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Authors

Hwang, Sophia HJ
Shapiro, Valerie B
Eldeeb, Nehal
et al.

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Assessing Social and Emotional Competencies in Educational Settings: Supporting Resilience in Young People

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Sophia H. J. Hwang, Valerie B. Shapiro,
Nehal Eldeeb, Juyeon Lee, Jennifer L. Robitaille,
and Jack A. Naglieri

Introduction

Over the past 50 years, there has been growing interest in promoting, sustaining, and restoring the well-being of young people by nurturing their positive attributes and assets. This strengths-based perspective, a tenet of positive youth development, is an approach that acknowledges the inherent assets within the young person and how various environments, experiences, and resources can cultivate connections, competencies, and leadership skills among other positive attributes (Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, 2021; Lerner et al., 2021). Strengths-based perspectives are predicated on the belief that "everybody has knowledge, talents, capacities, skills, and resources that can be used as building blocks toward their aspirations, the solution of their problems, the meeting of their needs, and the boosting of the quality of their lives" (Saleebey,

2008, p. 124). Resilience theory elaborates upon this strengths-based approach by stating that in the face of adversity, individuals have the capacity to respond to challenges, adapt successfully, and achieve better-than-expected outcomes (Luthar et al., 2015; Masten, 2014). The field of social and emotional learning (SEL) offers concrete programs and strategies for youth to develop competencies associated with resilience and thriving (Mahoney et al., 2020).

This chapter highlights the connection between the measurement of social and emotional competencies and the development of resilience through three aims. First, we situate social and emotional competence both as a protective factor that supports the cultivation of resilience in the face of adversity and as a promotive factor for healthy youth development. Second, we present a suite of psychometrically sound and developmentally appropriate assessment tools designed to help practitioners collect relevant, empirical information about youth's social and emotional strengths. As part of this section, we provide examples of how these assessment tools can be used to plan and monitor interventions that promote resilience in children, with particular attention to uses with racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse young people. Lastly, we conclude by discussing recent efforts to align social and emotional learning with broader initiatives to transform schools for equity and to promote global citizenship.

S. H. J. Hwang · V. B. Shapiro (✉) · N. Eldeeb
UC Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, USA
e-mail: sophia.hwang@berkeley.edu; vshapiro@berkeley.edu; neldeeb@berkeley.edu

J. Lee
University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong
e-mail: leejy@hku.hk

J. L. Robitaille
Aperture Education, Fort Mill, SC, USA
e-mail: JRobitaille@apertureed.com

J. A. Naglieri
George Mason University, Farifax, VA, USA

Practical considerations for assessment practices within these initiatives will be offered.

Factors Influencing Resilience in Young People

Risk, promotive, and protective factors at the individual, familial, community, and societal levels influence developmental trajectories and youth well-being (Masten et al., 2021). *Risk factors* (e.g., abuse and neglect, poverty, discrimination and racism, and trauma) are defined as the characteristics of the individual or their environment associated with an increased likelihood of negative short- or long-term developmental outcomes, such as academic failure and delinquency (Luthar et al., 2015; Masten et al., 2021). Advances in the study of youth development and systems theory have led to the conceptualization of *resilience* as a dynamic process (i.e., rather than a stable trait) that represents the capacity to "adapt successfully to significant challenges that threaten the function, viability, or development" (Masten, 2018, p. 16). *Protective factors* are environmental or individual attributes that lead to positive outcomes in the context of high levels of risk (Masten et al., 2021). In contrast, *promotive factors* lead to desirable outcomes, regardless of the risk-level (Masten et al., 2021). Some factors are both protective and promotive with examples including positive school climate, social and emotional skills, and supportive relationship with prosocial adults and peers (Masten, 2018).

The cultivation of resilience is malleable, dependent on conditions at multiple ecological levels (Masten et al., 2021). For instance, an individual's level of self-regulation, high-quality caregiving at home, or having a supportive community network may contribute to experiences of resilience. Educational settings, whether traditional day schools or out-of-school programs, are pivotal developmental contexts rich in resilience-promoting assets (Henderson et al., 2016) that can prevent, minimize, or disrupt negative outcomes caused by unmediated stressors. Thus, it is imperative to invest in the continuous improve-ment of resilience-promoting efforts in education settings to achieve positive developmental trajectories for youth (Catalano et al., 2008).

The Role of Social and Emotional Competencies in Promoting Resilience

Social and emotional competence (SEC) is a person's ability to integrate their cognitive, affective, and behavior systems to enable skillful intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning across social contexts (Domitrovich et al., 2007, Elias et al., 1997; Shapiro et al., 2017a). These competencies contribute to the experience of thriving and development of resilience (Mahoney et al., 2020). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) conceptualized these social and emotional capacities in five categories: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness (Weissberg et al., 2015). Spanning across these various skills and conceptualizations is the strengths-based belief that SECs are teachable and malleable across all developmental stages (i.e., through child and adulthood) and continuously supporting positive adaptation (Simmons et al., 2021; Mahoney et al., 2020).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is "a coordinated set of evidence-based programs and practices seeking to establish safe and supportive learning environments and foster SECs" (Mahoney et al., 2020). These processes, whether in the form of curriculum and programs (e.g., Committee for Children, 2011) or routines and practices (e.g., Jones et al., 2017), seek to promote the social and emotional competencies of young people in educational settings. Over the past 20 years, there has been a proliferation of SEL interventions that aim to support children and adolescents' well-being. CASEL's Program Guide presents 44 universal, school-based SEL programs for K–12 students that meet their highest criteria (i.e., SELect program) because they have at least one high-quality randomized control trial or quasi-experimental evaluation study, pro-

mote social–emotional competence via multi-year, classroom-based programming, and provide high-quality implementation support (Skoog-Hoffman et al., 2020). Examples of these evidence-based SELect programs include 4R's (Jones et al., 2011), Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS; Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2010), and Second Step (Espelage et al., 2013).

Social and emotional learning has demonstrated positive impacts on a broad set of developmental outcomes. A meta-analysis of over 200 studies of universal, school-based SEL programs found the greatest effects on student social and emotional skills (ES = 0.57), followed by academic achievement, positive social behavior, reduced emotional distress, improved attitudes, and lower conduct problems (ES ranged from 0.22 to 0.27) when compared to students in comparison conditions (Durlak et al., 2011). Another meta-analysis examining follow-up effects at least 6 months after the implementation of universal SEL interventions found that many of these positive impacts persisted: in comparison to controls, participants had improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, and well-being (ES ranged from 0.13 to 0.33). Additionally, these SEL programs fostered resilience and buffered against negative outcomes such as drug use, behavioral problems, and emotional distress (ES ranged from 0.14 to 0.16). A small subset of studies measured distal effects during adolescence or emerging adulthood, detecting increases in high school graduation and college attendance and decreases in juvenile justice involvement and clinical disorders – signaling lasting benefits of SEL interventions (Taylor et al., 2017).

Measuring Student Social and Emotional Competencies to Support the Development of Resilience

The expansion of SEL research, programs, and practices, in combination with the adoption of PK–12 SEL learning standards in more than 20 states in the United States (CASEL, 2021), cre-

ates an ongoing need for an aligned assessment system to measure social and emotional competencies. An *assessment system* is a series of interconnected processes yielding sound and actionable information, guiding decision-making (Sigman & Mancuso, 2017). Best practices indicate that an assessment system should be comprehensive, balanced, aligned, defensible, and ethical to inform decisions that impact the lives of children (Shapiro et al., 2022). A *comprehensive* assessment system includes data collected at multiple levels (e.g., classroom, school, district) through a variety of information gathering procedures each deployed for distinct and predetermined purposes. A *balanced* system is careful not to overemphasize one purpose or one type of decision-maker in the allocation of attention and resources. An *aligned* assessment system is synergistic with current curriculum and instruction, and well integrated into existing routines. A *defensible* assessment system goes beyond collecting information that reinforces an existing or expected narrative, but provides high-quality information that justifies costs and burdens. Lastly, an *ethical* assessment system is inclusive, fair, and transparent both in the overall process and in each component. Since an assessment process inevitably embeds, and can unintentionally extend, hierarchies of power, an ethical assessment system should also be designed with the greatest consideration for the least powerful members of our society (Shapiro et al., 2022).

Discrete pieces of a SEL assessment system can have distinct purposes. When considering student-level assessment, some schools design assessment systems for a summative function to determine whether students have met pre-established standards or acquired the requisite skills for school and life success. Other systems use formative assessment, identifying each student's social and emotional strengths and instructional needs to inform planning and monitor progress (Shapiro et al. 2017b). The two aforementioned purposes (i.e., summative, formative) have been distinguished as an "assessment *of* learning" in contrast to an "assessment *for* learning" (Cefai et al., 2021). In addition, some schools and out-of-school time (OST) programs articulate a need

for assessment systems that will guide adult learning, prompting reflective practice among educators, improving school culture and climate, and creating SEL professional development opportunities that place well-being at the center of teaching and learning (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Finally, schools and OST programs that invest in developing and/or implementing SEL programs use assessment to evaluate and continuously improve SEL delivery systems and impact. The following section presents a set of tools for assessing student SEC developed in response to these diverse needs.

Overview of the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment Tools

Aperture Education, an educational organization promoting positive youth development, has published the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) system, a suite of assessment tools for youth-serving professionals to measure SEC in children and youth from a strengths-based perspective within a risk and resilience framework (www.apertureed.com). The DESSA tools provide users with a practical and psychometrically sound means of assessing malleable within-child protective factors in youth as part of their efforts to gather information, plan interventions, and evaluate efforts. These tools can be used in the context of universal screening or in the implementation and progress monitoring of specific positive youth development interventions (Naglieri et al., 2013). With its strengths-based orientation, the DESSA assessment tools, which are part of a series that span a developmental continuum from birth to age 21, help identify youth's skills and also areas for growth within specific SECs. The assessments then serve as goal-setting tools to direct attention and resources toward promoting skills that youth need to navigate challenges and engage in new opportunities.

The DESSA K-8 suite of tools includes two rating scales that are appropriate for students aged 5–14 years. The first is the full form of the *Devereux Student Strengths Assessment* (DESSA;

LeBuffe et al., 2009/2014), which is designed to assess social and emotional competencies that serve as protective factors for children in kindergarten through eighth grade (Shapiro & LeBuffe, 2006). The DESSA was standardized on a national sample of 2494 ratings, provided by teachers, staff, and parents/caregivers using both paper and pencil and online versions. The DESSA is completed by parents, teachers, or staff at child serving agencies, including schools, extended day, summer enrichment, social service, and mental health programs (Shapiro et al., 2015). The assessment consists of 72 items that are entirely strength-based, scored on a five-point scale about how often the student engaged in each behavior over the past 4 weeks. The DESSA is organized into eight conceptually derived scales that provide information about social and emotional competencies. They are self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, goal-directed behavior, relationship skills, personal responsibility, decision-making, and optimistic thinking. The total of these scales is used to obtain a Social–Emotional Composite score. More information about the development, standardization, and psychometric properties of the DESSA are provided in the technical manual (LeBuffe et al., 2009/2014) and Chap. 11 (this edition).

The second rating scale included in the DESSA K–8 suite of tools is the *Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-mini* (DESSA-mini; Naglieri et al., 2011/2014). The DESSA-mini, with norms derived from a subset ($n = 1,250$) of the DESSA standardization sample, is a series of four brief (eight-item) forms, composed of strength-based items. The DESSA-mini yields a total score, from the standardized sum of the eight items. A single DESSA-mini form can be used to obtain a snapshot of a child's overall social and emotional competence to determine if additional assessment or targeted skill development should be provided (i.e., screening). The DESSA-mini forms show high agreement (95% accuracy) with the full 72-item DESSA (Naglieri et al., 2011). The four different forms can be used in rotation to avoid "practice effects" (i.e., improvements due to repeated

exposure). Because the four forms are highly correlated ($r > 0.95$), the total scores from each form can be directly compared (Lee et al., 2022c). This enables the use of the various DESSA-mini forms to monitor progress in acquiring social and emotional competence across time. More detailed descriptions about the development, standardization, and psychometric properties of the DESSA-mini are provided in the technical manuals (Naglieri et al., 2011/2014) and Chap. 11 (this edition).

As summarized in Chap. 11, the DESSA and DESSA-mini have demonstrated strong psychometric properties, including reliability (e.g., internal reliability, test–retest reliability, interrater reliability, alternate form reliability) and validity (e.g., concurrent and predictive criterion validity). In addition, recent studies have provided evidence of measurement invariance of the DESSA-mini over time and across subgroups, suggesting that the DESSA-mini measures the same construct of social–emotional competence (a) within and across academic years, and (b) across diverse subgroups of students based on gender (female and male), race and ethnicity (Asian/Asian American, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, and White), family income level (eligible for free or reduced price lunch and not eligible), disability status (receiving special education and not receiving), and language (English language learner [ELL] and non-ELL) (Lee et al., 2022a, b, c). Features intended to mitigate bias are described by Mahoney and colleagues (2022) and explored empirically by Shapiro and colleagues (2016). Collectively, this provides an empirical foundation for the use of the DESSA-mini to monitor the growth of social–emotional competence over time among diverse student populations.

The Use of the DESSA Tools in a Multitiered System of Support Framework

The DESSA K-8 suite of tools can be used as part of a comprehensive assessment system to support the social and emotional development of K–8 students through a multitiered system of support (MTSS). The integrated use of the DESSA and the DESSA-mini is designed to support three aims: First, to provide school-wide screening to inform differentiated instruction through universal interventions (tier 1), targeted instruction (tier 2), and intensive and individualized supports (tier 3) in a MTSS framework (e.g., Cook et al., 2015; Horner & Sugai, 2015). Second, the tools support ongoing progress monitoring to assess student responses to intervention at the individual level and to promote continuous improvement at the system level. Last, the DESSA tools aid planning for students who need expanded SEL support. In this way, the DESSA tools can be used as part of a comprehensive and balanced assessment process to help promote the social and emotional competence of all youth (LeBuffe et al., 2018). By adopting a primary prevention, strengths-based approach, educators can intervene in a nonpunitive and nonexclusionary way before the emergence of emotional and behavioral problems, differentiate instructional supports, and enhance the school environment and programs to increase the likelihood of success in school and life for all young people.

Universal Screening, Targeted Assessment, and Intensive Supports

One way to implement the DESSA K–8 tools is to begin with universal screening of all children using the DESSA-mini. This often occurs near the beginning of a school year, after the required 4-week observation period has occurred. Most children will obtain a DESSA-mini total score of 41 or higher, placing them in the *Typical* (*T*-scores of 41–59 inclusive) or *Strength* (*T*-scores of 60 or higher) range. These children are expected to benefit from universal (i.e., tier 1) social and emotional learning programs and a safe and supportive school climate.

Students who obtain a DESSA-mini *T*-score that is in the *Need for Instruction* range (*T*-scores of less than or equal to 40) are also expected to benefit from universal instruction, but should additionally be provided targeted (i.e., tier 2) social and emotional instruction to accelerate

their social and emotional development. To better understand the students' specific areas of need, these students may be assessed with the full 72-item DESSA to help determine the nature of the targeted interventions that should be provided. These interventions should be based on specific social and emotional scores on the eight DESSA scales and an examination of individual item scores as specified in the DESSA Manual. Thus, this screening and assessment system can be used to guide differentiated instruction.

If at any time an adult becomes concerned about a child's social–emotional status, a student can be re-screened, or a full DESSA may be completed. This is in recognition that risk and protective factors can wax and wane over the course of the school year. A child who had a *Typical* score in the fall may have experienced additional risk and adversity and now scores in the *Need for Instruction* range. A student may be escalated to more intensive support (i.e., tier 3) whenever implicated.

Ongoing Progress Monitoring for Continuous Improvement

The goal of ongoing progress monitoring (OPM) is to use alternative DESSA-mini forms to provide feedback to the teacher, student support personnel, student, and caregivers on the progress all children are making in developing social and emotional competencies. Typically, the alternate forms of the DESSA-mini are administered at 30–90-day intervals, depending on the needs of the student and the system. If necessary, the DESSA-mini forms can be used repeatedly throughout the year. The results of each administration are recorded and graphically displayed using the DESSA-mini OPM form. This form provides a graphical depiction of progress, displaying changes in *T*-scores from one DESSA-mini administration to the next. Guidelines are presented in the DESSA-mini manual on how to interpret changes and modify targeted interventions and supports based on the student's progress.

When using the full DESSA, pretest–posttest comparisons can be made through procedures described in the DESSA manual (LeBuffe et al.,

2009/2014); the student's statistically reliable growth or decline on each of the eight DESSA scales can be determined. This information can be useful for both documenting outcomes, planning for maintenance over the summer break, and preparing for the next school year. If the analysis indicates that a student did not respond to targeted interventions and make the anticipated level of progress, a referral for more intensive services should be considered.

In addition to evaluating the outcomes for individual students, the results of the pretest–posttest comparison technique can be aggregated across students who have been receiving targeted and intensive supports. These data can indicate areas where staff have, on the whole, been more or less successful at promoting specific competencies. For instance, this analysis might reveal that 75% of children receiving targeted support (e.g., a pull out social skills group) for self-management showed improvement, whereas only 25% of children receiving support for self-awareness showed improvement. This information can readily inform professional development strategies for staff, resource acquisition and mobilization in the school or community, and summer planning for youth.

Planning for Students Who Need Expanded Supports

The DESSA K-8 tools also provide valuable information for children who are being evaluated for or have already been deemed eligible for expanded services or special education services. In particular, the individual item analysis technique described in the DESSA manual can identify empirically grounded and instructionally relevant strengths to be incorporated into the child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Based on the individual item rating distributions from the national standardization sample, the individual item analysis technique enables the user to identify specific behaviors (i.e., DESSA items) that the student is exhibiting at an unusually high (*Strength*) or low (*Need for Instruction*) rate. These identified strengths can then be leveraged to help the student acquire skills rated in the Need for Instruction range, which is an important

component of strengths-based practice (Simmons et al., 2021). Additionally, identified strengths can be shared with the student or their family to foster a more positive, collaborative partnership. A review of the scale scores on the DESSA can also provide insights on how any disabilities may be affecting the child's performance of their social and emotional competence.

DESSA K-8 Uses in Research and Practice

The DESSA K-8 tools are currently in widespread use. At the time of this writing, for example, the DESSA-mini is being used to assess approximately half a million children annually. Direct citations of the assessment manuals (the K-8 DESSA, K-5 DESSA Second Step Edition (SSE)—a version of the DESSA intended for use in conjunction with the elementary Second Step curriculum (LeBuffe, Naglieri, & Shapiro, 2011), and the K-8 DESSA-mini) also reveal considerable use in research. Google Scholar identified 206 citations of the Technical Manuals through the end of 2020. After eliminating reviews and mentions of the DESSA that do not feature unique data collection, these citations represent 66 distinct studies. Out of the 66 studies, 22 focused on general assessment or measurement properties of the tool, and 44 were used in the context of an intervention. The majority of the studies ($n = 41$) used a full version of the DESSA or DESSA-SSE, while 21 used the DESSA-mini, and 4 integrated multiple tools in a comprehensive system model.

Although the DESSA was largely envisioned, and is mainly used as an assessment tool for students' social and emotional competence in the context of social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions, researchers have also used it as part of implementing and evaluating other resilience-promoting interventions. Some examples of these interventions include an equine learning program (Pendry & Roeter, 2013; Pendry et al., 2014a, b), a yoga intervention (Beattie, 2014), a digital citizenship/media literacy after-school program (Felt et al., 2013), and

an intergenerational preschool program placing preschool children with residents in an assisted living center (Brant & Studebaker, 2021). These applications of the DESSA reveal the flexibility of the DESSA in novel contexts.

The DESSA tools have been used with a variety of groups reflecting diversity across racial/ethnic groups, socio-economic status, ability, and risk contexts. Within the identified 66 studies that directly cited the DESSA manuals, 59 collected information with the DESSA tools in the United States, and 7 collected information internationally. Of the 59 studies in the United States, 51 studies described the race/ethnicity of students. These included a significant group of Black/African American (e.g., An et al., 2019; Anderson, 2015, 2018; Brock et al., 2019; Doromal et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Verlenden, 2016), Hispanic (e.g., Felt et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2018), Latine (e.g., Hatchimonji, 2016; Shapiro et al., 2017b; Shapiro et al., 2018), and White (e.g., Brann et al., 2020; Hughes, 2018; Kilpatrick et al., 2018; Naglieri et al., 2010; Pendry et al., 2013, 2014b) students or had an emphasis on Native American/Alaska Native children (e.g., Chain et al., 2017). Thirty-seven studies described the socio-economic status (SES) of students in their sample. These included a significant group of students who were eligible for free or reduced price lunch (e.g., Anderson, 2015, 2018; Brock et al., 2019), economically disadvantaged (e.g., Millman, 2015; Smith-Millman, 2017) and living below the poverty line (e.g. Stein et al., 2013). The tools were also administered for children across a range of developmental abilities from gifted student classrooms (Bacal 2015; Kong, 2013; Perham, 2012), to special education classrooms (Orduña, 2018), and some children with specific learning differences, such as children who stutter (Byrd et al., 2016). Furthermore, the DESSA has been used across a variety of risk contexts, such as with children with experiences of maltreatment (Daderko, 2014), living with active duty military family members (Conover, 2018), and with a neuropsychological diagnosis (e.g., ADHD, depression) (Naglieri et al., 2010).

Outside of the United States, the DESSA tools were used in research studies that cited the tech-

nical manuals across 17 countries. In Scotland, the DESSA was used to assess children's social and emotional competence following an intervention to support children experiencing loss or negative change (e.g., bereavement, incarcerated family, parental separation, transition to kinship care, etc.) (Whitehead et al., 2018). In Germany, the DESSA was used following a public skills training program (Herbein et al., 2018). In Kenya, the DESSA was administered after teachers practiced a reflective teaching approach as action researchers (Thumbi, 2019). In Australia, the DESSA was used to assess SEC following a father–daughter exercise program that addressed both sport skills and emotional well-being (Young et al., 2019). In Canada, the DESSA was used as part of a more extensive study to assess the long-term impact of a natural disaster (Arshad et al., 2020). In Israel, the DESSA was used in conjunction with a project-based learning program across Arab and Jewish schools (White, 2013). Finally, a cross-country study administered the DESSA in five languages (English, French, German, Spanish, and Mandarin) following a spiritual education program for children of divorced parents in 15 countries (India, China, Japan, Singapore, Egypt, South Africa, Nigeria, France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, United Kingdom, United States, Canada, and Australia) (Pandya, 2017). There are likely other international studies, not included here because they do not cite the English-language manuals, since they have their own technical manuals from official translations (e.g., Italian Edition; LeBuffe et al., 2015) and cultural adaptations of the DESSA to their local context (e.g., Dutch Adaptation; LeBuffe et al., 2013).

Moving from Research to Practice

Effective social and emotional assessment systems provide insights that guide the decision-making of adults who work with young people, coordinate, and provide appropriate learning opportunities, and improve the overall educational context to better serve youth (Sigman & Mancuso, 2017). These motivations are aligned

with the goals of *systemic* social and emotional learning, which takes a more comprehensive perspective to coordinate *across* settings (e.g., classroom, schools, homes, communities) to advance SEC in youth (Mahoney & Weissberg, 2020). Additionally, systemic SEL underscores the importance of leveraging the strengths and supports for SEL that exist within all of these levels (Greenberg et al., 2017), and also engaging in reflective practices to ensure continuous quality improvement (Borowski, 2021). Thus, the assessment of social and emotional competencies is part of a broader effort to improve educational systems and support holistic youth development so that *all* youth have the opportunity to experience resilience and flourish.

Within this movement of systemic SEL, scholars and practitioners have noted the role of culture, variability, and equity (e.g., Mahoney et al., 2020). Specifically, racism is a form of risk that manifests in interactions between the individual and context (Masten, 2018) and increases risk exposure for racial/ethnic minority youth (Masten, 2018). Yet, resilience is both an innate and learned capacity, and can be present and cultivated in these instances of social inequities. Thus, there is an opportunity to promote resilience and equitable outcomes through social and emotional learning initiatives. Two common conceptualizations of how SEL can be used to advance equity include the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2021) and CASEL's transformative SEL framework (Jagers et al., 2019).

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly set measurable economic, social, and environment targets to ultimately eradicate poverty, heal the planet, and realize the rights of all people (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021). These Sustainable Development Goals include an imperative to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" with specific targets noting processes such as "promotion of culture of peace and non-violence," "global citizenship and appreciation of

cultural diversity," and "build and upgrade inclusive and safe schools" (UNESCO, 2021). Social and emotional learning has been positioned as a key mechanism to achieve these goals (Singh & Duraiappah, 2020).

In 2020, *transformative* social and emotional learning (T-SEL) was presented as an elaboration upon the purpose of SEL and the five CASEL social and emotional core competencies. T-SEL positions social and emotional learning as a means to address social inequities (e.g., as experienced by race/ethnicity and class) and advance justice-oriented individual, community, and society well-being (Jagers et al., 2019). The focal constructs embedded within these SEC elaborations are as follows: the competency of self-awareness includes aspects of *identity* to explicitly address the importance of intersectionality, positionality, and self-respect; self-management includes *agency*, hope, and self-direction; responsible decision-making embraces *curiosity* with respect to others and the social environment; relationship skills addresses the need for *collaborative problem-solving* to become an effective global citizen; and social awareness advances sense of *belonging,* connection, and trust (Jagers et al., 2021). Taken together, T-SEL includes social justice and civic engagement as part of the process to transform inequitable education settings and support SEC development in youth (Jagers et al., 2021). This framing presses educators to grapple with the relationship between SEL and equity to consider how these T-SEL elaborations can be actualized in the practice of promoting social and emotional competencies among diverse young people for the benefit of all young people.

Leveraging systemic SEL initiatives for sustainable development or equity implies that student assessment of SEC is done through sustainable and equitable processes (Shapiro et al., 2022). In order to make decisions about how the measurement of student SEC is accomplished, prospective users of information should be consulted, including a spectrum of stakeholders from policy-makers to parents, and young people themselves (Casas et al., 2013; Ozer et al., 2021). Assessment in these frameworks should

serve both formative (i.e., providing actionable feedback to inform real-time adjustments) and summative (i.e., informing a judgment as to whether a performance meets a criterion) purposes (Cefai et al., 2021), such that assessment leads to improved outcomes for young people. Local assessment teams should clearly communicate to all stakeholders their rationale for assessment and how the information will be gathered, interpreted, and used. Furthermore, the local assessment team should articulate an approach to seeking permission to collect information from individuals (e.g., parents, community elders) who are advised of the risks, benefits, and any potential alternatives.

Assessment information should be collected through standardized protocols that enable comparisons over time and across groups, such that ineffective practices and disparities can be identified and remediated. Assessment information should be easily aggregated for decision-making at various levels of the educational system and should be presented expeditiously in a format that facilitates action. A thoughtful process should determine who is invited to help interpret, learn from, and use the information generated through the assessment process. Safeguards should be put in place to avoid complex circumstances being overly simplified and misinterpreted, or used to inappropriately rank, stigmatize, humiliate, alienate, or perpetuate constructed advantages among students and communities (Shapiro, et al., 2022). It is important that parents and guardians understand how their individual children are progressing at school in the social and emotional domain; information should be shared transparently and collaboratively, perhaps by integrating into systems that share information with parents about a child's progress in other domains (Elias et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Today's youth face unprecedented social, emotional, academic, and economic challenges. However, amidst these difficulties, school-based social and emotional learning programs have

proven to be an effective and meaningful approach to supporting youth by building promotive and protective factors. In supportive school environments that are appropriately staffed and resourced, students can realize their inherent strengths, gain additional social and emotional competencies, and experience resilience and ultimately flourish. This chapter highlights how using strengths-based, reliable, and developmentally and culturally sensitive assessment tools can cultivate social and emotional competencies in young people. Youth strengths and opportunities for growth must be appropriately measured on a regular basis to help inform the planning and delivery of interventions, decision-making, and continuous improvement of school climate. When comprehensive, balanced, defensible, and ethical assessment systems are used to advance the wellbeing of all young people, then students can learn and grow in educational systems that will support their development as learners, thinkers, and global citizens.

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