Keeping SEL Developmental: The Importance of a Developmental Lens for Fostering and Assessing SEL Competencies

Purpose

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a process through which children develop in their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving to succeed at important developmental tasks. The process includes, but is not necessarily limited to, recognizing and managing emotions, caring about others, making good decisions, behaving ethically and responsibly, developing positive relationships, and avoiding negative behaviors. Several theoretical frameworks have been proposed to describe SEL, with implications for SEL standards, programming and instruction, and assessment.

This Special Issues brief shows how development and the developmental tasks children and youth face at different ages are essential to everything about SEL—from the way we frame what SEL is, to the standards we use to describe what it looks like over time, to the ways we do instruction and assessment. The idea that SEL is a process of development is crucial. In development, many things change, but many things also stay the same.

Developmental Lens: What Changes

In terms of change, children's development is marked by the changing importance of developmental tasks: what is the focus of a child's age range on SEL expectations and abilities? Successful achievement of developmental tasks leads to well-being and success with later tasks, whereas failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks.[1,2] Thus, a child's functioning now and later is impacted by success or failure on these tasks.[3,4]

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[1] Havighurst, R. J. (1948). Developmental tasks and education. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[2] Havighurst, R. J. (1972). Developmental tasks and education. New York: David McKay Company. Inc.

[3] Mayeux, L., & Cillessen, A. H. (2003). Development of social problem solving in early childhood: Stability, change, and associations with social competence. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology,* 164(2), 153-173.

[4] Pons, F., Harris, P. L., & de Rosnay, M. (2004). Emotion comprehension between 3 and 11 years: Developmental periods and hierarchical organization. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 1, 127–152. doi: 10.1080/17405620344000022

It is easy to envision how the SEL process is marked by such age-differentiated developmental tasks.[5,6] Examples of such developmental tasks are as follows:

Preschoolers' developmental tasks
- Begin peer interaction while managing emotional arousal
- Initiate prosocial behaviors and interactions, along with friendships
- Stay connected with adults
- Understand basic emotional expressions, situations, and experiences—and ways to manage them (often with adult assistance), along with early efforts to solve interpersonal problems
- Begin to follow social rules, like taking turns

Elementary-aged children's developmental tasks
- Form dyadic friendships and stable peer reputations
- Control aggressive impulses
- Demonstrate emotional regulation within the peer group, showing emotions in appropriate contexts
- Resolve more complex social difficulties with a flexible variety of solutions

Middle school students' developmental tasks
- Build upon earlier understanding of others to comprehend more complex emotional situations in self and others
- Form a largely group-based identity with increasing independence from adults
- Become able to resolve conflicts within dyadic and group situations

High school students' developmental tasks
- Achieve more mature relationships with others and emotional independence from parents and other adults (while maintaining these relationships)
- Understand unique emotional perspectives
- Form an individuated personal identity (first group-based, then individuated)
- Acquire an articulated set of values and an ethical system to guide behavior

These tasks are but examples, and others could no doubt be specified (and, perhaps, fit more explicitly with SEL frameworks of choice). We use them to illustrate that the specific content and focus of the different elements of SEL change across time, leading to differences in emphases in frameworks, educational standards, programming, instruction, and assessment.

As an example, consider how a preschooler's SEL needs *must differ* from those of a high school student. A four-year-old faced with an angry classmate (e.g., the four-year-old takes a friend's toy) would benefit from SEL guidance that emphasizes the social rules of sharing and taking turns, the classmate's feelings, and simple means to solve the problem.

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[5] Denham, S. A., Wyatt, T., Bassett, H. H., Echeverria, D., & Knox, S. (2009). Assessing social-emotional development in children from a longitudinal perspective. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 63, 37-52.

[6] Nagaoka, J., Farrington, C. A., Ehrlich, S. B., & Heath, R. D. (2015). *Foundations for young adult success: A developmental framework.* Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

In contrast, a high school student's disagreement with a friend (e.g., one teenager lies to others about the student's dating behavior) would be much more complex, based on their attainment of earlier developmental tasks and their grappling with age-appropriate ones. The techniques used with a four-year-old would be irrelevant. Instead, SEL guidance might focus on the friend's and the high-schooler's unique, detailed emotional perspectives (e.g., who feels angry based on extenuating circumstances, who feels guilty based on the history of the friendship).

Developmental Lens: What Stays the Same

A developmental lens not only focuses on "what changes," but also on "what stays the same." In SEL, the content of specific skills differs along with changing developmental tasks as children mature. However, the dimensions of *what is important*—for example, what competencies should be included in frameworks—remains surprisingly constant.

An example is the overarching developmental task of responsible decision-making. This never disappears as a key component of SEL, but morphs into increasingly sophisticated age-specific tasks. The next table demonstrates what "changes" and "stays the same" in the developmental task of social awareness.

SOCIAL AWARENESS FROM PRESCHOOL THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL

THE CHILD UNDERSTANDS...			
Preschool	**Elementary School**	**Middle School**	**High School**
Expressions and situations of "basic" emotions—e.g., happy, sad, angry, scared	That one can • use thinking to regulate emotions • purposely hide or express emotions	That one can feel simultaneous, "mixed" emotions	That emotions experienced may depend on one's experiences and personality traits

Even when change predominates, individual children may show marked continuity in their social-emotional competencies in two ways:

(1) if developmental tasks are not well met, children's skills stay static, and they may be especially at risk for a cascade of continuing difficulties;[7,8]

(2) children's specific skills may change, but their relative standing on these skills may stay the same. Remembering these aspects of "what stays the same" strengthens the imperative to intervene early and consistently to foster children's SEL competencies.

In sum, all SEL is embedded in, or must be seen in the context of, the developmental tasks children and youth are facing, including aspects that change and stay the same. The outcome we care about is how they can successfully respond to these tasks by developing their social-emotional competence.

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[7] Blandon, A. Y., Calkins, S. D., Grimm, K. J., Keane, S. P., & O'Brien, M. (2010). Testing a developmental cascade model of emotional and social competence and early peer acceptance. *Development and Psychopathology*, 22(4), 737-748.

[8] M. H., Hahn, C. S., & Haynes, O. M. (2010). Social competence, externalizing, and internalizing behavioral adjustment from early childhood through early adolescence: Developmental cascades. *Development and Psychopathology*, 22(4), 717-735.

Applying SEL in practice to improve student's competencies require that educators and parents intentionally incorporate a developmental lens. We now detail developmental lenses for using frameworks, creating standards and assessment tools, and informing instruction

SEL is Embedded in Development

Developmental tasks underlie *all* components of SEL promotion: frameworks, assessments, standards, and practice. None of these components of SEL can succeed without a developmental task perspective; ignoring the developmental tasks makes them less useful, rendering them incomplete or out of sync with what is happening with children and youth as they grow. Further, the SEL components are dynamically related via the developmental perspective.

So, first, a focus on developmental tasks renders theoretical frameworks clearer and more comprehensive. Frameworks should acknowledge as explicitly as possible that their foundation is the developmental tasks that differ as children and youth mature. That is, frameworks name key dimensions of SEL that are developmentally essential for success. In turn, SEL frameworks impact both standards and, indirectly via instruction and assessment, growth of competencies. When frameworks rest on a developmental foundation, standards, assessment, and instruction can be more appropriate.

Standards are (or should be) couched within a clear frame-work and, as such, include the skills reflected by each developmental task in the framework. These standards inform assessment, and vice versa. That is, the development-ally informed standards can be reflected in assessment of SEL competencies. Assessment reflects "what changes" and "what stays the same" with development.

Both standards and assessment are useful in that they lead to instruction (which, in a dynamic relation, often leads to the need for further regular assessment and revised standards, and is supported by both professional development and curriculum). Finally, change in competencies is the endpoint to which we strive.

Social Awareness from PreK - High School (table; p3)

Change would need to be addressed by practitioners in their choice of framework, development of standards, selection of assessment tools, and instruction/programming/professional development.

- First, any framework used to describe the entire developmental period would need to accurately include these changing benchmarks for the developmental tasks of social awareness. Without inclusion of all, opportunities to comprehensively promote SEL would be lacking
- Second, standards would need to carefully include teachable indicators of these benchmarks.
- Third, assessment of these benchmarks' attainment would need to be included in formative, and, arguably, summative assessments.
- Fourth and finally, informed by and then informing standards and assessment, instruction (with accompanying professional development) would need to be tailored to the developmental expectations of each grade level.

Stability would need to be addressed.

- For any developmental task, the key goal needs to be showcased; it is stable across all ages. In this example, the key goal for all the developmental tasks is to be aware of others' emotions so that social interactions can be positive and problem solving can take place when interactions become negative.
- What if a child does not progress across this increasingly complex series of emotion knowledge benchmarks due to cognitive limitations or environmental circumstances? In this case, the very level of skill may stay the same (e.g., an elementary student may not progress past understanding basic emotional expressions and situations). SEL programming and instruction will need to be individualized to take this stability into account.
- It could also be true that the child who is advanced (or delayed) in emotion knowledge retains this standing amongst peers across these age ranges. In this case, the *relative level* of skill is what stays the same. The implications for such stability are again for instruction: careful assessment will always specify the child's level of attainment—and cross-communication between teachers of, for example, grades 4 and 5 could allow for fine-tuned instruction.

Implications of Using a Developmental Task Perspective

Unless we view SEL through a developmental lens, we cannot posit a theoretical framework that will allow us to formulate standards that can be translated into developmentally appropriate assessment and practice.

For example, referring to responsible decision-making (and taking cues from the Anchorage School District K–12 SEL Standards and Indicators[9], which generally conform to the CASEL-5 framework), a developmentally informed framework allows for the creation of equally developmentally appropriate standards. That is, in these standards, early-elementary students would recognize that they have choices in how to respond to situations and could implement "stop, think, and act" strategies in solving problems. Late-elementary students would attain the ability to generate alternative solutions to problems and predict possible outcomes. Middle school students could begin to identify and apply the steps of systematic decision-making and evaluate their strategies for avoiding risky behavior.

In contrast, early-high school students would tackle a more difficult task, such as considering ethical, safety-related, and societal factors when making their personal and interpersonal decisions. Finally, older high school students can move forward to being able to apply decision-making skills to foster responsible social and work relations and to make healthy life-long choices.

Using the developmental task perspective for assessment would allow for variation in what should be attained for SEL success across age periods. Some non-developmental competencies (e.g., "self-control," "empathy for others") are routinely assessed in summative assessment tools, but it is argued that more useful assessments (formative, e.g., contributing to ongoing changes in programming for specific children or groups of children; *and* summative, e.g., determining outcomes for classroom or school monitoring or program evaluation) change across development to pinpoint what students should be attaining developmentally. A focus on development renders the assessment tool much more useful for instruction and feedback for standards revision.

For instruction, it seems obvious that ignoring the key developmental tasks of specific grade levels makes any lessons and overarching classroom approaches less useful. For example, explaining how to understand basic emotions may be inappropriate for middle schoolers and "turn them off" to SEL instruction.

In sum, acknowledging developmental tasks of SEL is vital. Ignoring them renders a "one size fits all" approach that would leave educators, parents, stakeholders, community members, program and assessment developers, and policy makers *all* at a loss regarding focus and direction. But using the developmental task perspective across all aspects of SEL promotion is a tall order. At present many stakeholders may use frameworks that do not coordinate with their standards, and they may use assessments of constructs that are not in frameworks or are poorly aligned with the actual meaning of the constructs in a framework. This misalignment, we argue, needs to be addressed—and a means to

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[9] Anchorage School District K–12 SEL Standards and Indicators. Retrieved from http://www.asdk12.org/media/anchorage/globalmedia/documents/professionallearningdept/SELStandardsAppend.pdf

do so is by viewing all SEL in a developmental-tasks perspective for *all* SEL promotion components.

Developmental Lens for Frameworks

As already noted, any successful SEL framework must explicitly acknowledge development, especially to support standards, assessment, and practice. As implied in the previous section, differing developmental tasks and associated SEL skills across age periods can require amendments (sometimes slight, sometimes large) in standards, different assessment items, and a variety of means to foster SEL (e.g., the activities mentioned in the Anchorage School District K–12 SEL Standards and Indicators).

The more explicitly the developmental nature of SEL is addressed in the frameworks used to capture SEL phenomena and name specific competencies, the more usefully it can inform practice. It informs the SEL standards aligned (or not) with frameworks, and SEL assessment tools that may (or may not) emerge from these frameworks and standards. Although alignment of frameworks, standards, assessment, and practice is a goal not always met, we describe such alignment because it helps to amplify the impact of each SEL component for both adults and students.

First, SEL frameworks vary widely in the degree to which and how they view SEL through a developmental lens. Some do not mention differential developmental tasks or structures at all[10]. Some give broad or less articulated examples by age. For example, the CCSR Foundations for Young Adult Success[6] is a treasure trove of important information and covers much developmental territory, often very similar in content and detail to the developmental tasks cataloged above (as well as providing context on how the developmental tasks at differing ages are related, what internal and external changes affect developmental tasks, and how experience shapes children's attainment of developmental tasks). Nonetheless, using this framework to map and enumerate developmentally appropriate SEL skills and competencies, as well as environmental supports, would require substantial work.

However, some frameworks, such as the Search Institutes Assets[11], illustrate well the points made here, in that what stays the same are the elements within the external and internal assets described for age levels 3 to 5, 5 to 9, 8 to 12, and 12 to 18 years of age. For example, each age range includes external assets of support and internal assets of social competencies, among others.

In this framework, what changes is the content of competencies for each asset at each age level. For example, under the internal asset of "caring," 3- to 5-year-olds are expected to begin to show empathy, understanding, and awareness of others' feelings, but eventually by late high school these early abilities evolve, with the adolescent placing high value on helping other people. In a recent survey, over a third of school administrators noted knowing about and using the Search Institute's frameworks. Among the frameworks identified by the Assessment Work Group, few are this explicit in attention to developmental perspective; outlining very specific examples of age-appropriate qualities of the environment and characteristics and abilities of children is usually less consistent.

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[10] Roberts, R. D., Martin, J. E., & Olaru, G. (2015). *A Rosetta Stone for noncognitive skills: Understanding, assessing, and enhancing noncognitive skills in primary and secondary education.* New York, NY: Asia Society and ProExam.

[11] Search Institute Assets. Retrieved from http://www.search-institute.org.

Importantly, the CASEL-5 Framework[12,13] reported as the most known and used framework by nearly all respondents in the recent survey, is implicitly developmental (its applications in programming are completely developmental, however). It has been used either explicitly or *implicitly* in several state/local standards, either across grade levels or for specific grades[14]. Although these standards are clearly developmental in nature, with (as suggested here) similar constructs with different content depending on developmental task/level, the CASEL-5 framework itself does not specify such change. This circumstance is something of a special case in evaluating frameworks' attention to development.

Frameworks should be evaluated for their attention to developmental change and consistency in SEL. Those that are vague or lacking in attention to these issues are less useful. Table 2 provides a checklist that could be useful for all stakeholders.

HOW DEVELOPMENTAL IS YOUR FRAMEWORK?

	NO EVIDENCE	PARTIAL EVIDENCE	FULL EVIDENCE
Are developmental tasks for all SEL dimensions complete and sufficiently detailed?	• Framework lists tasks to be attained that are very global but do not change with age. And/or • Detail is lacking.	• Framework is spotty in coverage of developmental change in its dimensions; some include change across ages, some do not. • For some dimensions, the details about a given developmental task are sketchy.	• Framework gives developmental tasks for each age, for each of its dimensions. • Equivalent detail—easily translatable to action—is given for each developmental task at each age level.
How easily do frameworks' elements translate to standards, assessment, and instruction?	• Difficult to translate to standards and instruction—analysis into specific tasks is very difficult.	• Translation into standards' specific tasks and aspects of assessment and instruction is easy for developmentally detailed framework dimensions. • Translation is more difficult for less detailed dimensions.	• Translation flows clearly from the elements of the framework.

How Developmental Does your Framework Need to Be?

It depends in part on the age range with which you are working. If only working with a narrow age group, make sure the developmental tasks are appropriate and all principles of a framework's usability apply to the narrow age range.

The choice of theoretical perspective or framework via utilizing such questions could ultimately inform standards, assessment, and practice. As already noted, this connection amongst the elements is not uniform, even for the "best" frameworks. Much work remains to align frameworks, standards, assessment, and practice.

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[12] Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (2013). *The 2013 CASEL Guide: Effective social and emotional learning programs-preschool and elementary school edition.* Chicago, IL: Author.

[13] Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (2015). *The 2015 CASEL Guide: Effective social and emotional learning programs-middle and high school edition.* Chicago, IL: Author.

[14] Dusenbury, L., Newman, J. Z., Weissberg, R. P., Goren, P., Domitrovich, C. E., & Mart, A. K. (2015). Developing a blueprint for preschool to high school education in social and emotional learning: The case for state learning standards. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice* (pp. 532-548). New York: Guilford Press.

Developmental Lens for Standards

As already suggested, of all the elements supporting SEL-related development, state and local standards usually address the developmental perspective most explicitly, in comparison to some frameworks and assessment tools especially. Typically, some care is taken by educators in this task because standards need to translate to practice.

However, there is still variability in the grain size of competencies included in standards. For example, Anchorage has four domains of SEL standards (i.e., self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and social management), with three to four standards with two to three indicators each at five age levels from early elementary to late high school. In contrast, Cleveland's SEL "Scope and Sequence"[15] (which translates well into formative assessment) has three domains (self-awareness and self-management, social awareness and interpersonal skills, and decision-making and responsible behavior), with different indicators for every grade for every quarter of the school year (indicators do show some stability across time).

Standards' level of alignment with any framework *at all* is also variable. As already noted, such alignment among all elements is the goal. An integrated education system is vital[16,17] aligning a useful theoretical framework with: (a) clear goals and benchmarks (i.e., standards) for children's SEL progress; (b) evidence-based curricula and instruction, along with support for teachers to implement such programming so that such standards may be met; and (c) universal and targeted screening and progress monitoring (screening, formative, summative) emanating directly from the framework and standards, informing and informed by instruction.

Given the necessity of an integrated education system, several recommendations can be made for creation of developmentally informed standards and applying those with larger grain size:

- Select and adhere to a developmentally-informed framework
- Create clear indicators *at least* for each grade level for each developmental area in the SEL framework
- Make sure that formative assessment emanating from these standards is created with the assistance of school personnel
- Align instruction with the framework, standards, and assessment tools in a way that all developmental tasks—whether they change or stay the same across age—are addressed

[15] Cleveland SEL Scope and Sequence. Retrieved from http://www.clevelandmetroschools.org/cms/lib05/OH0191584 4/Centricity/shared/district files/departments/humanware/SEL %20Scope%20and%20Sequence1.pdf

[16] Denham, S. A. (2015). Assessment of social-emotional learning in educational contexts. In *The handbook of social and emotional learning*, J. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. W. Weissberg, and T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), pp. 285-300. New York: Guilford Press.

[17] Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D. & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82, 405–432.

The next table illustrates a beginning effort with one framework dimension—self-awareness, in this case of emotions—and its relation to standards, instruction, and assessment.

FROM FRAMEWORK THROUGH ASSESSMENT

	PRESCHOOL	ELEMENTARY
FRAMEWORK	Understand basic emotions	Understand more complex aspects of emotion
STANDARD	Recognize/label their own emotions	Distinguish emotions' intensity
INSTRUCTION	Role play situations triggering emotions	Draw an "anger thermometer"
ASSESSMENT	Direct assessment, teacher ratings of emotion knowledge	Direct assessment, teacher ratings

Developmental Lens for Assessment

In conjunction with developmentally informed SEL frameworks and standards, developmentally appropriate assessment is vital. There are many issues needing careful resolution in SEL assessment, and the reader is referred to these broad views on the need for improvement in this area.[6,18] Given the purpose of this brief, however, we focus on the need to consider developmental tasks when creating and using appropriate SEL assessment within the educational system depicted above.

There are two ways in which developmental tasks can inform assessment, including suggestions already made here[19].

First, the aspect of SEL in question may have continuity in meaning and be demonstrated *similarly*, with age-related improvements/changes. Such developmental appropriateness requires assessing the same construct across ages with items that are at least functionally similar (if not identical), but with sufficient difficulty to encompass the variability inherent in developmental change.

Second, the aspect of SEL in question may have continuity in meaning, but *different* manifestations. In evaluating any SEL assessment, it is necessary to perform the detailed work of examining items and methods of assessment (rating, observation, direct assessment, direct behavior rating) to make sure these aspects of development are appropriately covered.

Further, assessment should emanate from developmentally-based framework and standards, as well as contributing to practice (and vice versa). However, it is not always the case that widely used and

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[18] McKown, C. (2017). Social-Emotional Assessment, Performance, and Standards. *The Future of Children*, 157-178.

[19] LeBuffe, P. A., Shapiro, V. B., & Robitaille, J. L. (2017). The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) comprehensive system: Screening, assessing, planning, and monitoring. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*. Online First.

useful assessment tools are allied or aligned with a framework at all, even when items that are relevant for various developmental tasks are utilized.

For example, the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment[19] (DESSA) is aligned to an extent with the CASEL-5 (as is the Social-Emotional Assets and Resilience Scale[20]). In contrast, another often useful measure, the Social Skills Intervention System Rating Scales (SSIS-RS)[21] does not align with a framework, although items do largely correspond to important SEL dimensions. This need has been acknowledged in a very new version of the Social Skills Improvement System Social Emotional Learning Edition Rating Forms (SSIS SEL RF) for teachers, parents, and students. [22]

Thus, in general SEL measures may have age norms and even different forms for different ages, but their content often may not strictly follow a developmental task orientation or be aligned with a framework. Further, they are also unlikely to have rubrics for how the competencies change across age. Such rubrics are useful to closely follow empirical knowledge of change in developmental tasks and allied skills/competencies. These complete descriptions of how a skill is demonstrated at each age would aid in reporters' understanding of SEL competencies, improving accuracy of assessment. Finally, differences across ages in scales from some such assessment tools do not match developmental tasks.

Aligning assessment with specific standards can be challenging, except in cases where the assessment is created along with the standards. Usually, such assessment would be formative rather than necessarily summative. A good example of such an assessment tool is the BESST-Web, which is also loosely related to the CASEL-5, and was created to dovetail with the Illinois SEL Standards[23]. The developmental nature of the BESST-Web assessment tool is clear, with appropriate goals and indicators for each grade level from kindergarten to grade 8, as well as connections to specific practices to support each skill assessed. This connection to instruction is of course a central need. Both the DESSA and SSIS-RS, previously mentioned, also have connections to educational practice; assessment should translate to action.

Finally, if a developmental lens is in place, reporting, methodology, and type of assessment must be considered. Regarding reporting, most aspects of SEL would be difficult for a child in preschool or the primary grades to report on (especially since self-awareness is a dimension of SEL, but also because younger children may be more locked in the here and now and more likely to want to

[20] Merrell, K. W., Cohn, B. P., & Tom, K. M. (2011). Development and validation of a teacher report measure for assessing social-emotional strengths of children and adolescents. *School Psychology Review*, 40, 226–241.

[21] Gresham, F. M., Elliott, S. N., & Kettler, R. J. (2010). Base rates of social skills acquisition/performance deficits, strengths, and problem behaviors: An analysis of the Social Skills Improvement System-Rating Scales. *Psychological Assessment*, 22, 809–815.

[22] Gresham, F., Elliott, S. N., Metallo, Byrd, S., Wilson, E., Erickson, M., Cassidy, K., & Altman, R. (2018). Psychometric fundamentals of the Social Skills Improvement System: Social-Emotional Learning Edition Rating Forms. Assessment for Effective Intervention.

[23] Marzano, R. J. (2015). Using formative assessment with SEL skills. In T*he handbook of social and emotional learning*, J. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. W. Weissberg, and T. P. Gullotta (Eds.) (pp. 336-347). New York: Guilford Press. [see also https://besstweb.com]

please the examiner[24]). Teachers of younger children may be more likely to have enough contact with them to be reliable SEL reporters, and may also be more disposed to direct assessment (when time permits), observation, and direct behavior ratings.

Regarding methodology, certain SEL competencies "pull for" specific types of assessment, and particularly, perhaps, at specific ages. For example, aspects of early childhood and primary grades SEL (e.g., emotion knowledge, responsible decision-making) might require direct assessment for best results; competencies that refer to knowledge may always be best assessed directly[19]. Behavioral skills are easily rated, but as children move into middle and high school, the question of who should do the rating becomes an issue.

In sum, much work needs to be done to improve SEL assessment, and much work is ongoing. Currently, educators and parents must use what is available until more of the type of assessments stipulated here are developed. It would be wise, until even better tools are developed and alignment with frameworks and standards is accomplished, to choose those that are most developmentally informed, inclusive of several age ranges, and consistent with the framework used by the specific state or district.

Developmental Lens for Instruction

Frameworks, standards, and assessment exist to support SEL instruction (i.e., curricular programming and teacher-child interaction). Effective curricular programming at least pragmatically follows a developmental perspective[13, 14, 25, 26, 27]. Curricular programming generally changes to follow changes in developmental tasks, but to our knowledge this advantage has never been empirically substantiated.

As an example, however, the PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) has different programs for different ages of children from preschool to sixth grade; aligned largely with the CASEL-5 framework, the same constructs (e.g., emotion knowledge) are addressed across ages, but with the appropriate content for the specific developmental task for each age. Programming for younger children would involve play more than that for older children and be less group-oriented than that for older children who have progressed in their peer skills, for example. Again, a system in which developmentally informed assessment (supported by a framework and clear standards) is being used would link such assessment to specific instructional needs of children and classrooms. It is important for such individualization to be part of any instruction.

24 Wigelsworth, M., Humphrey, N., Kalambouka, A., & Lendrum, A. (2010). A review of key issues in the measurement of children's social and emotional skills. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 26(2), 173-186.

25 Bierman, K. L., & Motamedi, M. (2015). SEL programs for preschool children. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook on social and emotional learning: Research and practice* (pp. 135-150). New York: Guilford.

26 Jagers, R.J., Harris, A., & Skoog, A. (2015). A review of classroom-based SEL programs at the middle school level. In J. A.Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice* (pp. 167-180). New York: Guilford.

27 Williamson, A.A., Modecki, K.L., & Guerra, N.G., (2015) SEL programs in high school. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R.P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice* (pp. 181-196). New York: Guilford.

Conclusion

In short, developmental tasks are the foundation on which SEL frameworks (and their constructs), standards, assessments, and instruction must be built. A weak foundation makes it difficult to build a solid, consistent, and effective approach to SEL promotion. Much work remains in this exciting and crucial endeavor. The following table makes suggestions for this future work.

HOW USERS OF A DEVELOPMENTAL TASK PERSPECTIVE CAN USE THIS BRIEF

USERS	RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS BRIEF
Policy-Makers, Standards Writers	• Use a specific theoretical framework that approaches SEL from a developmental task perspective. • Make sure that the framework is comprehensive and addresses the age ranges of interest (our argument would be to make this choice seamless across PreK to high school, but some frameworks are more age-specific and hypothetically policy-makers and standard writers could use different frameworks across ages). • Use a sufficiently fine grain of standards that developmental change can be observed.
Assessment Tool Developers	• Align with a practice-oriented theoretical framework. • Create tools, even potentially summative ones, that include the different developmental tasks at different age levels. • Consider alignment with standards (especially when writing formative assessment). • Address issues of reporting, methodology, and type of assessment.
Program Developers, Professional Development Leaders	• Work from a clearly developmental framework that addresses in detail the developmental tasks of the age range whose SEL you seek to promote. • In creating new programming/instruction or evaluating existing programs/lessons, judge whether appropriate developmental tasks are clearly addressed, with room for change across time and across the period of programming. • Consider, where possible, alignment with standards—for broadly used programs, this evaluation will differ from district-, school-, or teacher-created lessons, which should very clearly adhere to local standards. • Link your program or lessons to assessment.

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Susanne Denham is an applied developmental psychologist and University Professor Emerita of psychology at George Mason University. Her funded work centers on social-emotional development of preschoolers, emotional competence and its socialization by pivotal adults (parents and teachers), along with its importance for social and academic functioning. She is the author of two books, *Emotional Development in Young Children* and, with Dr. Rosemary Burton, *Social and Emotional Prevention and Intervention Programming for Preschoolers*, as well as numerous articles. She has consulted on applied and basic research projects on social-emotional interventions, assessment of social-emotional development, and state standards for these skills.

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://measuringsel.casel.org

Introductory Series

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.

Comparative Series

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.

Special Issues Series

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.

Descriptive Series

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.