crummel called for the "cultivation of genius" (defined as the brilliance, intellect, ability, cleverness, and artistry of the mind and heart), which is vital to the success of all children. Some ten years later, in Italy, Maria Montessori, founded schools that had a child-centered approach. The focus was and is on developing the whole child cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically. Then as many of us know, John Dewey (1916/1966), noted as the father of public education, introduced the idea of "social responsibility" which included improving the quality of life for workers and their families. Did you know that Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is also grounded in SEL? Vygotsky (1978) argued that social interaction comes before cognition.

> *Did you know that Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is also grounded in SEL? Vygotsky (1978) argued that social interaction comes before cognition.*

Another historical marker in the SEL evolution was the focus on emotional literacy. In the 1970s, the term emotional literacy (EL) was coined by clinical psychologist Claude Steiner, who defined EL as "the ability to understand your emotions, feelings, the ability to listen to others and empathize with their emotions, and the ability to express emotions productively."

(Steiner & Perry, 1997, p. 11) Steiner's framework also addressed the facilitation of relationships, including using dialogue and self-control to avoid negative arguments. The ability to be aware of and to read other people's feelings enables one to interact with them effectively, so that powerful emotional situations can be handled in a skillful way. Steiner calls this "emotional interactivity" (Tudor, 2020).

In 1990, two psychology professors at Yale, Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, coined the term "Emotional Intelligence" (EQ) describing it as the ability to "assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others" (Mayer et al., 2002, p. 396; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). They also describe Emotional Intelligence as a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to perceive and express emotion, the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions.

Later that year, Daniel Goleman, a researcher specializing in the brain and its impact on behavior, worked with David McClelland from Harvard University and a group of other researchers who were studying cognitive intelligence. Goleman (1996) argued that in a business context, it was "not cognitive intelligence that guaranteed business success but emotional intelligence" (p. 23). Goleman described emotionally intelligent people as possessing four characteristics:

1. They are good at understanding their own emotions (self-awareness)
2. They are good at managing their emotions (self-management)
3. They are empathetic to the emotional drives of other people (social awareness)
4. They are good at handling other people's emotions (social skills) (Goleman, 1996, p. 23)

In our opinion, Emotional Intelligence implies cognitive abilities as opposed to SEL competencies. In fact, EQ as well as Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests fail to address the whole child, their potential, and human capacity for learning. Instead of EQ, we prefer the term, "emotional literacy" (Steiner) and apply the steps of EL to the process of assessing.

In 1994, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was formed to focus on Social Emotional Learning research initiatives (see Figure 1.1). This agency looked at how SEL impacts academic and personal success. Fast forward over 30 years, CASEL, together with the Aspen Institute and other agencies have standardized the field of SEL into 5 competencies. (See Appendix 1.)

FIGURE 1.1 ● CASEL Framework
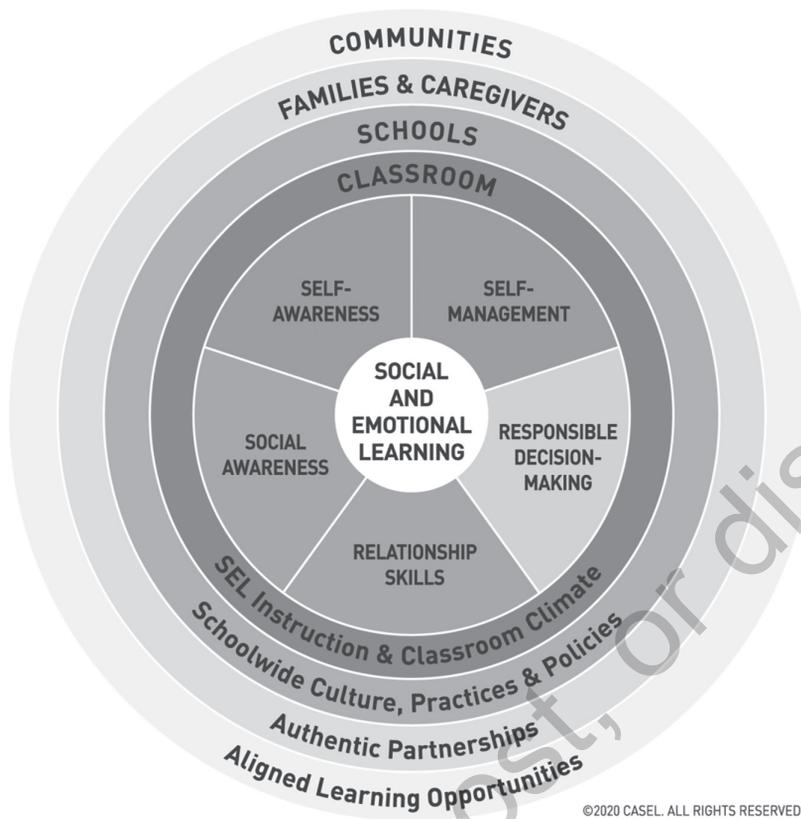
Source: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Reprinted with permission.

Over the decades, SEL has had many names such as "character education" and "values education." It was often viewed as an add-on and a soft skills curriculum – meaning it wasn't really important to academic development. That is changing. Research results show an undeniable connection between social emotional competencies and academic success (Durlak et al., 2011; Hawkins et al., 2004). For another reference to the History of SEL, a QR code link is provided.

bit.ly/3NOaLDm

To read a QR code, you must have a smartphone or tablet with a camera. We recommend that you download a QR code reader app that is made specifically for your phone or tablet brand.

THE WHOLE CHILD EMPHASIS: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY SEL

The School Development Program, led by Yale researcher James Comer, focused on educating the "whole child." At the time educating the "whole child" was a new approach, which developed a system that deeply embedded social skills and social services; and addressed the entire school community including students,

FIGURE 1.2 ● Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Framework
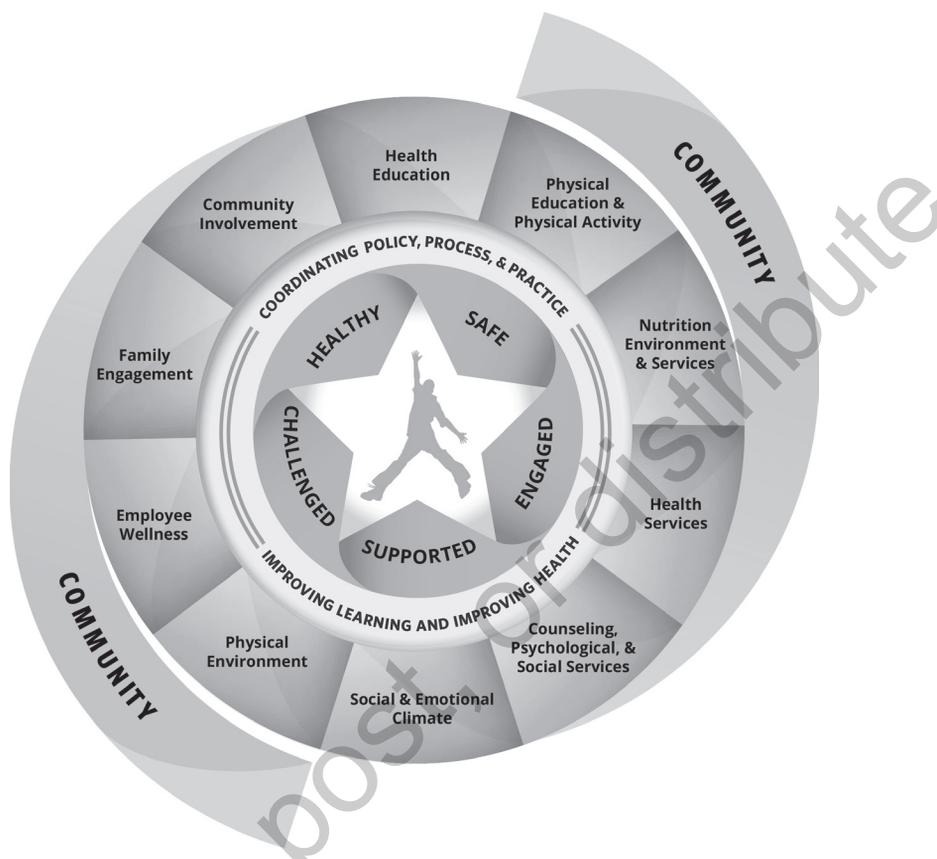
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

teachers, staff, and parents. Educating the "whole child" focused on an integrated approach of academics and social emotional learning, (Comer, 1980). According to Beaty (2018), the School Development Project in New Haven Schools continued as the "hub of SEL research from 1987–1992" (p. 68). Today, the emphasis on the whole child is included in the "Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) framework, an all-encompassing approach to meet educational needs, public health needs, and school health. The WSCC is a collaboration between education leaders and health sectors to improve each child's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. wellness, social, emotional, needs of all children. This framework was developed by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). What is unique about the WSCC model and why we include it as an important framework is that it is student-centered and also recognizes the connections between health and academic achievement, and the importance of evidence-based school policies and practices (see QR code and Figure 1.2).

The WSCC model has 10 components:

bit.ly/3K3UBVA

1. Physical education and physical activity
2. Nutrition environment and services
3. Health education
4. Social and emotional climate
5. Physical environment
6. Health services
7. Counseling, psychological and social services
8. Employee wellness
9. Community involvement
10. Family engagement

A QR code is available for a virtual tour of a healthy school (interactive).

RESEARCH SUPPORTING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As the exigency for Social Emotional Learning continues to grow, the research supporting the integration of SEL validates this need. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is at the forefront in making evidence-based research available to support SEL integrated in schools and beyond. Among its many initiatives, CASEL is reexamining the definition of SEL, which is critical to effective policy making and classroom implementation. CASEL works with practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to deepen our knowledge base about SEL and what works for educators and students.

The research is clear. Dr. Kirabo Jackson and his colleagues studied over 150,000 ninth-grade students who attended Chicago Public Schools between 2011 and 2017 and found that schools that scored high on metrics of social well-being and work habits were also the most effective at supporting long-term student success. Participants in the schools where social emotional learning was integrated into the school learning environment had fewer absences, more graduations, and higher college acceptance rates. Jackson's work was further explored by Terada in his essay on what constitutes a "good" school. Terada (2021) explained,

> Although all students benefit from attending high-performing schools, it's the schools that provide a well-rounded education that drove the differences that Jackson and his colleagues observed. They discovered

that a school's impact on the noncognitive dimensions of learning—healthy relationships and a growth mindset, for example—were much more predictive of long-term success than a school's impact on test scores. (p. 2)

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGH SE SEL ASSESSING

So, why do we care? Why should you care? As more and more states, districts, and schools include social emotional learning in their programs, more SEL-focused curricula appear most often as a separate subject and not a daily practice. Many resources created for the commercial market have been developed to provide a standardized SEL curriculum paired with standardized testing tools. However, assessing practices that support learners with needs-based strategies aligned to social and emotional learning competencies are notably absent from these programs. For SEL assessing to be responsive to the needs of a classroom; SEL must be owned by the students, as a developmental aspect of the process of learning progressions.

> We use the term *SE SEL*, which is presented by Brown et al. (2022). SE SEL is *student empowered social and emotional learning*. "Traditional approaches to social-emotional learning (SEL) often use standardized curricular materials to promote the development of personal and relational competencies and skills that students are assumed to lack. Such SEL curricula tend to be teacher-centered and, in some cases, even used as behavioral management or disciplinary tools. SE SEL, in contrast, encompasses practices that affirm what students bring to the classroom by encouraging students to identify and choose activities they love or value, to experience what it feels like to positively engage with and positively influence others, and in many cases, to share their expertise with classmates and teachers. These practices offer students a too-infrequent sense of control over their learning, connectedness to others, and sense that they matter in their school environment." (Brown et al., 2022)

Our goals for you include learning how to think about assessing as a relationship building tool, how to use SEL assessing to provide effective encouraging feedback as a process to increase SEL competencies, and how to use SEL assessing to inform more effective Student Empowered SEL teaching.

Practitioner "Wondering" Reflection

Time to Start Your SEL Assessing Reflection Journal

Select a hard copy journal or create a digital journal with your wonderings. Be sure to include a date in your wonderings and wonder more than once!

As you read about SEL and assessing what are your impressions of the intersections? What concepts or ideas strongly resonated with you? What did you immediately want to change in your thinking and in your practice? What do you want to know more about?

Takeaway to Practice

What is the one takeaway from this chapter you want to put into action? **Name it. Create your action plan**.